



## Position Statement on Campus Sexual Violence

The American Psychoanalytic Association condemns sexual violence, including campus sexual violence. Being the victim of sexual assault is one of the most violating experiences one can have, and sexual assault causes both immediate and long-term physical and mental health consequences, including increased risk of suicide. Sexual assault is the most common violent crime on college campuses today. We endorse ongoing measures to identify the scope of the problem on college campuses, help prevent sexual assault, help colleges and universities respond effectively when a student is assaulted, and improve enforcement efforts. Campus sexual violence takes place in a cultural context in which sexual and physical violence are tolerated in everyday student life, including athletic departments and many social contexts, such as in the behavior tolerated and promoted by fraternities and sororities.

### BACKGROUND

Sexual assault includes a wide range of victimizations, including rape and other types of unwanted sexual contact. College students as a subpopulation are at elevated risk for sexual assault. One in five women is sexually assaulted in college.<sup>i</sup> The CSA Study found that 6.1% of college men were victims of either attempted or completed sexual assault. Currently available literature<sup>ii</sup> suggests that sexual and racial minorities are at even higher risk for sexual violence. Campus sexual violence is chronically underreported. In many instances, survivors of sexual violence do not have a safe, confidential place to turn after an assault, and are unaware that institutional policies and procedures are devised primarily to protect the institution's interests, which are often not in the interests of victims of sexual assault.<sup>iii</sup>

### PSYCHOANALYTIC UNDERSTANDING OF CAMPUS SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual assault is an act of power and violence. Perpetrators use sex organs as the locus of violence, but "rape isn't about sex, at least not in the sense of being motivated by sexual attraction or an uncontrollable sexual urge."<sup>iv</sup> The pervasive threat of sexual assault is akin to bullying – a group process and social dynamic. Psychoanalysts view sexual assault as not only a two-party process, but as a three-party process. The perpetrator and bystander audience together create a complex and destructive power dynamic.<sup>v</sup> Any intervention must consider this interlocking social interaction among perpetrators, victims, and bystanders, which includes other students and campus authorities not necessarily present at the time of the assault, but part of the overall institutional environment. The social milieu of campus life can contribute greatly to an atmosphere of leniency regarding sexual assault. In addition to the effects of physical and emotional violence from sexual assault, the threat of shame and humiliation can have a debilitating effect on the survivor's development and progression in life. Sexual assaults that occur during this sensitive, critical developmental period of late-adolescence and early adulthood can significantly compromise the consolidation period of sexual identity, thus posing long term negative impact on the person's overall development.

The survivor who discloses often becomes "neither subject nor object, but rather placed in a liminal place,"<sup>vi</sup> on the boundary of the college or university community. Although it is less obvious, perpetrators and administrators also suffer destructive consequences because of their participation in this process, contributing to an overall erosion of the campus environment. Failure to redress grievances and the related deterioration of the campus community further compromises the environment.

A defensive position adopted by colleges and universities is to act secretly. Secrecy is a central dynamic of what happens between the perpetrator and the victim of sexual assault, and this secrecy and deception permeates college and university responses to sexual assault, through internal systems or discreet management within the institutional hierarchy.<sup>vii</sup> In the desire for power and control, colleges and universities demonstrate "an institutional narcissism not dissimilar to the narcissism and solipsism that characterize the self-justification of most perpetrators."<sup>viii</sup> In addition, the reality that highly-esteemed students, such as sports

team or fraternity or sorority members, can be a danger to other students is downplayed, and that “troublesome reality is projected onto the messenger of the unwanted information.”<sup>ix</sup> The perpetrator becomes the victim and the victim becomes the perpetrator, in a paroxysm of misplaced sympathy; thus, colleges and universities may collude with the perpetrators against the victims as if a common enemy.

Colleges and universities become focused on the business of education and dominated by internal forces and interests, and secrecy and deception for the purposes of power and control become a way of reacting to unwanted interruptions, represented by increased student concerns about sexual assault within the institution. Scandal is minimized and avoided and assets are protected from potential subsequent litigation. Institutional self-preoccupation links to the fantasy of college and university hierarchies that the campus is a utopian place apart, presided over by learned good men, offering a place for the ignorant to be educated.

## RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>x</sup>

- Encourage colleges and universities to develop and conduct in-depth campus climate surveys with students, including heterosexual men and women, but making special effort to survey LGBTQ persons, and racial minorities. Collaborative funded efforts are needed to accurately track the prevalence of sexual assaults on US campuses.
- Prevent sexual assaults on campus by using evidence-based prevention strategies, including initiatives to promote bystander intervention and enlisting men and other students to intervene.
- Call upon experts, in collaboration with the CDC, the Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women, and the Department of Education, to identify and publicize emerging, promising practices to prevent campus sexual assault, and to develop new investigative and adjudicative protocols to better hold perpetrators accountable.
- Under current federal law, when a school knows, or may reasonably know, that one of its students has been sexually assaulted, it is obligated to act responsibly to provide a safe environment for all students and give survivors the help they need to pursue their educations. Accountability must be ensured. In all cases, the institution must respond. Colleges and universities should identify trained, confidential advocates who can provide emergency and ongoing support to those who have been sexually assaulted.
- Colleges and universities should include key stakeholders, including student groups (including LGBTQ and racial minority groups) and survivors in developing effective sexual misconduct policies.
- Since trauma can negatively impact a victim’s ability to mentally process the traumatic event, colleges and universities should hire outside investigators specially-trained in working with trauma victims to interview alleged victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, about which these professionals should provide comprehensive reports to the educational institution. Involvement of professionals from outside of the educational institution helps minimize institutional biases that may come into play.
- Colleges and universities should provide comprehensive support for sexual assault survivors, including interventions such as rape crisis services, advocates that accompany survivors to medical and legal appointments, “as long as you need” clinical therapies such as psychoanalytical treatments, and coordination with local law enforcement to foster understanding of the unique needs of sexual assault victims.
- The federal government should continue to strengthen its role in combating sexual violence through enforcement of Title IX<sup>1</sup> and the Clery Act<sup>2</sup>, which protect all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, immigration status, or whether they have a disability.

**Approved by the Executive Council, January 15, 2015**

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<sup>1</sup> Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 requires schools who receive federal funds to protect people from discrimination based on sex in educational programs and activities.

<sup>2</sup> The Clery Act requires public and private universities and colleges participating in federal student aid programs to disclose campus safety information. It also imposes certain basic requirements for handling incidents of sexual violence, and was expanded in 2013 to expand the law’s requirements in incidents of campus sexual violence.

- <sup>i</sup> Krebs, C.P. (2007). *The Campus Sexual Assault (CSA) Survey*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice.
- <sup>ii</sup> Rothman, E.F. (2011). The prevalence of sexual assault against people who identify as Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual in the United States: A systematic review. *Trauma Violence Abuse* 12:55-66. See also, Edwards, K.M., Sylaska, K.M., Barry, J.E., Moynihan, M.M., Banyard, V. L., Cohn, E. S., Walsh, W. A. Ward, S. K. (2014). Violence, Sexual Violence, and Unwanted Pursuit Victimization: A Comparison of Incidence Rates Among Sexual-Minority and Heterosexual College Students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*; Edwards, K.M., Sylaska, K.M, Barry, J.E., Moynihan, M.M., Banyard, V.L., Cohn, E.S., Walsh, W.A., & Ward, S.K. ( 2014). Physical Dating Violence, Sexual Violence, and Unwanted Pursuit Victimization: A Comparison of Incidence Rates Among Sexual-Minority and Heterosexual College Students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 6:1-21, (appeared online June 12, 2014) doi: 10.1177/0886260514535260
- <sup>iii</sup> Not Alone: The First Report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Violence (April 2014). Washington, DC: The White House.
- <sup>iv</sup> Filipovic, J. (2013). Rape is about power, not sex. *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/29/rape-about-power-not-sex>, accessed 10/12/14.
- <sup>v</sup> Twemlow, S.W. & Sacco, F.C. (2011). *Preventing Bullying and School Violence*. Washington, DC & London, England: American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc.
- <sup>vi</sup> Gardner, F. (2012). Defensive Processes and Deception: An Analysis of the Response of the Institutional Church to Disclosures of Child Sexual Abuse. *British Journal of Psychotherapy* 28:98-109.
- <sup>vii</sup> Gardner, F. (2012). Ibid. See also the experiences of college student Emma Sulkowicz as described by her parents: Sulkowicz, K.J. & Leong, S. (October 2, 2014) An open letter to President Bollinger and the board of trustees of Columbia University: <http://columbiaspectator.com/contributors/kerry-j-sulkowicz>, accessed 10/12/14.
- <sup>viii</sup> Gardner, F. (2012). Ibid.
- <sup>ix</sup> Gardner, F. (2012). Ibid.
- <sup>x</sup> Not Alone: The First Report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Violence (April 2014). Washington, DC: The White House.