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Campus Rape Phenomenon

Keriann Speranza

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Rape is a serious crime affecting all colleges and universities, but it is rarely brought to the attention of the media, administrators, faculty, students, and community. Research shows that between 14% and 27.5% of college women have been sexually assaulted (Humphrey & Kahn, 2000). The 2005 Bureau of Justice Statistics Report on violent victimization of college students indicates that between the years 2000 and 2004, 74% of rapes and sexual assaults were committed by someone known to the victim (Gross, Winslett, Roberts, Gohm, 2006). This report also suggested that campus rape is the most underreported violent crime in the United States.

Rape is one of the most severe of all traumas, causing multiple, long-term negative outcomes. Between 17% and 65% of raped women develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Campbell, Dworkin, Cabral, 2009). In particular, most victims of rape suffer from the “rape trauma syndrome,” a specific form of PTSD, which includes persistent intrusive repetitions of the rape experience (e.g., nightmares and intrusive memories), persistent distress when exposed to rape related events or situations, and persistent symptoms of hyper-vigilance (Campbell et al., 2009). Moreover, more than half of sexual assault victims meet diagnostic criteria for depression, and 40%-49% of survivors become dependant on alcohol (Campbell et al., 2009).

Given the little attention given to campus rape, and the traumatic collateral consequences resulting from an already traumatic event, this paper focuses on male-female rape on college campuses. By first reviewing statistics of rape rates among college fraternities and athletic teams, and discussing the relationship between alcohol consumption and campus rape, I show how Ronald Akers’ (1998) Social learning theory of crime, James Messerschmidt’s (1993) Masculinities theory, and Felson and Cohen’s (1979) Routine activities theory can help explain the causes of this criminal behavior. Finally, I present current legislation surrounding campus crimes, and propose a new policy that prohibits alcohol on campus and targets members of fraternities and athletic teams, which may more effectively prevent and reduce campus rape rates.

STATISTICS

Women aged sixteen to twenty-four experience rape at rates four times higher than the sexual assault rate of all women. Because most college women fall into the age range of sixteen to twenty four, they are at a higher risk...
of experiencing a sexual assault (Humphrey & Kahn, 2000). Moreover, a woman is more likely to be sexually assaulted while in college than before entering college (Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, Martin, 2007), and most are assaulted within the first two years of college.

Recent data shows that 26.1% of senior women in college have been victims of either an attempted or completed sexual assault since entering college (Krebs et al., 2007). Another study of college women shows that of those who reported being victims of sexually coercive situations, 84% of the incidents occurred during the first four semesters when they lived on campus (Gross et al., 2006). Seven percent were victims of physically forced sexual assault and 16% were victims of incapacitated sexual assault (Krebs et al., 2007). Victims of incapacitated sexual assault were considerably more likely to have been using alcohol before the assault, and were categorized as drunk during the assault (Krebs et al., 2007).

When attempting to understand the nature of sex offenses on college campuses, research shows that athletes and fraternity members, in comparison to the general male population, demonstrate higher levels of sexual deviance (Jackson, Veneziano, & Riggen, 2004). Fraternity members comprised 25% of the assailants in incapacitated sexual assaults (Krebs et al., 2007).

THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS

Three theories propose explanations for rape on college campuses: Ronald Akers’ (1998) social learning theory, James Messerschmidt’s (1993) masculinities and crime theory, and Marcus Felson’s and Lawrence Cohen’s (1979) routine activities theory. These three theories describe different explanations and provide a framework for policies of campus rape on the American college campus.

Social Learning Theory

Akers’ Social Learning Theory (1998/2006) is a broader theory that grasps the differential association process and incorporates differential reinforcement and other principles of, “behavioral acquisition, continuation, and cessation” (Akers & Sellers, 2009, p. 88). Akers (1998/2006) includes a variety of concepts regarding differential reinforcement including, “operant” behavior (voluntary actions of the individual), which is conditioned and shaped by rewards and punishments, respondent conditioning (involuntary reflex behavior), environmental and internal stimuli that provides signals for behavior, and schedules of reinforcement (rate and ratio in which rewards and punishments follow behavioral responses). Social learning theory offers a breakdown of crime and deviance that encompasses variables that work both to motivate and control criminal behavior and to promote and undermine conformity (Akers & Sellers, 2009).

Akers describes four major concepts: differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation. Differential association contains behavioral-interactional and normative decisions. Behavioral-interactional is the direct association and interaction with others who engage in specific types of behavior. The normative aspect is the different patterns of norms and values to which an individual is exposed through groups and associations. Definitions are one’s attitudes or meanings that the individual attaches to any given behavior. These definitions are both general (religious, moral, and conventional values) and specific (motives for a specific act). The greater the extent to which one holds attitudes that disapprove of certain acts, the less one is likely to engage in them. Differential reinforcement relates to the balance of anticipated or actual rewards and the consequences/punishments that may follow. Imitation pertains to the involvement in behavior after an individual observes someone else engaging in it (Akers & Sellers, 2009).

Akers (1998/2006) explains that the social learning process including one's differential association, are indirectly shaped by one's social structure. He identifies four dimensions of social structure that provide the contexts within which social learning variables operate: (I) differential social organization, (II) differential location in the social structure, (III) theoretically defined structural variables, and (IV) differential social location. Differential social organization refers to the structural correlates of crime in the community or society that affect the rates of crime and delinquency including age and population density that lean societies, communities, and other social systems toward high or low crime rates. Differential location in the social structure refers to the sociodemographic characteristics of individuals and social groups (class, race, gender, and age) that indicate their niches within the larger social structure. Differential social location refers to an individual's membership and relationship to primary, secondary, and reference groups such as family, friendships, peer groups, colleagues, and work groups (Akers, 1998/2006).

Differential social organization (I) and differential location in the social structure (II) provide the general learning contexts for individuals that increase or decrease the likelihood of them committing crime. The “differences in the societal group rates of criminal behavior are a function of the extent to which their cultural traditions, norms, and social control systems provide socialization, learning environments, and immediate situations conducive to conformity or deviance” (Akers & Sellers, 2009, p. 90). Moreover, “the structural conditions identified in
Boeringer's (2006) rape and sexual coercion study of 700 college males found that the social learning variables of association, reinforcement, definitions, and imitation explain the self-perceived likelihood of using force to gain sexual contact or commit rape. These variables also predict the actual use of drugs or alcohol, non-physical coercion, and physical force by males to obtain sex.

Boeringer (2006) also shows that college fraternities reinforce delinquent values in its members regarding women, drinking, and sex. Men in fraternities learn in these environments through “brotherhood” activities (parties, living in fraternity houses, interacting with other brothers) the values they are to follow. Specifically, same-sex housing that is commonly found among fraternities may provide situations supportive of beliefs, behaviors, and reinforcements conducive to rape; the close, all-male environment encourages the learning of rape-supportive attitudes. These fraternity houses have also been the setting for most known acquaintance rapes on American college campuses (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993).

Sanday, Martin, and Hummer (2009, as cited in Minow & Einolf, 2009) argue, “fraternities perpetuate a hypermasculine and overaggressive culture that objectifies women, advocates impersonal and sometimes exploitative sex, emphasizes competition and male superiority, provides role models and support for sexually coercive behavior, and fosters brotherhood bonding through open discussion and encouragement of female subservience and sexual exploitation” (p. 840). “Brothers” commonly learn from their friends that they are supposed to have stereotypical masculine attributes such as athletic skills, a high tolerance for alcohol, and sexual success with women. In many fraternities, men are taught that, “having sex with a woman who has passed out is a legitimate form of seduction because force was not used” (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997, p. 52).

Many fraternities breed in their members a form of dependency that protects members from challenging beliefs, and these “brothers” do not reveal their peers’ deviant or abusive behaviors to outsiders. Some researchers have argued this code of silence and the demand for group loyalty means that few crimes committed in fraternity houses are punished (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).

Masculinities
James Messerschmidt’s (1993/2006) Masculinities and Crime theory emphasizes that crime is seen as a resource for “doing gender” (showing one is masculine). He argues crime is most likely to occur when, “legitimate means of demonstrating masculinity are stifled” (Messerschmidt, 1993/2006, p. 383). He states, “all males act to do gender within the confines of the dominant conception of masculinity which teaches that heterosexual men are superior to women” (Messerschmidt, 1993/2006 p. 384). Messerschmidt (1993/2006) recognizes this as hegemonic masculinity, which is “defined through work in the paid-labor market, the subordination of women, heterosexualism, and the driven uncontrollable sexuality of men” (P. 384). Hegemonic masculinity “emphasizes practices toward authority, control, competitive individualism, independence, aggressiveness, and the capacity for violence” (Messerschmidt, 1993/2006, p. 384).

Most men engage in practices that attempt to sustain hegemonic masculinity, and when men enter a setting, they undertake social practices that demonstrate they are “manly.” Researchers argue the only way others can judge a man’s “essential nature” is through his behavior and appearance. Thus, men separate themselves from all that is feminine. Hegemonic masculinity also involves practices characterizing dominance, control, and independence (Messerschmidt, 1993/2006).

In addition to the preservation and promotion of hegemonic masculinity among fraternity brothers in many fraternities (Schwartz & DeLines, 1997), the legacy of man’s dominance over collegiate sports is also presumed to help preserve traditional hegemonic masculinity within sports networks on college campuses (Gage, 2008). Researchers suggest problematic consequences of hegemonic masculinity, which includes “attitudes and behaviors that are personally or socially harmful to men attempting to maintain this gender status” (Gage, 2008, p. 1022). Hence, institutions that enforce such notions of masculinity can simultaneously promote repressive gender attitudes of women and problematic sexual behavior.

For example, most fraternities are valued on “brotherhood bonds,” which may be linked to convincing men that they can only achieve masculinity by putting down and ridiculing everything that is feminine. Large numbers of men on college campuses are concerned with doing masculinity: developing their self-worth and self-esteem by doing acts that will win them the approval of their peers (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).

Researchers have theorized that pressure to conform to sports teams’ norms of masculinity may also lead to aggressive
behavior off the field. Miller, Sabo, Farrell, Barnes, and Melnick (1998, as cited in Gage, 2008) found that male athletes beginning sex earlier, had more partners, were involved in more sexual encounters, and displayed a higher propensity for sexual violence than nonathletes. Fritts and Rubin (2003, cited in Gage, 2008) found that members of sports teams were overrepresented among initiators of sexual aggression. Koss and Gaines (2004, as cited in Gage, 2008) reported that involvement in sports is significantly related to sexual aggression.

Many men on college campuses have come to see the sexual conquest of women as a form of doing masculinity (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). The hyper-erotic notion that they can achieve status (or security in their gender identity) only by “working a yes out” (making it easier to sexually coerce a woman by feeding her drugs or alcohol) even if she is unconscious or struggling physically, is an important reason why college men devote so much attention to “scoring.” “Working a yes out of a women,” is viewed by many fraternity members as a, “safer path to gaining sexual access to a reluctant, non-consenting women than [is the] use of physical force” (Abbey et al. 2003, p. 821).

When these men belong to a male peer-support group that ridicules women, it maintains and reinforces these attitudes consistently, which is a powerful combination: a male motivated to prove masculinity by scoring by any means necessary, who has no empathy for his sexual partner/victim and is sure that he has the right to do so, and the peers who approve and encourage his behavior. Schwartz & DeKeseredy (1997) argue, “men are constantly reminded of their power and dominance, but they feel ceaselessly under threat from women. They do not feel powerful and, moreover they feel as if women have power over them” (p. 64). Some men not only have callous sexual attitudes towards women, but also see violence and danger as masculine and exciting, and they may affirm their masculinity by being sexually aggressive towards young women on college campuses.

Routine Activities Theory

Felson and Cohen's (1979/2006) routine activities theory has two major propositions. First, it asserts that in order for crime to occur, motivated offenders must encounter suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians. Second, it argues that the probability of this situation occurring is influenced by a person's “routine activities” (work, family, and leisure activities). The relative presence or absence of the three main elements (motivated offenders, suitable targets of criminal victimization, and capable guardians of persons or property) may change, and, “the risk of criminal victimization varies dramatically among the circumstances and locations in which people place themselves and their property” (Akers & Sellers, 2009, p. 36).

Routine activities are “recurrent and prevalent activities that provide for basic population and individual needs” (Akers & Sellers, 2009, p. 36). They also emphasize that crime prevention and deterrence naturally occur in the informal control system; the “quiet and natural method by which people prevent crime in the course of daily life” (Akers & Sellers, 2009, p. 37). This control occurs as people, “interact and bring out the best in one another” (Akers & Sellers, 2009, p. 37).

Routine activities theory helps to explain high rates of sexual assault on college campuses. Schwartz & DeKeseredy (1997) argue that, “American college campuses are rape-supportive cultures, where values and beliefs that support and encourage the sexual victimization of women are widely available to men” (p. 21). They state, “this culture may not only encourage aggression but may make it easier to get away with it by failing to provide any informal or formal deterrence” (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997, p. 21). “Suitable targets” flourish in the number of women who routinely attend parties and voluntarily ingest large amounts of alcohol or drugs on campus, and the lack of effective deterrence on most campuses particularly an absence of effective guardians at these parties increases the likelihood of victimization (Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait, & Alvi, 2001).

Schwartz and Pitt (1995) contend that two lifestyle factors increase women's suitability for sexual victimization. First, “women who are sexually assaulted are statistically likely to go out drinking more often than other women, and second these women are more likely to report that they have male friends who they knew tried to get a women drunk in order to victimize them sexually” (Schwartz et al., 2001, p. 631). Fraternities provide an atmosphere that encourages heavy alcohol consumption and endorses drinking at social functions. This shows a “convergence between two aspects of routine activities theory: likely offenders – men who are sexually aggressive, and who often belong to all-male, pro-abuse subculture – and suitable targets – women who are so chemically incapacitated that they cannot resist these men's coercive sexual advances” (Schwartz et al., 2001, p. 633). Most college campuses are too often, “effective guardian absent;” meaning no one is watching the behavior of these males or punishing those who commit violent sexual offenses.

Most fraternity members engage in significantly greater levels of sexual assault through drugging or intoxicating women to render them incapable of consent or refusal (Abbey, Sherrod, McAuslan, Zawacki, & Buck, 2003). Some men deem
it appropriate to force a drunken woman to have sexual intercourse because she is designated as a “legitimate sexual target.” Legitimate sexual targets help men convince each other that they can excuse and justify violence against women.

**Summary**

Akers' social learning theory emphasizes that men learn from each other both values and appropriate behaviors when living on college campuses. Messerschmidt's masculinities theory argues in order for men to show they are “manly” to others they have to display hegemonic masculinity at all times. He stresses men who show they are dominant and controlling will be more likely to engage in sexual assaults. Felson and Cohen's routine activities theory indicates that motivated offenders (college males) are more likely to come into contact with suitable targets (intoxicated women) with no guardians present at college parties. They reiterate that with no guardians present, motivated offenders will almost always be able to commit crimes. College men, who learn from their “brothers” hegemonic masculinity values, are more likely to commit campus rape at parties where suitable targets are present and capable guardians are absent.

**POLICIES**

Current policies do very little to prevent rape. Many of these policies are recent responses to publicity and lawsuits against colleges, in which each institution sought to, “make clear the college’s position disapproving of the behavior” (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993, p. 130). Moreover, most policies focus on the victim or seek to address the rare occurrence of stranger rape. From routine activities theory, masculinities and crime theory and social learning theory, it is clear that a policy that includes educational and interactional programs aimed at fraternities and athletic teams, alcohol prohibition on the college campus, and the enforcement of current penalties is needed.

**Current Policies**

Currently, six major federal legislations address campus violence: Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990, the Buckley Amendment Clarification (1992), the Campus Courts Disclosure Provision (1998), the Jeanne Cleary Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, the Campus Sexual Assault Victim’s Bill of Rights (1992), and the Campus Sex Crimes Prevention Act (2000). These laws outline the response procedures after a campus rape has been committed, but they do not specify enforceable guidelines for college campuses.

The Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990 is a landmark federal law that requires colleges and universities to disclose campus crime statistics and security policies in an annual security report. It also requires that a timely warning be issued about ongoing threats (Paludi, 2008). To ensure that campus police and security records about crimes are not improperly hidden among confidential student educational records, the Buckley Amendment Clarification (1992) was implemented. This revised the federal law, the Buckley Amendment, which keeps student records (grades, health charts) confidential (Paludi, 2008). In 1998, the Campus Courts Disclosure Provision was added to the Buckley Amendment, which requires that the final disciplinary action taken by a college or university against a student accused of a crime of violence be publicly disclosed. Previously this information had been considered confidential (Paludi, 2008).

Also in 1998, the original 1990 Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act was renamed the Jeanne Cleary Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, commonly referred to as the Jeanne Cleary Act. This act expanded its crime reporting requirements to include additional geographic areas and crime categories. It also added a public crime log requirement for institutions with a police or security department (Paludi, 2008).

The Campus Sexual Assault Victims’ Bill of Rights (1992) sets provisions as part of the “Campus Security Act,” and requires colleges to have sexual assault policies that guarantee certain basic rights for all sexual assault survivors. These provisions also expand the scope of sexual assault statistics that colleges report (Paludi, 2008). Finally, the Campus Sex Crimes Prevention Act (2000) amended the Jeanne Cleary Act to ensure that the students and the community are notified when a sex offender is enrolled or works at the higher education institution (Paludi, 2008).

Most college campuses also provide procedures to be followed once a sex offense has occurred and the possible sanctions that may be imposed (Potter, Krider, and McMahon, 2000). These policies target the victims of the crimes and outlines the legal mandates of what should take place if a rape or sexual assault occurs. These policies do not help to prevent this violence.

While most universities provide campus sexual assault programs for women, including education “to promote the awareness of rape, acquaintance rape, and other sex offenses, forcible or nonforcible” (Potter et al., 2000, p. 1347), they do not mandate sexual assault prevention education for men. Moreover, most policies target stranger assaults when most research has shown that acquaintance assaults are the most common form. Potter et al. (2000) state, “extremely expensive blue lights with hotlines to the campus police do absolutely nothing to improve safety for women, it is always easier to change the physical
Proposed Policy
The proposed policy suggests educational and interactive programs for men (more specifically members of fraternities and athletic teams), harsher alcohol polices, and harsher enforcement and penalties of already implemented student conduct rules on campuses. Potter et al. (2000) explain that, “since it is men who are the offenders, it should be men not women who change their behavior” (p. 1347). This is the one essential strategy that most colleges have not used.

A comprehensive and effective educational program should provide information to students, faculty, and staff about which behaviors constitute sexual assault and what to expect if it happens. Many men and women are often unaware that to have sex with a woman who has passed out, or lost the ability to meaningfully consent, is in most jurisdictions in the United States a form of rape. These educational programs should be developed, run, and sponsored by students, which could increase the likelihood of attendance and have a greater impact. Male student leaders such as fraternity presidents and sports team captains are more likely to receive greater support from their brothers and teammates (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993). Sororities and fraternities should co-organize an educational program encouraging a dialogue between men and women about sexual assaults (Boeringer, 2006).

These changes can address the causal factors in Messerschmidt’s masculinities and crime theory and Akers’ social learning theory. Educational programs that have respectable, positive influences teaching men on rape prevention, are more likely to be attended, respected, and influential. Speakers would provide positive ways for men to see how their hegemonic masculinity affects the campus community, and these men may be more encouraged to change their behavior.

Enforcing a prohibition of alcohol on campus is crucial to reducing the incidence of acquaintance rape (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993). This policy could be easily implemented, and in fact, many colleges throughout North America have shut down student pubs, prohibited campus parties that involve alcohol consumption, and banned alcohol from dormitories and campus apartments (Whitaker & Pollard, 1993). Student consumption of alcohol should be discouraged not only because alcohol is illegal for most students, but also because it creates an environment in which acquaintance rapes are most likely to occur (Whitaker & Pollard, 1993). Without alcohol, fewer suitable targets and more capable guardians, as routine activities theory explained, would be present.

Some penalties imposed on fraternity members who are convicted of illegally possessing alcohol, serving to minors, or sexual assaulting or raping a woman should include: disbandment of the member’s fraternity chapter, prohibition of campus activities for a specified time, prohibition of alcohol at fraternity events, prohibition of fraternity members holding office in student government or having any campus position of leadership, requirement for community service (i.e., participation in rape prevention programs for all fraternity members), restriction of female guests in their houses, loss of campus housing, and a requirement that the fraternity develop and record its official position on sexual violence, and develop guidelines to ensure that the policy will be enforced (Foubert & Perry, 2007). Most of these policies are presently in place in many fraternities on college campuses; enforcement of those should be increased.

CONCLUSION
Social learning theory, masculinities and crime theory, and routine activities theory explain the alarming prevalence of campus rape on college campuses. Akers’ social learning theory explains how men on college campuses learn the importance of being masculine (Messerschmidt) and that it is appropriate to sexually coerce intoxicated women who in their routine activities (Cohen and Felson) attend parties. A required educational program for fraternities and athletic teams may be more effective in reducing campus rape. Current legislation is limited in its ability to prevent campus rape. The legislation only provides college officials with procedures of what to do after a campus rape occurs. If the athletic teams’ and fraternities’ policies currently in place are enforced more rigorously than assailants may be deterred. Furthermore, if awareness about alcohol consumption and the likelihood of sexual victimization is increased, more aggressive preventative measures may be taken and then campuses and college parties can be safer environments.

References


