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# Knowing a Sexual Assault Victim or Perpetrator: A Stratified Random Sample of Undergraduates at One University

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## **Abstract**

Rape awareness and prevention programs are common on college campuses and a potentially useful way to reach large numbers of young adults. One largely unexamined potential mediator or moderator of program effectiveness is the personal knowledge of student audiences. In this study, we assess the prevalence of knowing a victim and, notably, a perpetrator of sexual assault. A stratified random sample of 2,400 undergraduates was recruited for an online survey about sexual assault. A total of 53.5% participated and yielded a sample representative of the student body. Sixteen questions were modified from the Sexual Experiences Survey to assess whether participants knew a victim of any one of eight types of sexual assault. Findings indicate that students begin college with considerable personal knowledge of sexual assault victimization and perpetration. Nearly two thirds (64.5%) reported that they know one or more women who were a victim of any one of eight types of sexual assault, and over half (52.4%) reported that they know one or more men who perpetrated any of the types of sexual assault. Most students reported knowing victims and perpetrators of multiple types of assault. Knowledge varied substantially by gender and ethnicity. Students' preexisting personal knowledge should be included in assessments of program effectiveness and, ideally, in program design.

## **Keywords**

adolescence, perpetrators, race, ethnicity, rape, sexual assault, victims

## **Disciplines**

Other Social and Behavioral Sciences | Race and Ethnicity | Student Counseling and Personnel Services

## **Comments**

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Knowing a Sexual Assault Victim or Perpetrator:  
A Stratified Random Sample of Undergraduates at One University

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### Abstract

Rape awareness and prevention programs are common on college campuses and a potentially useful way to reach large numbers of young adults. One largely-unexamined potential mediator or moderator of program effectiveness is the personal knowledge of student audiences. In this study, we assess the prevalence of knowing a victim and, notably, a perpetrator of sexual assault. A stratified random sample of 2400 undergraduates was recruited for an online survey about sexual assault. A total of 53.5% participated and yielded a sample representative of the student body. Sixteen questions were modified from the Sexual Experiences Survey to assess whether participants knew a victim or perpetrator of sexual assault.

Findings indicate that students begin college with considerable personal knowledge of sexual assault victimization and perpetration. Nearly two-thirds (64.5%) reported that they know one or more women who were a victim and over half (52.4%) reported that they know one or more men who perpetrated one of the eight types of sexual assault. Most students reported knowing victims and perpetrators of multiple types of assault. Knowledge varied substantially by gender and ethnicity. Students' pre-existing personal knowledge should be included in assessments of program effectiveness and, ideally, in program design.

**Keywords:** adolescence, perpetrators, race/ethnicity, rape, sexual assault, victims

Knowing a Sexual Assault Victim or Perpetrator:  
A Stratified Random Sample of College Students at One University

Thirty years ago, Heath and colleagues (1981) asserted that “many people don’t know, or aren't aware they know, a rape victim.” This is important because knowing a victim is widely believed to be related to more empathic attitudes about sexual assault. And, following along the knowledge-attitude-behavior continuum (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), those who know a victim may exhibit more compassionate behaviors toward victims, take risk-reduction actions, and be less likely to perpetrate sexual assault.

Sexual assault prevention and education programs, which have become commonplace on college campuses since they began in the mid-1980s (Briskin & Gary, 1986), appear to assume a similar logic. Many programs are designed to increase factual knowledge, reduce the acceptance of rape myths, and increase empathy with the ultimate goal of preventing sexual assault (Breitenbecher, 2000). According to the most recent meta-analysis of such efforts (Anderson & Whiston, 2005), however, programs have relatively limited outcomes. They are best at increasing factual knowledge, have a statistically significant but substantively small effect on attitudes about rape, behavioral intention, and the incidence of sexual assault, and no documented effect on rape awareness or empathy. These effects differ by gender and type of audience: members of the general student body demonstrate positive changes in attitudes and behavioral intent; and women in mixed gender groups and members of fraternities and sororities demonstrate the largest positive change in rape and rape-related attitudes.

There is little evidence that campus sexual assault prevention efforts take into account the personal experiences and knowledge of student audiences. Asking students to focus on their own exposures may help engage them in the material but, perhaps even more importantly,

documenting such information may be useful because assumptions about the results of such exposure are not necessarily borne out in data (e.g., Banyard, 2008; Burt, 1980; Eagan & Wilson, 2012; Ellis, O'Sullivan, & Sowards, 1992). Including information about personal experience and knowledge may help assess whether personal knowledge is a mediator or moderator of program effectiveness and whether potential mediator or moderator effects differ by characteristics of the program participants.

The purpose of the present investigation is to assess personal knowledge of both sexual assault victimization and sexual assault perpetration in a diverse undergraduate population so as to help inform the development and evaluation of sexual assault prevention efforts on campus.

### **Sexual Assault Victimization**

Five decades of research indicates that about half of all female college students have experienced some form of sexual assault (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Kanin & Parcell, 1977; Kirkpatrick & Kanin, 1957; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). About one fifth have been raped. Ethnic differences in sexual assault victimization and rape are reported rarely. To our knowledge, the most recent and complete information is from Koss et al. (1987) who found that those at highest risk of rape are Native American women, followed by White, Hispanic, Black and Asian college women (40%, 16%, 12%, 10%, and 7%, respectively). Given these rates, one could assume that knowing a victim of sexual assault would be common among college students and that knowing a victim of rape would be less common and would differ by ethnicity.

Knowledge goes beyond one's own experience, however, and is based, in part, on the willingness of others to share their experiences. Multiple studies suggest that most sexually assaulted women (66% to 87%) eventually disclose their assault to someone else, most often a friend or family member (e.g., Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007; Banyard, Plante,

Cohn, Moorhead, Ward, & Walsh, 2005; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Golding, Siegel, Sorenson, Burnam, & Stein, 1989; Ullman, 1996; Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Ullman, Starzynski, Long, Mason, & Long, 2008). Gaining social support is the primary reason that sexual assault victims disclose to others, thus, it is not surprising that they turn to informal sources they consider helpful (Dunn, Vail-Smith, & Knight, 1999; Golding et al., 1989).

### **Sexual Assault Perpetration**

As with college women's self-reports of sexual assault victimization, male college students' self-reports of perpetration are relatively common. Large and representative national samples indicate 20% to 25% of college men report that they have engaged in some form of sexually coercive behavior (Koss et al., 1987; Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait, & Alvi, 2001). Similar to women victims, the percentage of college men who report that they perpetrated rape varies by ethnicity: Black: 10%; Hispanic: 7%; White: 4%; Asian: 2%; and Native American: 0% (Koss et al., 1987).

Although some studies begin to address the issue (e.g., Schwartz & Pitts, 1995), our review of the peer-reviewed literature identified no research about men's disclosure of sexual assault perpetration to a friend or others that is comparable to the growing body of research on women's disclosure of sexual assault victimization. As with the disclosure of other stigmatized conditions and behaviors (e.g., Valle & Levy, 2009), there are costs to disclosing one's perpetration of sexual assault, including the risk of criminal prosecution and the risk of being negatively evaluated by others.

### **Disclosure of Victimization**

Research suggests that women are more likely than men to know a victim of sexual assault. A recent study of 1,241 undergraduates of unspecified ethnicity suggests that one in five

men and one in three women have received a disclosure of sexual assault victimization from a friend (Banyard, Moynihan, Walsh, Cohn, & Ward, 2010). Prior research found higher percentages – about one third of male and one half of female undergraduates (Dunn et al., 1999). Women are more likely than men to be told (e.g., Orchowski & Gidycz, 2012), perhaps because women are likely to be close with other women (Marsden, 1987), most (80%) of victims' first disclosures are to women (Neville & Pugh, 1997), and women are the predominant victims of sexual assault.

When it comes to documenting other demographic characteristics of the person to whom the disclosure was made, there is a substantial gap in the literature. Most studies of victim disclosure focus on whether or not victims disclose and what types of support they seek, and do not report demographic characteristics beyond the gender of those who receive a disclosure. Because victims are most likely to disclose to a friend, in order to examine who is likely to receive a disclosure, we must consider friendship networks.

Homophily, the tendency of people to befriend those similar to themselves, has been documented in over 100 studies (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). A national survey representative of U.S. college students found that White and Black students tend to have mainly homogenous groups of friends, specifically, friends of their same race whereas Asian and Hispanic students have the most diverse friendship groups (Fischer, 2008). A similar friendship pattern was observed in a longitudinal survey of students at a research university, which also found that Black students' interracial friendships actually decrease during college (Stearns, Buchmann, & Bonneau, 2009). The ethnic composition of friendship groups is important because, using data from the General Social Survey, Marsden (1987, 1988) found that people are substantially more likely to discuss "important matters" with those of the same (vs. another) race



or ethnicity. Therefore, if sexual assault victims disclose to their closest friends a majority of the time, friendship patterns would suggest that Black female victims would disclose to Black female peers and White female victims would disclose to White female peers. Those with homogeneous friendship groups are likely to have knowledge about sexual assault that corresponds closely to the victimization and perpetration risk associated with that particular ethnic group.

In addition to the relevance of friendship networks, some scholars assert that strong social forces may lead to differential sexual assault disclosure across ethnic groups. The expectation for Black women to be strong and independent, a fear of fueling White racism, the oversexualized image of Black women, the desire to keep Black men out of the legal system, and a lack of adequate sexual education have all been cited as to why disclosures are believed to be unlikely by Blacks, and, if they occur, to generally stay within the Black community (Tillman, Bryant-Davis, Smith, & Marks, 2010). Asian cultures emphasize the good of the whole over the good of the individual and, thus, Asian individuals typically turn to those outside the group only as a last resort (e.g., Zhang, Snowden, & Sue, 1998). Hispanic cultural expectations that are believed to affect disclosure include the adherence to traditional gender and marital roles, and religion (Ahrens, Rios-Mandel, Isas, & Lopez 2010), none of which encourage disclosure.

Another factor that can affect disclosure is whether the victim sees herself as a victim and labels what happened as sexual violence. Some research suggests an ethnic differential in labeling a rape as such with Asian and Hispanic women more likely than Black and White women to identify their assault as rape (Kalof, 2000). In addition, some types of assault appear to occur differentially. For example, Blacks are less likely than Whites to experience alcohol-involved or alcohol-facilitated sexual assaults (Abbey, Ross, McDuffie, & McAuslan, 1996;

Krebs, Barrick, Lindquist, Crosby, Boyd, & Bogan, 2011), and alcohol-involved sexual assaults are more likely to be disclosed to a friend (Fisher et al., 2003).

### **Current Study**

The present investigation was designed to estimate, in a diverse student population at one urban, private university, the proportion of undergraduates who know a sexual assault victim or perpetrator. Little research has been conducted about the prevalence of personal knowledge of a victim among college students and, to our knowledge, there has been no research on the prevalence of knowing a perpetrator. The study constitutes a needs assessment, of sorts, for sexual assault prevention and intervention efforts on campus.

Given individual risk and disclosure patterns, we anticipate knowledge of victimization to be higher than knowledge of perpetration. Given individual risk and friendship and social considerations related to disclosure, we expect knowledge to differ by demographic characteristics. For example, women will be more likely than men to know about victimization, and Black students will be less likely than other students to know about assaults involving alcohol. Given the lack of research on perpetrator disclosure, we are not able to predict with any confidence which population groups are most likely to know about sexual assault perpetration.

### **Method**

A stratified random sample of 2400 university undergraduates (600 freshman, 600 sophomores, 600 juniors, and 600 seniors) was recruited in Fall and Spring 2010 for an online survey about sexual assault. Students were recruited from one large, urban, university in the Northeast. The participation rate (i.e., ratio of completed surveys to the sample size) was 53.5%, yielding an N of 1285.

Characteristics of the participants were generally consistent with those of the

undergraduate population. The sample was 25% freshmen, 25% sophomores, 25% juniors, and 25% seniors; the corresponding percentages for the participants were 26.9%, 23.7%, 23.9%, and 25.2%. The sample was 51.1% women; 57.1% of the participants were women. Members of ethnic minority groups participated proportionate to their representation in the undergraduate population: Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans comprised 40.8% of the undergraduate body and 41.8% of the study participants. And, finally, the sample was similar to the undergraduate population based on academic division: arts and sciences (60.0% university; 60.8% participants), business (19.5% university; 21.1% participants), engineering (15.1% university; 14.2% participants), and nursing (5.4% university; 3.7% participants). In sum, the quality of the resulting sample, in terms of participation and representation, is high.

### **Measures**

**Dependent variables.** Questions about personal knowledge about sexual assault victimization and perpetration (8 yes-no questions each) were drawn from the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) developed by Koss and Oros (1982). The internal consistency (Cronbach alpha) of the items is .74 (women) and .89 (men); the test-retest reliability is 93% (Koss & Gidycz, 1985). The questions, used in nearly 30 years of research with college students, were prefaced with instructions to respond to the victimization knowledge questions on the basis of “any women you know, including your women or girlfriends, girl or women relatives, and, if you are female, yourself.” The perpetration knowledge questions were prefaced with instructions to respond on the basis of “any men you know, including your male friends, male relatives, and, if you are male, yourself.” Participants were assured that they would not be asked to specify who (i.e., themselves or others) in response to any of the questions. The questions addressed three methods – continual arguments and pressure, giving her alcohol or drugs, and threatened or used

some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.) – with outcomes ranging from unwanted sex play (defined as “fondling, kissing, or petting but not intercourse”), attempted intercourse (defined as “get on top of her, attempt to insert his penis”), intercourse, and sex acts (defined as “anal or oral intercourse of penetration by objects other than the penis”). See Table 1 for a list of the questions. The updated version of the SES (Koss et al., 2007) is substantially longer (the short form asks women 35 questions about victimization) and could not be used in a brief survey.

**Independent variables.** Four demographic variables were assessed in four questions using response options that corresponded to the categories typically used with students at the participating university: gender (male, female); ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Other); year at school (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior); and academic division (arts and sciences, business, engineering, nursing). All questions were self-report and based on self-identification.

The data collection instrument was administered following IRB approval and piloting.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Univariate and bivariate findings were tabled for knowing one or more sexual assault victim or perpetrator overall, by gender, ethnicity, year at university, and academic division and by gender-ethnic pairing (White women, Black women, Hispanic men, etc.). Chi-square tests were conducted. Follow-up tests were not performed to avoid over-interpreting within-group differences; differences were examined through multivariate analysis.

Standard diagnostic statistics (i.e., correlation matrices, tests for multicollinearity) were examined for each predictor and found to be generally acceptable. Multivariate logistic regression was used to assess the independent contribution of each demographic characteristic. A

variable to take into account when the questionnaire was completed (early fall or late spring) was included in each regression; it was neither sizeable nor statistically significant in any analysis.

After documenting variability in knowledge among the gender-ethnic pairings, we proceeded with multivariate analysis using these pairings (i.e., interactions) rather than a traditional social science approach of using main and interaction effects. The rationale for this decision was three-fold: 1) the approach closely mirrors – and, therefore, is believed to provide information more directly relevant to – current prevention and intervention practice; 2) diagnostic statistics documented unacceptable levels of association between the main effects of gender and ethnicity and their interactions; and 3) within the generalized linear model, which includes logistic regression, one may properly specify models that contain only the interaction effects among the predictors if that facilitates substantive interpretation (Cook & Weisberg, 1995). To reduce the chance of a Type I error, a Bonferroni correction for multiple statistical tests was applied, resulting in a  $p$ -level of .0033.

## **Results**

### **Knowing Sexual Assault Victims**

Nearly two-thirds (64.4%) of the students reported that they knew at least one woman who was a victim of one or more of the eight examined types of sexual assault. The mean number of types of sexual assault victimizations known was 1.73; among those who reported knowing a victim, the mean was 2.68. A total of 44.3% reported knowing a woman or women who had been the victim of two or more types of assault; 29.2% knew a victim or victims of three or more.

Personal knowledge of a sexual assault victim varied by type of assault. Over half of the sample (54.1%) reported knowing a woman who had given in to sex play (fondling, kissing, or

petting, but not intercourse) when she didn't want to because she was overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure. Nearly one third (32.0%) reported knowing a woman who had sexual intercourse when she didn't want to because she was overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure. Fewer knew a woman who had been given alcohol or other drugs by a man in order to facilitate the assault. About one in five reported knowing a woman who had experienced unwanted attempted (18.8%) or completed (22.6%) intercourse through the use of alcohol or other drugs. Fewer yet knew a woman who had been threatened with physical force or was physically forced to engage in unwanted sex play (14.5%), attempted intercourse (13.0%), intercourse (10.0%), or anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects (7.4%).

Table 2, organized by the tactic used by the man and the outcome, documents that women were substantially more likely than men to report that they knew a woman victim of sexual assault. Personal knowledge of a victim varied by ethnicity for five of the eight assault types. Asians generally were least likely to report knowing a victim of any of the types of sexual assault and Blacks were most likely to report knowing a victim when the assault, regardless of outcome, involved the threatened or actual use of physical force. There were no differences by year at university. Academic division was associated with personal knowledge in about half of the studied phenomena; in each case, nursing students were most likely and engineers generally were least likely to report that they knew a sexual assault victim.

### **Knowing Sexual Assault Perpetrators**

Fewer students reported knowing a perpetrator (than a victim) but still more than half (52.4%) reported that they knew a man or men who had perpetrated one or more of the eight examined types of sexual assault. The mean number of types of perpetration known was 1.23; among those who reported knowing a perpetrator, the mean number was 2.35. One third reported

knowing a man or men who had perpetrated two or more of the different assaults.

As with victimization, personally knowing a sexual assault perpetrator varied by type of assault. A total of 42.0% of the sample reported knowing a man who had used continual arguments and pressure to get a woman to give in to sex play when she did not want it. Nearly one third (31.6%) reported knowing a man who used the same technique with sexual intercourse being the outcome. Knowing a man who had given alcohol or other drugs to a woman in an assault was lower: 14.8% for attempted and 13.4% for completed sexual intercourse. And about one in fifteen (7.2%) reported that they knew a man who had threatened to use or who had used physical force against a woman resulting in sex play, attempted sexual intercourse (5.4%), sexual intercourse (4.5%) or anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis (4.4%).

Table 3 documents that gender differences were fewer in knowing a perpetrator (vs. victim) of sexual assault. Gender differences were observed only for the use of continual arguments and pressure, regardless of outcome. The gender discrepancy in knowing a perpetrator was similar (women were more likely to know) but smaller than in knowing a victim. As with victimization, ethnic differences were observed in five of the eight outcomes, however, it was not for the same five. Asians were least likely to know a perpetrator of sexual assault when it involved continual arguments and pressure or when the man gave the woman alcohol or other drugs. Whites were least likely to know a perpetrator when physical force was threatened or used. Again, there were no differences by year at university. Academic division differences in knowing a perpetrator of sexual assault were few (three of eight outcomes), and, again, in each case, knowledge was highest among nursing students and lowest among engineers.

### **Gender-Ethnicity Pairings**

To explore whether the effect of gender is consistent across ethnic groups, we next examined knowledge of a sexual assault victim and perpetrator in each gender-ethnicity pairing. As shown in Table 4, knowing a victim overall and of each type of assault differed statistically among the groups. There were fewer differences in knowing a perpetrator of sexual assault. In each, knowledge was lowest or nearly the lowest among Asian men. One exception was perpetration through the threatened or actual use of physical force, for which White men were least likely to report knowledge.

### **Multivariate Findings**

The adjusted odds ratios (AOR) and statistical significance levels are reported in the tabled findings of the multivariate regressions; only those significant at  $<.0033$  are reported in the text. We focus herein on patterns of findings rather than individual comparisons.

**Gender-ethnicity pairings.** As shown in Table 5, there were more statistically significant differences for knowing a victim than knowing a perpetrator. Knowledge of a victim or perpetrator of assaults in which the victim was given alcohol or other drugs did not differ between any of the ethnic-gender pairings and Asian men, the reference group.

White, Hispanic, and “other” men as well as Asian and “other” women did not differ statistically from Asian men in their personal knowledge of a victim or a perpetrator of one of the eight types of sexual assault. Black men and Hispanic women did not differ from Asian men in their personal knowledge of a perpetrator.

The statistically significant differences were large, with AORs ranging from 2.11 to 11.29. White, Black, and Hispanic women had a higher odds of knowing a victim of one of the eight types of sexual assault (AOR=3.87, 11.28, and 4.44, respectively) and, in particular, in knowing a woman who gave in to sex play following continual arguments and pressure



(AOR=3.49, 8.13, and 4.15, respectively). White women also had a higher odds of knowing a woman who had unwanted intercourse following continual arguments and pressure from a man (AOR=2.73). Black women and men were more likely than Asian men to know a woman who was sexually assaulted following the threat or use of physical force. Both had a higher odds of knowing a woman who was the victim of attempted intercourse following the threat or use of force (AOR=5.06 and 5.80, respectively). Black women had a higher odds of knowing a woman who was forced to have sex play (AOR=5.20) and Black men had a higher odds of knowing a woman who was forced to have intercourse (AOR=5.82).

**Year at university and academic division.** Sophomores, juniors, and seniors did not differ from freshman in their knowledge of a victim or perpetrator of sexual assault. And, as noted earlier, knowing did not differ between early fall and late spring. The academic division of the student was not statistically associated with personal knowledge with two exceptions. In both cases – knowing a victim who was penetrated by an object other than the penis following the use or threat of force (AOR=5.15) and knowing a perpetrator who used or threatened to use force with the result being attempted intercourse (AOR=7.33) – the adjusted odds was substantially higher and statistically significant for nursing students than those in engineering.

### **Discussion**

Many of the undergraduates we surveyed are aware that they know a rape victim. Nearly two thirds of the students reported knowing victims and over half reported knowing perpetrators of sexual assault. One in ten reported knowing a victim of forcible rape and 22.6% reported knowing a victim of alcohol-facilitated rape. The victim-knowledge numbers are substantially higher than those reported in prior research (e.g., Banyard, Moynihan, Walsh, Cohn, & Ward, 2010; Dunn et al., 1999), and the percentages specific to rape are higher than rape victimization

rates (e.g., McCauley, Ruggiero, Resnick, Conoscenti, & Kilpatrick, 2009) suggesting that participants were reporting on their knowledge of others' experiences as well as their own. (Note, in particular, that given that the topic under study was clearly men's victimization of women, male participants were unlikely to have referred to themselves when asked if they knew a victim and female participants were unlikely to have referred to themselves when asked if they knew a perpetrator.)

One in twenty students reported knowing a perpetrator of forcible rape and 13.5% reported knowing a perpetrator of alcohol-facilitated rape. The one in twenty figure corresponds closely to the rape perpetration rate found by Koss et al. (1987); there are no national or other large-scale estimates, to our knowledge, to which we can compare our findings regarding personal knowledge of a perpetrator of alcohol-facilitated rape. Differences by academic unit were few and primarily between engineering (low) and nursing (high) students. Whether it was in early fall or late spring, first-year undergraduates' knowledge was generally similar to that of students in other years, which suggests that students arrive at college with such knowledge.

The findings documented substantial gender and ethnic differences in knowing a sexual assault victim and fewer differences in knowing a sexual assault perpetrator. Women were substantially more likely than men to know a person who had been the victim or perpetrator of each of the examined forms of assault. There were no notable differences in men's knowledge: White, Hispanic, and "other" men did not differ statistically from Asian men in their personal knowledge of a victim or a perpetrator of one of the eight types of sexual assault. And, contrary to prior research about knowledge of sexual assault victimization, we did not find Black students (male or female) to be less likely to know victims and perpetrators of alcohol-involved assaults.

Black and White students tend to have friends of their same race (Fischer, 2008), thus,

one would expect them to know more victims and more perpetrators. Hispanic and Asian students, with values discouraging disclosure and a higher likelihood of having diverse friendship groups, may have contributed to the lower rates of knowing a victim or perpetrator. And the findings largely followed that pattern for women. Nine of ten Black women reported knowing a victim of sexual assault. Black and White women were substantially (eleven and three and a half times, respectively) more likely than Asian men to know at least one victim, and they were more than twice as likely to know a perpetrator. The observed differences in the gender-ethnicity pairings remained even when taking into account year at university and academic division.

### **Study Strengths and Limitations**

The present investigation contributes to the small literature on personal knowledge of sexual assault victims and perpetrators and has several limitations. A key methodological strength is the quality of the sample in terms of response rate (53.5%; prior online surveys with college student samples in which there is no intervention have obtained rates from 21% [Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004] to 47% [Rothman & Silverman, 2007]) and representativeness of the ethnically diverse students from all four years and from all academic disciplines (vs. convenience samples such as students in a specific course) of the university. A limiting trade-off to the relatively high response rate was the brevity of the questionnaire, which restricted the amount of content that could be addressed. We would encourage future research to include questions about male victims, same-sex assaults, and populations of particular interest to university administrators (e.g., athletes, fraternity and sorority members, international students). Our investigation would have been improved if we had been able to discern knowledge based on one's own experience vs. disclosure from another and how the subject knew about the assault

involving the individual (e.g., read about, heard about, received a direct disclosure). And, finally, research need not be limited to the college campus but if it is, larger and geographically diverse samples of students would be beneficial.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Colleges and universities are a logical intervention point for sexual assault prevention programming that could have widespread population implications. College enrollment is high; in 2009, 41% of all U.S. 18- to 24-year olds were enrolled in college (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). And all U.S. colleges and universities that receive federal funding, which is virtually all institutions of higher education, are required to inform students about crimes on campus and the procedures that follow the occurrence of an assault and to conduct sexual assault prevention programs (Clery Act, 20 U.S.C.A. § 1092).

As Banyard, Ekstein, and Moynihan (2010) point out, sexual assault prevention efforts are moving beyond approaching women as potential victims and men as potential perpetrators and, instead, increasingly focusing on friends as informal helpers. Given that a substantial percentage of students know sexual assault victims, some (e.g., Fisher et al., 2003) have suggested that colleges and universities offer trainings to increase students' skill in handling disclosure. If students are trained how to handle disclosure, they may be better able to provide support, help the victim recognize what happened as a violation of school policies, and encourage her to seek help from a campus resource. Some research (e.g., Banyard, Moynihan, Walsh, Cohn, & Ward, 2010) suggests that a majority of undergraduates who receive a disclosure believe they were a good source of support, but a substantial minority report being unsure what to do and emotionally distressed. Christiansen and colleagues (2012) found that many to whom a disclosure had been made found it difficult to support the victim and reported

that their relationship with the victim was affected; about one fourth suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome as a result. Thus, such training might help those who receive as well as make a disclosure. A more complete understanding of the knowledge and experiences of these potential helpers, as we attempted to generate in the present investigation, may be beneficial as well.

Considerations about perpetration are important, too. Although not specific to sexual assault, some research on dating violence suggests that the tendency for a bystander to intervene is a function of whether the perpetrator is a friend or a stranger (Rayburn et al., 2007). Loyalty to a friend may discourage a student from taking action. Over one half of the students in our study knew a perpetrator, at least some of whom may have been a part of their friendship network. Norms-based programs might find it useful to inform students that they are not alone – others know sexual assault perpetrators, too – and to encourage them to claim sexual assault as a problem of the community.

Knowledge is extremely high in some groups and lower in others, which may be relevant when tailoring programs for specific population groups (e.g., athletes, fraternities and sororities [Moynihan & Banyard, 2008]). Study findings suggest that presenters of workshops for, for example, members of African American sororities and Asian engineering fraternities would face students with substantially different prior knowledge about sexual assault victimization and perpetration. Personal knowledge is important in program delivery in another way. Male-led peer efforts are increasingly common (e.g., Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Foubert, Brasfield, Hill, & Shelley-Tremblay, 2011) and in-depth interviews with 27 volunteers suggest that knowing a victim is the single most common reason for becoming involved in such work (Casey & Smith, 2010).

**Conclusion**

Theories about change typically describe knowledge – the focus of the current investigation – as the first component, the element from which attitudes and behaviors derive. Knowing a victim and a perpetrator of sexual assault was statistically normative in this study of a diverse and representative group of undergraduates at one university. Such knowledge likely affects students' sense of safety at school and in the world in general. Personal knowledge of sexual assault victims and perpetrators may affect students' receptivity to university programming and, in turn, program effectiveness. In addition, colleges and universities are encouraged to consider how data such as these can inform the development of their prevention and intervention efforts. Programs that ignore experience and knowledge differences risk being considered out of touch or even irrelevant by the very population they are designed to serve.

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Table 1

*Survey Questions*


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The next set of questions is about your personal knowledge of sexual assault. In these questions “anyone” means any women you know, including your women or girlfriends, girl or women relatives, and, if you are female, yourself. You will not be asked to indicate who had any of these experiences.

Do you know anyone who ever:

- has given in to sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when she didn't want to because she was overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure?
- has had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when she didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make her?
- had a man attempt sexual intercourse (get on top of her, attempt to insert his penis) when she didn't want to by threatening or using some degree of force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.), but intercourse *did not* occur?
- had a man attempt sexual intercourse (get on top of her, attempt to insert his penis) when she didn't want to by giving her alcohol or drugs, but intercourse *did not* occur
- gave in to sexual intercourse when she didn't want to because she was overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure?
- had sexual intercourse when she didn't want to because a man gave her alcohol or drugs?
- had sexual intercourse when she didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.) to make her?
- had sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) when she didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.) to make her?

In these next questions “anyone” means any men you know, including your male friends, male relatives, and, if you are male, yourself. You will not be asked to indicate who in response to any of these questions.

Do you know anyone who ever:

- Used continual arguments and pressure to get a girl to give in to sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when she didn't want to?
- Threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.) to make a woman have sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when she didn't want to?
- Threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.) to attempt sexual intercourse with a woman (get on top of her, attempt to insert his penis) when she didn't want to but intercourse *did not* occur?
- Attempted sexual intercourse with a woman (get on top of her, attempt to insert his penis) when she didn't want to by giving her alcohol or drugs, but intercourse did not occur?
- Used continual arguments and pressure to get a woman to give in to sexual intercourse when she didn't want to?
- Has had sexual intercourse with a woman when she didn't want to by giving her alcohol or drugs?

- Had sexual intercourse with a woman when she didn't want to because he threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.) to make her?
  - Had sex acts with a woman (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) when she didn't want to because he threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.) to make her?
-

Table 2  
*Knows One or More Sexual Assault Victims, %*

	n	Any	Continual arguments and pressure		Gave alcohol or other drugs		Threatened or used physical force			
			SP	I	AI	I	SP	AI	I	OP
Overall	1285	64.4	54.1	32.0	18.8	22.6	14.5	13.0	10.0	7.4
Gender										
Men	552	54.5****	42.9****	24.5****	14.5****	19.9*	8.5****	8.9****	8.0*	4.5****
Women	733	71.9	62.5	37.7	22.1	24.6	19.0	16.1	11.6	9.6
Ethnicity										
White	711	67.7****	56.5****	33.6	20.7	24.2*	13.6**	13.2****	9.4****	6.9
Black	92	79.4	68.5	38.0	21.7	28.3	28.3	26.1	23.9	14.1
Hispanic	69	72.5	65.2	37.7	21.7	27.5	11.6	8.7	10.1	5.8
Asian	357	52.4	42.9	26.1	14.3	16.5	12.3	9.5	6.7	6.4
Other	51	66.7	56.9	31.4	13.7	25.5	17.7	15.7	15.7	9.8
Year at University										
Freshman	345	61.2	52.8	28.1	20.6	19.4	12.5	10.4	9.0	6.7
Sophomore	304	66.1	54.0	33.6	21.7	25.3	14.8	12.5	8.2	5.3
Junior	307	65.2	58.6	32.6	16.9	23.5	16.0	13.4	10.4	8.1
Senior	324	65.4	51.5	34.3	16.4	22.5	14.8	16.1	12.4	9.6
Academic Division										
Arts & Sciences	781	65.7	55.6	33.0	20.2*	24.3	13.6**	13.1	10.2**	7.2****
Engineering	183	57.4	47.0	25.7	12.6	16.4	13.7	9.8	6.6	3.8
Business	271	63.8	52.4	31.4	17.7	20.7	14.0	14.0	9.2	7.4
Nursing	47	74.5	66.0	42.6	27.7	27.7	34.0	19.2	23.4	23.4

*Note.* SP=Sex play, I=Intercourse, AI=Attempted intercourse, OP=Other penetration (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis). Some categories do not sum to the total N because of missing data. \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001



Table 3.  
*Knows One or More Sexual Assault Perpetrators, %*

	n	Any	Continual arguments and pressure		Gave alcohol or other drugs		Threatened or used physical force			
			SP	I	AI	I	SP	AI	I	OP
Overall	1285	52.4	42.0	31.6	14.8	13.4	7.2	5.4	4.5	4.4
Gender										
Men	552	44.8*	38.8*	25.5***	14.5	13.6	5.8	4.4	4.7	3.6
Women	733	55.3	44.5	36.2	15.0	13.2	8.2	6.1	4.4	5.1
Ethnicity										
White	711	56.0***	44.9***	33.5***	16.2*	14.5*	5.8	4.4	3.0***	3.1*
Black	92	59.8	47.8	45.7	19.6	16.3	12.0	7.6	13.0	8.7
Hispanic	69	60.9	49.3	34.8	18.8	21.7	5.8	4.4	8.7	10.1
Asian	357	40.9	33.3	23.0	9.5	9.0	8.4	6.4	4.2	4.5
Other	51	54.9	41.2	31.4	17.7	11.8	7.8	7.8	5.9	5.9
Year at University										
Freshman	345	51.6	38.8	28.4	13.7	10.4	5.8	3.8	3.2	4.4
Sophomore	304	49.7	42.1	33.9	14.5	12.2	7.9	4.9	4.9	3.0
Junior	307	52.1	42.7	29.3	15.0	15.0	7.5	6.5	5.2	5.2
Senior	324	56.8	45.4	35.5	16.4	16.4	7.7	6.5	4.9	5.3
Academic Division										
Arts & Sciences	781	54.4**	43.5*	33.8**	15.0	13.3	7.7	4.7***	4.9	4.4
Engineering	183	40.4	31.7	21.3	10.4	9.8	4.4	3.3	2.7	2.7
Business	271	53.9	44.7	31.4	16.6	15.1	6.6	6.3	4.4	5.2
Nursing	47	57.5	44.7	38.3	19.2	17.0	12.8	19.2	6.4	8.5

*Note.* SP=Sex play, I=Intercourse, AI=Attempted intercourse, OP=Other penetration (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis). Some categories do not sum to the total N because of missing data.

Table 4. Personally knows sexual assault victims and perpetrators, by gender and ethnicity pairing, %

	n	Continual arguments and pressure			Gave alcohol or other drugs		Threatened or used physical force			
		Any	SP	I	AI	I	SP	AI	I	OP
<u>Knows a Victim</u>										
White women	391	74.9***	65.2***	40.9***	24.6*	25.1*	18.7***	16.9***	12.0***	8.7*
White men	320	58.8	45.9	24.7	15.9	23.1	7.5	8.8	6.3	4.7
Black women	59	89.8	81.4	39.0	23.7	33.9	30.5	25.4	22.0	17.0
Black men	33	60.6	45.5	36.4	18.2	18.2	24.2	27.3	27.3	9.1
Hispanic women	45	77.8	68.9	37.8	22.2	31.1	11.1	11.1	11.1	8.9
Hispanic men	24	62.5	58.3	37.5	20.8	20.8	12.5	4.2	8.3	0.0
Asian women	201	59.2	49.8	31.3	16.9	18.9	16.4	12.4	7.5	8.0
Asian men	156	43.6	34.0	19.2	10.9	13.5	7.1	5.8	5.8	4.5
Other women	34	73.5	64.7	35.3	17.7	26.5	23.5	17.7	11.8	14.7
Other men	17	52.9	41.2	23.5	5.9	23.5	5.9	11.8	23.5	0.0
<u>Knows a Perpetrator</u>										
White women	391	58.6***	47.8*	39.6***	15.6	14.8	6.9	5.1	2.6**	3.6
White men	320	52.8	41.3	25.9	16.9	14.1	4.4	3.4	3.4	2.5
Black women	59	66.1	52.5	47.5	22.0	17.0	10.2	8.5	13.6	10.2
Black men	33	48.5	39.4	42.4	15.2	15.2	15.3	6.1	12.1	6.1
Hispanic women	56	57.8	48.9	33.3	17.8	20.0	4.4	4.4	11.1	8.9
Hispanic men	24	66.7	50.0	37.5	20.8	25.0	8.3	4.2	4.2	12.5
Asian women	201	43.3	33.8	25.4	9.5	7.0	9.5	7.0	3.0	4.5
Asian men	156	37.8	32.7	19.9	0.6	11.5	7.1	5.8	5.8	4.5
Other women	34	61.8	47.1	38.2	23.5	14.7	11.8	8.8	5.9	8.8
Other men	17	41.2	29.4	17.7	5.9	5.9	0.0	5.9	5.9	0.0

Note. SP=Sex play, I=Intercourse, AI=Attempted intercourse, OP=Other penetration (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than penis). Four respondents did not indicate their ethnicity and are not included. \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001

Table 5.  
*Knows One or More Sexual Assault Victim or Perpetrator, Adjusted Odd Ratios*

	Any	Continual arguments and pressure		Gave alcohol or other drugs		Threatened or used physical force			
		SP	I	AI	I	SP	AI	I	OP
<u>Knows a Victim</u>									
(referent: Asian men)									
White women	3.87***	3.49***	2.73***	2.22**	1.95*	2.57**	3.10**	1.76	1.51
White men	1.84**	1.58*	1.32	1.38	1.85*	0.96	1.49	0.98	0.93
Black women	11.28***	8.13***	2.51**	2.19*	3.04**	5.20***	5.06***	3.85**	3.44*
Black men	1.92	1.50	2.27*	1.50	1.33	3.85**	5.80***	5.82***	1.96
Hispanic women	4.44***	4.15***	2.41*	1.92	2.61*	1.47	1.94	1.74	1.69
Hispanic men	2.20	2.61*	2.56*	1.85	1.70	1.81	0.70	1.36	§
Asian women	1.83**	1.80**	1.80*	1.40	1.38	2.23*	2.16*	1.16	1.57
Other women	3.49**	3.42**	2.06	1.44	1.99	3.56*	3.21*	1.88	3.36
Other men	1.51	1.33	1.33	0.44	1.93	0.77	2.35	4.91*	§
<u>Knows a Perpetrator</u>									
(referent: Asian men)									
White women	2.11***	1.78**	2.26***	1.63	1.28	0.69	0.62	0.32*	0.63
White men	1.72**	1.38	1.25	1.85*	1.23	0.49	0.53	0.50	0.48
Black women	2.82***	2.07*	3.06***	2.44*	1.46	1.11	1.22	2.05	1.92
Black men	1.40	1.22	2.57*	1.55	1.33	1.93	0.94	1.98	1.22
Hispanic women	2.02*	1.82	1.64	1.90	1.88	0.44	0.64	1.59	1.73
Hispanic men	2.95*	1.96	2.17	2.36	2.64	1.02	0.70	0.66	2.43
Asian women	1.15	0.98	1.18	0.92	0.55	1.07	0.99	0.41	0.86
Other women	2.45*	1.68	2.04	2.72*	1.25	1.24	1.27	0.75	1.95
Other men	1.15	0.89	0.80	0.62	0.54	§	1.14	0.93	§

*Note.* SP=Sex play, I=Intercourse, AI=Attempted intercourse, OP=Other penetration (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis). § indicates variable was dropped from the regression because it predicted failure perfectly. Odds were adjusted for each of the variables listed in the table as well as for year at university, which was not statistically significant in any of the regressions, and academic division, which reached the Bonferroni-corrected level of statistical significance in two regressions (see text). \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.0033, the Bonferroni-corrected level of statistical significance.