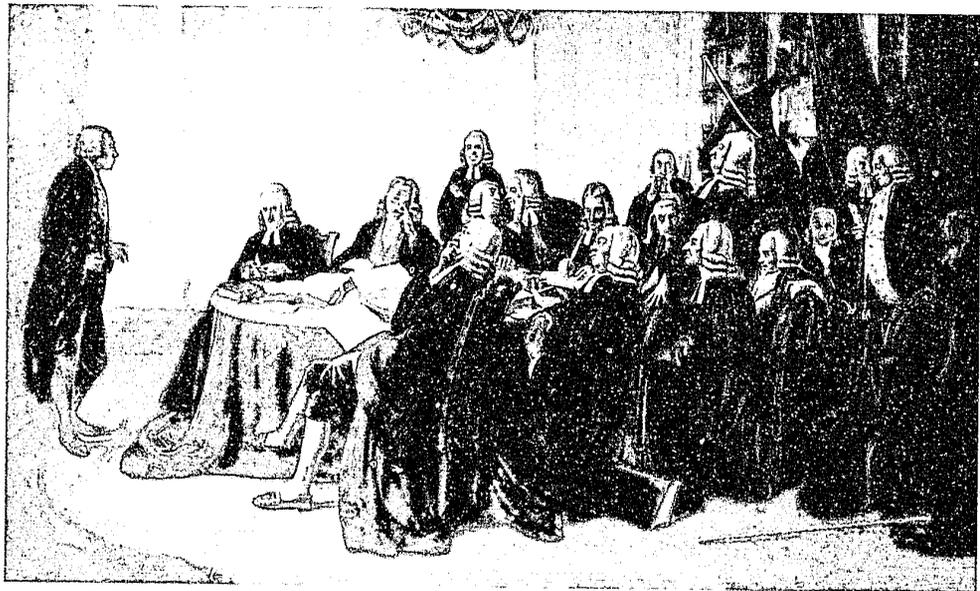


# Academically Speaking...

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Criminal Justice-Related Research  
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.....  
Diane L. Zahm, Ph.D., Editor  
Florida Criminal Justice Executive Institute

by Linda S. Forst

## The effects of two acquaintance rape prevention education programs on rape-supportive beliefs among college students

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Sexual violence has been the topic of women's magazines for decades, and in the 1990s it became the subject of national newspapers, talk shows, and periodicals. This notoriety was largely due to the Tailhook scandal. In September, 1991, 90 women were assaulted or harassed by Navy servicemen at the Tailhook Symposium (Office of the Inspector General, 1993). Another branch of the armed services, the Army, reported 24 servicewomen were raped or sexually assaulted by fellow soldiers while serving in the Persian Gulf (Sun-Sentinel, July 21, 1992). Interest in the subject of sexual violence was exacerbated by the rape trials of semi-celebrities William Kennedy Smith and Mike Tyson and by Anita Hill's accusations of sexual harassment by a Supreme Court nominee.

It is perhaps because of increased media coverage of sexual violence that reports of rape are increasing. The United States has the highest rape rate in the world (Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 1991). Researchers give several reasons for this shocking fact; primarily, they suggest, the high rape rate appears to be closely related to our excessively high tolerance for violence in general (Gordon & Riger, 1991). Of more disturbing significance, the incidence of rape continues to increase at an alarming rate. From 1968 to 1977, there was 103% increase in reported rapes. The latest figures indicate a 59% increase in rapes and attempted rapes from 1990 to 1991, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey (Law Enforcement News, 1992).

Rape is a vastly under-reported crime (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1985, 1991). Estimates vary, but aided by the use of self-report studies, Goldberg (1989, January) hypothesizes that only 10% of rapes are reported to the police. Some researchers hypothesize that the actual number may be 3.5 to 9% higher than reported rapes, suggesting many women choose not to report rape to police (Carrow, 1980).

The low reporting rate for rapes is especially characteristic of acquaintance rape, which has little likelihood of being reported (Ellis, 1989; Parrot, 1987; Ward, Chapman, Cohn, White, & Williams, 1991). Despite this fact, the number of reported rapes has risen dramatically. From 1981 to 1990 rapes reported to the police have increased 24% nationally (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1991). An estimated 109,062 rapes (only female victimizations are reported for Uniform Crime Reporting purposes) were reported to law enforcement agencies across the nation during 1992 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1993).

The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) rape victimization rate for women is nearly twice as large as the Uniform Crime Reports statistics, which are based on rapes reported to police. The most recent figure available from NCVS is for 1991, during which 173,310 rapes were reported. The compilers of the NCVS admit these numbers are still too low and hypothesize their reporting methods may affect their responses (Koss & Harvey, 1991). The

NCVS methods undermine self-disclosure for several reasons: (a) interviews may take place in front of other household members, (b) no real training is given to the interviewers concerning sensitive topics, and (c) no match up exists between interviewer and interviewee by race or sex. The most critical deficiency of NCVS methods is that victims are never asked clearly whether or not they were raped. They must respond voluntarily when answering questions concerning bodily harm. Furthermore, NCVS compilations use a narrow definition, strictly limiting rape to vaginal penetration by a penis against the victim's will.

Since rapes were being inconsistently reported, it became clear that to accurately investigate the rape problem, researchers could not rely on reported rapes and incarcerated rapists to gather information. To alleviate this limitation, self-report victimization studies were undertaken (Koss & Harvey, 1991). Self-report studies allowed the researchers to query the general public and to gather data from women who had not made reports as well as men who had not been caught and identified as rapists. Estimates vary on how many women have been or will be victims of sexual assault, but the estimates far exceed the number of rapes reported by the FBI or NCVS. Self-report studies estimate that from 1 in 4 women (Gibbs, 1991; Parrot & Bechhofer, 1991) to as high as 1 in 3 women (Schmich, 1985) women will be sexually assaulted during their lifetime.

Rape is a serious crime. In its most restrictive definition, it is sexual intercourse without consent. Although the terms rape and sexual assault are frequently used interchangeably, the term sexual assault is more inclusive, encompassing any forced sexual act against one's will. Rape and sexual assault represent all too common crimes with effects, both long-term

and short-term, that devastate those involved.

The act of rape is often described as either stranger rape or acquaintance rape. It was once believed that stranger rape was the most common type of rape (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1985). Federal government victimization surveys have more recently reported that stranger rape and acquaintance rape occur with approximately the same frequency (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1989). However, the NCVS reports that in 1989, approximately 66% of rapes involved strangers (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1991).

As more self-report studies have been conducted, these beliefs have been challenged. Research has found the percentage of rapes accounted for by stranger rape to be much lower than the government figures. Russell (1984) determined stranger rape to be much less common than acquaintance rape; rape crisis centers report approximately 25-40% of victims indicate they were raped by strangers (Bateman, 1982). More recent research has corroborated the finding that stranger rape may not be as common as acquaintance rape (Koss et al., 1987; Parrot, 1990; Ward et al., 1991).

Acquaintance rape is forced, unwanted intercourse with a person known to the victim. The victim may know the offender casually or have a dating relationship (Parrot, 1990). According to Ward et al. (1991), 70 to 80% of rapes are acquaintance rapes that happen in a social environment in which sexual aggression occurs. Privacy, isolation, parties, alcohol, dating, and miscommunication among young people can lead to an increased chance of rape occurring. In a survey, 100% of self-disclosed rapists stated their rape was preceded by some type of consensual sexual activity (Kanin, 1984).

Acquaintance rape is rarely reported to the authorities or prosecuted. This fact has been

supported in the literature, both published (Berger, Searles, Salem, & Pierce, 1986; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1989; Estrich, 1987; Lundberg-Love & Geffner, 1988) and unpublished (Forst, 1990). Estimates range from a 1 to 10% reporting rate for acquaintance rapes.

Evidence shows the rate of date rape has increased dramatically during the past generation. Researchers cite several sociocultural changes that have occurred in society that appear to be related to this trend: first, the equalization of freedom between men and women (moral, legal, financial, and education) (Gordon & Riger, 1991); second, the erosion of traditional values and courting habits has put women in situations to which they would not have previously been exposed (Parrot,

1990); and third, the portrayal of violent sexuality in the media, coupled with messages from family and peers, socialize us to believe rape myths. Movies, books, soap operas, and magazines often portray women as liking rough sex; note for example, Rhett's drunken rape of Scarlett in Gone With the Wind, and Laura's marriage to Luke, her rapist, in "General Hospital" (Warshaw & Parrot, 1991).

Another crucial factor in the rise of date rape is the widespread use of alcohol among young people (Levine & Kanin, 1987). Alcohol has been found to lessen social inhibitions, including a reduction of men's inhibitions against violence and women's ability to resist sexual violence (Richardson & Hammock, 1991).

## Rape on college campuses

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Acquaintance rape is particularly prevalent on college campuses. One of the largest studies of this phenomenon was Dr. Mary Koss's study of over 6,000 college students on 32 campuses across the country. Her results, widely reported in popular media as well as in scholarly journals, indicated that over 80% of sexual assaults were committed by acquaintances. Other studies have produced similar results, with some indicating 85 to 95% of the victims knew their attackers (Cockey, Sherrill, Cave, & Chapman, 1988). Forty-four percent of the female respondents in the Koss study reported being coerced into sexual activity, with 15.4% having sexual intercourse against their will (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987).

Muehlenhard and Linton (1987) reported similar results in their study on college students, which demonstrated that 77% of the female students and 57% of the male students had been involved in sexual coercion, with 14.7% of the women having had sexual intercourse against their will.

These factors result in the frightening conclusion that on college campuses, often envisioned as safe and secure enclaves, 25% of women have been victims of rape or attempted rape, with 90% of the victims knowing their assailant (Keller, 1990). One of every 3.6 female students will be a victim of sexual assault at some point in her life (Koss & Harvey, 1991).

## Rape mythology

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Rape myths are prejudicial, stereotypical, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists that tend to create a climate hostile to rape victims (Burt, 1980). Belief in rape myths may facilitate the occurrence of sexual assault (Burt, 1980; Koss & Harvey, 1991). Some of the most common rape beliefs are as follows:

Rape is a crime committed by a stranger who attacks women walking alone at night.

Women "ask for" rape by their appearance or behavior.

It's the woman's fault if she was raped.

Women say "no" but mean "yes."

All women secretly want to be raped.

Most rapists are mentally ill.

Rape by an acquaintance is not as traumatic as rape by a stranger.

Only women are rape victims.

## Role of culture in development and belief in rape myths

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Burt (1980) conducted a frequently cited study that examined the belief that certain cultural attitudes play a role in causing rape. Burt described rape myths and tested the hypotheses that the acceptance of rape myths can be predicted from attitudes such as sex role stereotyping, adversarial sexual beliefs, sexual conservatism, and acceptance of interpersonal violence.

Burt's results indicated that the greater the degree of sex role stereotyping, adversarial sexual beliefs, and acceptance of interpersonal violence, the greater a respondent's acceptance of rape myths. The strongest relationship existed between the acceptance of interpersonal violence and rape myths. Burt also found younger,

better-educated people revealed less rape myth acceptance, less acceptance of interpersonal violence, and a lesser degree of sex-role stereotyping.

Burt reported two major implications of her study. First, some Americans believe numerous rape myths. In addition, their rape attitudes are correlated with other strongly held attitudes such as sex role stereotyping, acceptance of interpersonal violence, and lack of trust of the opposite sex in relationships. She also observed that for Americans holding these views, rape victims' testimony is rarely accepted.

Researchers indicate women are often blamed for their sexual assault, depending on their behavior preceding

the assault. However, in a Time poll it was also evident that the percentages of people holding the victim responsible for the assault decreased with the respondents' age (Gibbs, 1991). Therefore, it is prudent to examine the attitudes of college

students in order to ascertain if they share these attitudes. Additionally, by examining young people's attitudes, we can determine if their attitudes have contributed to the increase in sexual aggression and the increase in the rate of date rape.

## Education programs on campus

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Negative publicity on high-profile cases, recent self-report studies that indicate how prevalent acquaintance rape is, and pressure from students, their parents, and most recently, state legislators, have forced colleges and universities to address the acquaintance rape problem. Many are attempting to combat acquaintance rape by expanding their rape awareness and prevention programs.

Past studies on rape prevention education programs present conflicting results. Most indicate that providing rape prevention programs increases student knowledge of rape (Brakenseik, 1982; Dignan, 1985; Ferguson, Duthie, & Graf 1987; Hamilton & Yee, 1990; Jones & Muehlenhard, 1990; Lee, 1987). Students with information about risks of rape are less likely to be victims of sexual assault (Holmberg & MacDonald, 1990; Miller, 1988).

Gordon and Riger (1991) argue that campus rape is so prevalent because of the norms in our society that condone sexual violence. Young people have grown accustomed to observing sexual violence in the media and have become desensitized to it. One way to lessen the possibility of rape is to change the climate on our campuses so that this behavior is no longer regarded as the norm or as acceptable (Gordon & Riger, 1991). Some educational programs have

demonstrated the potential to reduce the motivating factors for men to commit rape while increasing the woman's ability to resist (Lundberg-Love & Geffner, 1988; Miller, 1988).

Whether this increased knowledge affects rape-supportive beliefs (long-held beliefs that support the occurrence of rape and the blaming of victims) is unclear but promising. Ferguson et al. (1987), Fischer (1986), Hamilton and Yee (1990); Jones and Muehlenhard (1990), and Lee (1987) found that increased knowledge led to fewer rape-supportive beliefs. Brakenseik (1982) found a change in attitudes among men but not among women, and Borden, Karr, and Caldwell-Colbert (1988) found no significant change in attitudes among student participants.

Past studies have also examined different types of rape prevention education programs to determine effectiveness. These studies report no significant difference in attitude change depending on the type of program or facilitator (Abrams, 1992; Jones & Muehlenhard, 1990; Nichols, 1991). However, few studies have compared the effectiveness of programs presented in different formats. The impact of using improvisational theater, for example, has not been compared to the results of a more traditional didactic program. Examining acquaintance

rape prevention programs to determine their effectiveness is warranted in light of the increasing numbers of rapes on campuses. Another aspect of sexual assault prevention programs that has not

been explored is the relationship between familiarity with sexual assault on the part of the participant and the effectiveness of a particular prevention education program.

## The study

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The purpose of this study was to examine the efficacy of two different types of rape prevention education programs, developed and presented to male and female college students.

Participants were recruited from among 420 undergraduate students in criminal justice and psychology classes at Florida Atlantic University. The Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale (ASB) and Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMA) (Burt, 1980) were combined into one questionnaire with filler questions placed throughout the questionnaire. The students who participated were randomly assigned to one of three groups. One third participated in Workshop A; one third in Workshop B; and the remaining third were in the control group. All three groups completed the pre-treatment tests prior to their workshops. The participants in Workshops A and B completed immediate post-treatment tests after participating in their workshops.

Two weeks after Phase I, all of the participants reconvened in the same classroom for Phase II which consisted of tests and debriefings for all three groups.

Workshop A (treatment 1). This workshop was didactic in nature with a lecture format frequently used on college campuses. A female university police officer and a representative of the county sexual assault project covered definitions, legal issues,

services available, rape myths, sexual behavior, and communication and assertiveness. The group also watched a video, Campus Rape, produced by the Santa Monica Rape Treatment Center and participated in a question and answer session. The presentation lasted for approximately an hour and then the participants were given a post-treatment test.

Workshop B (treatment 2). This workshop was experiential in nature, inviting participation from the audience. The principal investigator was the facilitator in this workshop. Also present as resource people were a detective from the local police department, a representative of the county sexual assault project, and a representative of student services at Florida Atlantic University. A brief overview of rape and acquaintance rape was presented, including definitions, legal issues, prevalence, communication, attitudes, social factors, and rape and the college community. A small awareness quiz was handed out for discussion purposes. At the conclusion of this discussion, the improvisational theater began. Two drama students performed the roles of David and Mary, fictional college students, who meet at a fraternity party and pair off. These students had been given the scripts weeks before and rehearsed them and conferred with the primary investigator concerning their roles.

This script, developed by Cornell University (Salmons-Rue, 1987), contained two scenes. These scenes were adhered to with minor changes to coincide with the local environment and personalize the presentation.

The first scene shows how risk factors and miscommunication can lead to acquaintance rape. The scene leads up to David forcing Mary to have sex against her will. At the conclusion of the first scene, the facilitator and actors drew the audience into a discussion. They did this by asking questions about how the audience felt, how the actors felt, what behaviors may have contributed to the situation, and how they could

change the behaviors.

After the discussion, the actors move to scene two, which is the same situation as scene one, but incorporates prevention strategies as well as suggestions made by the audience. Again, a discussion was held with the audience/participants as to how they were feeling, how the actors were feeling, and what behavior changes had made the difference in the scene.

Workshop C (control group). This group was the control group. The participants were released after completing their pre-treatment tests.

## Analysis and Results

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Fifty four students completed all phases of the study and their responses were analyzed. The subjects ranged in age from 19 to 44, with the mean age 23.9 years (SD 5.83) and the median age 22 years. Thirty-three (61%) of the participants were females and 21 (39%) were males. Twenty-six (48%) were seniors, 24 (44%) were juniors, 3 (6%) were sophomores, and 1 (2%) was a freshman. The educational major that was most frequently represented was criminal justice (44% or n = 24). Seventeen percent (n = 9) of the subjects were psychology majors and 13% (n = 7) were political science majors. The remainder of the participants declared majors in nursing, education, business, communications, sociology, and social psychology.

Most of the participants were Caucasian; six participants were minorities (11%). All participants had been residents in the United States for over 10 years except for one

African-American and one Haitian. Both had resided in the U.S. for 5 to 10 years.

The subjects were queried as to their experiences with forced sex. Thirteen subjects (24%) (12 women and 1 man) had been forced to have sex against their will and 25 subjects (46%) knew one or more individuals who had been forced to have sex against their will. One participant admitted having forced someone to have sex, and 16 subjects (30%) knew someone who had forced someone to have sex. There were 7 victims of sexual assault in the didactic program, 3 in the experiential program, and 3 in the control group. Participants with a familiarity with sexual assault (knowing a victim or offender) were evenly distributed throughout the three groups, with 14 in the didactic program, 13 in the experiential program, and 14 in the control group.

Rape prevention program format. The

results of this study indicate that there was no significant difference between the didactic program and the experiential program in reducing rape-supportive beliefs as measured by the Adversarial Sexual Beliefs (ASB) and Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) scales. These results support previous research findings which indicate that there is no clearly superior method or format of presenting information about rape and its prevention.

It appears that presenting any type of program increases knowledge and awareness of acquaintance rape and decreases rape-supportive beliefs among college students to some degree. Participants in both interventions showed greater decreases in the immediate post-treatment test. However, the second post-treatment test indicated scores regressed to pre-treatment levels. Only those participating in the didactic program showed a significant decrease in rape-supportive beliefs as measured by the RMA at the follow-up post-treatment test.

Whereas neither the didactic nor the experiential program offers a clear advantage, the lecture program may be the program of choice for college administrators for several reasons. The didactic program is most frequently used, and, consequently, students, faculty, and administrators are more familiar with the format and possibly more open to the presentation of rape prevention education in this manner. Furthermore, the lecture format is also more conducive to presenting the information to larger groups than improvisational theater. As universities often have large numbers of students in need of attending these programs, the efficiency of the lecture method could be an important issue. The lecture format is more cost-effective, less time-consuming, and less resource-intensive than the theater program. Preparing for the theater program and presenting it

takes the coordination of the schedules of many individuals for rehearsals as well as the presentation. If the actors and facilitators are volunteers, it may be difficult to obtain the needed commitment. Some colleges have elected to pay the participants, further increasing the cost of the program. In addition to these concerns about the theater programs, their overall effectiveness has been questioned (Frazier, 1993).

The familiarity factor. The second major finding in this study was the relationship between direct and indirect familiarity with acquaintance rape and rape-supportive beliefs. Participants who had been victims of sexual assault had significantly lower scores on both the ASB and RMA scales than participants who had not been victims. Thus, "victim" participants had fewer rape-supportive beliefs. The "victim" scores were significantly lower than "non-victim" across all groups, pre-treatment and post-treatment. "Victim" scores did not significantly decrease over time perhaps because they were already low. This would indicate that their previous victimization had decreased their rape-supportive beliefs. This suggests that their own victimization had made them more sensitive to sexual violence and less accepting of rape-supportive beliefs.

These findings support a previous study (Dietz, 1982). Dietz found that college women who had experienced a rape situation showed greater empathy toward rape victims than did women who had not been involved in a rape situation.

It is unclear how empathy would be related to rape-supportive beliefs, although another finding in the Dietz study may suggest a correlation. Dietz found the male respondents in the study who exhibited strong empathy toward rape victims reported less desire to rape a woman than did men who expressed

less empathy for the victims.

A more recent study by Hamilton and Yee (1990) indicates that increased knowledge of rape is associated with fewer rape-supportive beliefs and also a decreased likelihood of raping. It would appear there is a correlation between knowledge of rape, empathy, and rape-supportive beliefs.

This study examined not only attitudes of participants who were victims of sexual assault but also the attitudes of those who had a familiarity with the issue by knowing a victim of sexual violence or an offender. The participants who had a familiarity with sexual assault showed significant decreases in rape-supportive beliefs after the didactic program, as measured by the ASB scale. This was not true of the participants who had no direct or indirect familiarity with sexual assault. The RMA scores among participants who had familiarity with rape victims or offenders were not significantly decreased.

Previous studies have produced conflicting results in this area of direct familiarity with victims or offenders. Coller and Resick (1987) surveyed 76 female undergraduates in response to a date rape scenario. Results indicated there was no correlation between empathy and victim blame. Further, they found no correlation between the degree of empathy and the participant's own history of victimization.

Conversely, Kleinke and Meyer (1990) found a positive value to familiarity with rape victims. After viewing a six minute video of an interview with a rape victim, 165 male and female undergraduates rated the "typical" rape victim more unfavorably than the videotaped victim with whom they had familiarity.

#### Incidence of victimization in sample.

This investigation revealed a high incidence of victimization by sexual assault among this sample. Twenty-four percent of the participants reported they had been victims of forced sex, and one of those victims was a male. Forty-six percent knew someone who had been a victim of forced sex. This is consistent with previous studies which have reported figures from 15% to 29% of participants in the studies stating they had been forced to have sex against their will (Koss et al., 1988; Aizenman & Kelly, 1988; Nichols, 1991).

This study sample reported a higher male victimization than reported by the NCVS. The NCVS estimates that 1% of males are victims of rape. This estimate was based on fewer than 10 reported cases in 1989 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1991). One male participant (5%) in this study reported he was forced to have sex against his will. Self-report studies have stated that less than 10% of rape victims are male (Jamison & Flanagan, 1989). This sample reported that 8% of the rape victims were men which is consistent with literature on self-report studies, however, the number is so low definitive conclusions are impossible.

A substantial percentage of the participants had experience with sexual assault (30% knew an offender; 46% knew a victim). These students tended to be more receptive to the information presented and retain it better than students who do not know someone who has been victimized or who has victimized others. This sensitivity may result from feelings of empathy brought about through direct familiarity with victims or sex offenders.

## Recommendations and conclusions

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Participants with a direct knowledge of rape trauma exhibited a significantly decreased rape-supportive belief score after participating in the didactic program. In addition, participants who had been victims of sexual assault showed significantly fewer rape-supportive beliefs across all groups including the pre-treatment tests. This finding indicates that rape education program facilitators should, whenever possible, have rape victims address students, in person or on videotape, as part of either a didactic or experiential program. If students personally unfamiliar with rape trauma can be given an opportunity to experience the same feelings and attitudes of the victim, this study indicates rape-supportive beliefs would diminish. This issue should be studied further.

Whether or not any acquaintance rape prevention program has the ability to change deeply ingrained and long-held attitudes and beliefs remains to be seen.

The study of acquaintance rape and acquaintance rape prevention programs is in its early stages. It appears that the acquaintance rape rate continues to increase in spite of the efforts being undertaken by community service groups and college administrators. It is imperative therefore that efforts not stop, decrease, or slow down. Rape awareness programs must continue to educate as many students as

possible.

Campus administrators have a moral and legal obligation to provide as safe an academic environment as possible (Keller, 1990). College is one of the last opportunities society has to educate young men and women about human relations and, therefore, should strive to provide awareness education to all students. If comprehensive rape prevention education programs are provided, the numbers of sexual assaults occurring on our campuses can possibly be reduced or minimized.

In addition to promoting and implementing rape education and prevention programs, university and college administrators, faculty, staff, and students must work together on a comprehensive code of sexual ethics. Antioch College's recent sexual consent policy is a step in that direction.

Finally, this nation must also examine its own fascination with violence and sex. The incidence of sexual violence in the United States is the highest in the world. Whether the incidence of sexual violence is due to cultural or psychological factors, to increased media coverage, or to a lack of funding for educational programs such as those described in this study this nation can ill afford to ignore the rape epidemic. As Brownmiller (1975) wrote of her book Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape, "[I have given] rape its history. Now we must deny it a future."

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