

Literature Review Paper

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Introduction

Rape culture is a phenomenon that has been present on college campuses for decades (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993). This term refers to the societal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that normalize and condone sexual violence. Rape culture is perpetuated through various means, including victim blaming, the objectification of women, and the trivialization of sexual assault (Brock, 2018). Unfortunately, rape culture has serious consequences for college students, particularly for women. According to recent research, college women are at high risk of experiencing sexual assault during their time in college, with one in five women reporting some form of sexual assault (Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007). In addition to the physical and emotional harm caused by sexual assault, victims also often face stigma, shame, and a lack of support (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007).

This literature review will outline what fosters rape culture on college campuses, as well as the consequences of this culture for college students. The group that has been chosen for this study is female students on college campuses in the United States. By examining the factors that contribute to rape culture and its consequences, this literature review aims to shed light on a pressing issue and provide insights into how to prevent sexual violence and create a safer and more inclusive campus environment.

Relevance

The topic of what fosters rape culture on college campuses is an important topic to consider for several reasons. Firstly, sexual violence is a pervasive and serious problem on college campuses, with a significant number of college students experiencing some form of sexual assault during their time in college (Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007). The consequences of sexual assault can be devastating, with victims experiencing physical harm,

emotional trauma, and long-term mental health issues (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007). Moreover, rape culture, which is a set of societal attitudes and beliefs that normalize and perpetuate sexual violence, can further exacerbate the problem by creating an environment where sexual assault is more likely to occur and less likely to be reported (Brock, 2018).

The impact of rape culture on people's lives can be significant. Victims of sexual assault often suffer from a range of physical and psychological consequences, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (McLean, Gallop, & Loppnow, 2019). In addition, victims often face barriers to accessing justice and support, such as social stigma, victim-blaming, and a lack of resources (Lerner & Thomas, 2019). Furthermore, rape culture can create a hostile and unsafe environment for all students, particularly women, who may feel unsafe and unwelcome on their own college campuses (Testa, Koss, Cook, & Bernat, 2016).

The problem of rape culture on college campuses is widespread and affects many individuals. Studies have found that one in five women and 6.1% of men experience some form of sexual assault during their time in college (Cantor et al., 2015; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007). However, these statistics likely underestimate the true prevalence of sexual violence, as many victims do not report their experiences to the authorities or seek support (Fisher et al., 2017). Moreover, rape culture affects not only individual victims but also the wider campus community, contributing to a culture of fear, distrust, and hostility (Boswell & Spade, 2017).

Factors Contributing to Sexual Assault

The prevalence of sexual violence on college campuses is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach to prevention. One key factor contributing to sexual assault is the acceptance of rape myths. Rape myths are false beliefs about rape that perpetuate victim-blaming and minimize the responsibility of perpetrators. Koss et al. (2017) found that rape myth acceptance is associated with hookup culture, which in turn contributes to sexual assault on college campuses. Prevention programs that focus on addressing rape myths and promoting healthy attitudes towards sex and consent can help to reduce the likelihood of sexual assault.

Greek life, which is a prominent feature on many college campuses, has also been found to contribute to sexual assault through its strict gender roles, alcohol consumption, and hierarchical power structures (Patton et al., 2018). Fraternities, in particular, have been found to be associated with higher rates of sexual assault. Efforts to address the harmful effects of Greek life can include policies that restrict the influence of these organizations on campus, as well as programs that challenge their traditional gender roles and promote healthy behaviors.

Another key factor contributing to sexual assault on college campuses is high-risk drinking behaviors. Testa and Livingston (2019) found that drinking is strongly associated with sexual assault, and that prevention efforts should focus on reducing high-risk drinking behaviors among students. Policies that limit access to alcohol and promote responsible drinking behaviors can be effective in reducing the likelihood of sexual assault. Additionally, bystander intervention programs can empower students to intervene in situations where sexual assault may occur and provide support for victims.

Rape Myth Acceptance and Hookup Culture

The prevalence of rape myth acceptance, hookup culture, and sexual assault highlights the necessity to confront detrimental beliefs and attitudes that perpetuate gender-based violence

(Krebs, Lindquist, Berzofsky, & Shook-Sa, 2020; Stemple, Flores, & Meyer, 2017). Rape myths, in particular, can foster a culture that faults victims for their own victimization and diminishes the gravity of sexual violence (Burt, 1980; McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Meanwhile, hookup culture can create an environment where sexual encounters are often facilitated by alcohol and where communication about consent may be inadequate (Armstrong, Hamilton, & England, 2010). These factors can contribute to a culture that normalizes sexual violence, making it more difficult for survivors to come forward and seek assistance (Koss, 1993).

Prevention efforts must go beyond simply promoting awareness of sexual assault and instead focus on challenging the cultural and social factors that contribute to it. This can involve promoting healthy relationships, including those that involve casual sex, and educating students on the importance of affirmative consent. It is also essential to provide support for survivors of sexual assault, such as counseling services and access to medical care. Policies that promote a safe and respectful campus environment, such as bystander intervention programs and strict disciplinary action against perpetrators, can also be effective in preventing sexual assault.

Victim Blaming and Normalization of Sexual Violence

Victim blaming is a harmful and pervasive belief that often surrounds discussions of sexual violence. Research has found that victim blaming is prevalent on college campuses and contributes to a culture that normalizes sexual violence (Katz et al., 2011). This normalization of sexual violence can make it more difficult for victims to come forward and can perpetuate the cycle of abuse. Victim blaming reinforces harmful myths that suggest that victims are somehow responsible for their own victimization. This can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and isolation for survivors, making it harder for them to seek help and support.

To combat victim blaming and promote a culture of respect for all individuals, it is important to challenge harmful beliefs and attitudes about sexual violence. Prevention programs can focus on educating students about the reality of sexual assault, including the prevalence of victim blaming and the importance of supporting survivors. Additionally, policies that prioritize the needs and well-being of survivors can help to create a more supportive and respectful campus environment. This may include increased resources for counseling and support services, as well as clear policies and procedures for responding to incidents of sexual violence.

Changing attitudes towards sexual violence and victim blaming requires a sustained effort from all members of the campus community. This includes administrators, faculty, staff, and students. It is important to recognize the role that all individuals play in creating a culture that promotes respect and safety for all members of the campus community. By working together to challenge harmful beliefs and attitudes, we can create a safer and more supportive environment for everyone. This can help to prevent sexual assault and support survivors in their healing process.

The Importance of Strong Sexual Assault Policies and Procedures

The importance of strong sexual assault policies and procedures on college campuses cannot be overstated. Cantor et al. (2015) found that when colleges and universities have secure policies in place to address sexual assault, they are more likely to have higher rates of reporting and disciplinary action against perpetrators of sexual violence. This is likely due to the fact that these policies make it easier for survivors of sexual assault to come forward and report incidents, as they feel more confident that their reports will be taken seriously, and that appropriate action will be taken.

In addition to providing clear guidelines for reporting and investigating allegations of sexual assault, comprehensive policies should also address prevention efforts. Prevention programs can include education on consent and healthy relationships, as well as training on bystander intervention. These programs can help to create a campus culture that promotes respect and safety for all individuals, which can in turn reduce the likelihood of sexual violence.

It is also important that these policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that they are effective in addressing the current needs of the campus community. This can include conducting surveys and focus groups to better understand the experiences and concerns of students, faculty, and staff related to sexual violence on campus. By staying informed and responsive to the needs of the community, colleges and universities can better address the issue of sexual assault and create a safer and more supportive environment for all members of the campus community.

The Association Between Drinking and Sexual Assault

Sexual assault continues to be a persistent and critical problem on college campuses in the United States (National Sexual Violence Resource Center [NSVRC], 2021). According to a recent NSVRC report, around one in five women and one in 14 men experience sexual assault while in college (NSVRC, 2021). However, survivors of sexual assault frequently encounter substantial obstacles when attempting to report incidents and pursue justice (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). Such barriers may include concerns about retaliation, skepticism from authorities, and lack of awareness about available resources (Fisher et al., 2000).

To address these challenges and create a safer campus environment for all members of the community, it is essential that colleges and universities develop strong sexual assault policies and procedures. These policies should provide clear guidelines for reporting and investigating

allegations of sexual assault, including information on how to access support services and pursue disciplinary action against perpetrators.

Moreover, comprehensive policies should also address prevention efforts. This can include a range of initiatives, such as education on consent and healthy relationships, bystander intervention training, and awareness campaigns. These programs not only equip students and staff with the knowledge and tools they need to prevent sexual violence, but also help to create a culture of respect and safety on campus.

In recent years, numerous colleges and universities have implemented measures to bolster their policies and procedures regarding sexual assault (Krebs, Lindquist, Berzofsky, & Shook-Sa, 2020). In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance to all colleges and universities that receive federal funding, outlining the steps they should take to address sexual violence on campus (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2011). This guidance stressed the significance of establishing a transparent and accessible reporting process for survivors of sexual assault, as well as implementing prevention initiatives that target the underlying causes of sexual violence (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2011).

Numerous colleges and universities have taken steps to respond to the guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education on sexual violence prevention and response (Krebs et al., 2020). As a result, new policies and procedures have been established that demonstrate a commitment to addressing sexual assault. For example, certain institutions have implemented anonymous reporting options, which enable survivors to report incidents without apprehension of retaliation or stigma (Krebs et al., 2020). Other institutions have established specialized sexual assault response teams that consist of trained professionals who can provide survivors with

support and guidance throughout the reporting process (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2020).

In addition to these efforts, many colleges and universities have instituted prevention programs that strive to foster a culture of safety and respect on campus. These programs can assume different forms, such as peer education initiatives, workshops on consent and healthy relationships, and bystander intervention training (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). By providing students and staff with the tools and understanding necessary to prevent sexual violence, these programs can contribute to establishing a more nurturing and welcoming campus environment for all members of the community.

Despite the progress made in preventing and responding to sexual assault on college campuses, there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed. As per a recent report by the Association of American Universities (AAU), just one-third of students who experience sexual assault report the incident to the university or law enforcement (Cantor et al., 2020). This underscores the need for ongoing measures to improve reporting procedures and support services, along with prevention initiatives that tackle the cultural factors underlying sexual violence.

Conclusions and Applications

Summary

Sexual violence is a prevalent issue on college campuses, with factors such as social norms, alcohol use, and gendered power dynamics contributing to the problem. Greek life and hookup culture have also been found to perpetuate rape culture and normalize sexual violence. Victim blaming is prevalent on college campuses, further contributing to a culture that normalizes sexual violence. However, strong sexual assault policies and procedures have been

found to increase reporting and disciplinary action against perpetrators of sexual violence.

Drinking is strongly associated with sexual assault on college campuses, highlighting the need for prevention efforts to reduce high-risk drinking behaviors among students.

Integration

Based on the research I found, I do not see any disagreements between what I think and what the studies show. I am totally on board with the idea that rape culture on college campuses is a huge issue that we need to address. Things like hookup culture, rape myths, victim blaming, and drinking behaviors can all contribute to this culture. But there are ways we can prevent it. I think it is important for colleges to have strong sexual assault policies and to teach students about consent. We also need to challenge harmful attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence. Overall, I believe that it is important to fight against sexual violence in order to keep our fellow students safe.

Application

One important application is the development and implementation of comprehensive sexual assault policies and procedures that provide clear guidelines for reporting and investigating allegations of sexual assault (Cantor et al., 2015). These policies should also address prevention efforts, including education on consent and healthy relationships, as well as training on bystander intervention (Cantor et al., 2015). Social workers can play a key role in advocating for the adoption of these policies and procedures, as well as in providing education and training to students, faculty, and staff on the prevention of sexual violence.

Another important application for social work practice is addressing the contextual risk factors that contribute to sexual assault on college campuses, such as the presence of Greek organizations and the concentration of men in certain academic programs (Humphrey & White,

2018). Social workers can work with campus administrators and student organizations to develop strategies for reducing these risk factors, such as increasing diversity in academic programs and promoting alternative forms of socializing that do not involve heavy drinking or hierarchical power structures.

Additionally, social workers can play a crucial role in addressing victim blaming and rape myth acceptance on college campuses (Katz et al., 2011; Koss et al., 2017). This can include providing counseling and support services to survivors of sexual violence, as well as engaging in education and outreach efforts to raise awareness about the harmful effects of victim blaming and rape myths.

Finally, social workers can work to reduce high-risk drinking behaviors among students, which have been strongly associated with sexual assault on college campuses (Testa & Livingston, 2019). This can include developing and implementing evidence-based prevention programs, as well as providing counseling and support services to students who struggle with alcohol use.

Overall, social workers can play a critical role in addressing sexual violence on college campuses by advocating for policy change, providing education and training, addressing risk factors, reducing victim blaming and rape myth acceptance, and addressing high-risk drinking behaviors among students.

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