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College Students' Perceptions of the Rates of Various Types of Sexual Violence and the
Barriers to Reporting

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Abstract

This study compared the perceived campus, peer, and personal rates of four types of sexual violence (sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense) with the documented rates of these same incidents, based on official campus statistics and U.S. census data on forcible rape. Additionally, the barriers to reporting sexual violence among college students were examined. I hypothesized that the results of this study would reveal a pattern of underreporting on campus for all four types of sexual violence. A total of 807 undergraduate respondents (440 females, 204 males, and 5 individuals that identified as transgender or “other”) completed ($n = 643$) or partially completed ($n = 164$) a confidential online survey. The results of the study indicated that each form of sexual violence was significantly underreported on campus when compared to the perceived rates of the participants. Furthermore, female students reported a higher number of salient barriers to reporting sexual violence and also rated each of the 15 barriers examined in this study higher than men. Key implications of these findings and recommendations for future research are discussed.

College Students' Perceptions of the Rates of Various Types of Sexual Violence and the Barriers to Reporting

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are significant problems on college campuses. During a single academic year, an estimated 1 in 36 women will experience a completed or attempted rape (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). Moreover, previous research suggests that approximately one third of female students will become victims of sexual assault by their senior year of college (Finley & Corty, 1993). Unfortunately, a great number of these assaults go unreported on college campuses. There are various barriers to reporting sexual assault. Among adult women, the greatest barriers to reporting sexual assault include fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, financial dependence on the perpetrator or the perpetrator not allowing the victim to obtain help, not wanting family members or friends to be prosecuted, lack of resources to obtain help, such as transportation, childcare, money, and insurance, and cultural or language barriers to obtaining help (Sable, Danis, Mauzy, & Gallagher, 2006). Among adult men, the top barriers to reporting sexual assault are shame, guilt, and embarrassment, concerns about confidentiality, and the fear of not being believed (Sable et al., 2006).

Although previous research with adults has suggested that sexual violence is often underreported and that several barriers, such as those noted above, may account for this pattern of underreporting, further investigation is needed specifically on college campuses to clarify the extent to which sexual violence is or is not reported, as well as to identify barriers to reporting among this particular population.

Descriptions of Different Types of Sexual Violence

There are several types of sexual violence, including sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, nonforcible sex offenses, and forcible sex offenses. *Sexual harassment* is defined as unwanted conduct of a sexual nature or conduct based on sex, which is offensive to the recipient; therefore, sexual harassment can be deliberate or unintended (Mayekiso & Bhana, 1997). An estimated two thirds of all college students experience some form of sexual harassment during their time on campus (Lundy-Wagner & Winkle-Wagner, 2013).

Sexual misconduct is defined as actual or attempted sexual activity that is forced upon another without the clear consent of that person. It can range from unwanted touching or physical contact of a personal nature to unwanted, coerced, or forced penetration (Campus Policy Prohibiting Harassment & Sexual Misconduct, 2008); as indicated by this definition, sexual misconduct encompasses sexual assault and rape.

The broad term of “sexual assault” is defined as unwanted sexual contact that stops short of rape or attempted rape. This definition includes sexual touching and fondling (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, n.d.). Rape is defined as forced sexual intercourse, including vaginal, anal, or oral penetration, whether penetration by a body part or an object (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, n.d.). There are various forms of rape including stranger rape, partner rape, and acquaintance rape. On college campuses, most rapes and assaults are committed by someone known to the victim, therefore they are categorized as acquaintance rape (McMahon, 2010). Acquaintance rape is defined as rape involving two people who know each other but have had no sexual contact prior to the assault (Ford & Foley, 1998). Approximately one-fourth of all women

experience a completed or attempted rape during their four or five year college careers (McMahon, 2010); by comparison one to three percent of males experience physically forced sexual intercourse where the perpetrator is a female in a given year (Hines et al., 2012). Rape can be categorized as nonforcible or forcible as well.

Nonforcible sex offenses are defined as unlawful, non-forcible sexual intercourse (Security Services Annual Crime Report, 1998). Nonforcible sex offenses include incest and statutory rape. In contrast, *forcible sex offenses* are defined as any sexual act directed against another person, forcible and/or against that person's will, or not forcibly or against the persons will where the victim is incapable of giving consent (Security Services Annual Crime Report, 1998). Forcible sex offenses include forcible rape, sodomy, fondling, and sexual assault with an object.

Underreporting Phenomenon

According to the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), fewer than 5% of completed or attempted rapes against college-aged women are reported to law enforcement (Sable, Danis, Mauzy, & Gallagher, 2006). Previous research has only examined the reported rates of completed and attempted rape among the college population. Therefore, it is unknown whether or not incidents of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense are over reported, accurately reported, or underreported. Previous research suggests that students may chose not to characterize their experiences as sexual violence due to embarrassment, an unclear understanding of the legal definitions of various forms of sexual violence, not wanting to define someone they know who victimized them as a perpetrator, or because they blame themselves for their own victimization (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). Each of these

complex personal and structural barriers may prevent a student from reporting any experience of sexual violence. Furthermore, a college campus creates a unique environment that complicates issues of sexual violence. Victims of sexual violence may continue to be fearful after an incident as the perpetrator may live in the same residence hall or be enrolled in the same courses (McMahon, 2008). The complexity of these barriers to reporting begins to explain why sexual violence appears to be an underreported crime. Further research on this population is necessary for understanding the reporting trends among college students in reference to multiple forms of sexual violence. A greater understanding of the reporting trends and the barriers to reporting would allow colleges to create tailored programs for combating the specific barriers.

Barriers to Reporting Sexual Violence

Among adult women, the greatest barriers to reporting sexual assault include fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, financial dependence on the perpetrator or the perpetrator not allowing the victim to obtain help, not wanting family members or friends to be prosecuted, lack of resources to obtain help, such as transportation, childcare, money, and insurance, and cultural or language barriers to obtaining help (Sable et al., 2006). Among adult men, the top barriers to reporting sexual assault are shame, guilt, and embarrassment, concerns about confidentiality, and the fear of not being believed (Sable et al., 2006). Continuing to explore the perceived importance of barriers for men and women could broaden the public's understanding of factors that contribute to underreporting (Sable et al., 2006). Since the effects of an unreported case of sexual violence can be so detrimental to the victim, determining what barriers are present on college campuses can potentially alleviate these effects. This knowledge can help bring

sexual assault into the public eye, which is the first step towards prevention (Bihl, n.d.). Moreover, universities could be able to create tailored preventative programming based on the perceived barriers to reporting sexual violence (Bihl, n.d.). Future investigation is needed to clarify the extent to which sexual violence is or is not reported, as well as to identify barriers to reporting among this particular college population.

Limitations of Previous Research

Previous research has determined that incidents of rape are underreported among all women and that college women may be more at risk for experiencing rape or attempted rape. However, previous research has not explored the reporting trends for other forms of sexual violence amongst the female or male population. Therefore, due to the heightened risk of college females and the trend of underreporting rape and attempted rape, it is necessary to explore the reporting trends for a broader range of sexually violent crimes. Among the male population, the rates of assault and rape for boys under the age of eighteen and adult males has been minimally explored. Previous research suggests that one in six boys are sexually assaulted before the age of 18 (Finkelhore, 1994) and that approximately 5% to 10% of rape victims are adult males (Stermac, Sheridan, Davidson, & Dunn, 1996). Nevertheless, there is a general lack of attention to male sexual assault victims in our society (Sable et al., 2006), especially within the college population. Due to the minimal research on sexual violence perpetrated against men, it is important to examine the experiences of college-aged men in relation to a broader range of sexually violent crimes.

Furthermore, Sable et al., (2006) only explored the barriers to reporting for adult men and women. The barriers reported by adult men and women may differ from those

reported by college-aged men and women, therefore it is important to explore the barriers to reporting sexual violence within that population.

The Present Study

In an attempt to address this need for further research, the goals of this study were two-fold: First, the perceived rates of sexual violence, including sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense were compared to the documented rates, which were based on official campus statistics and U.S. census data on forcible rape. This allowed me to identify any discrepancies and the degree to which each type of sexual violence may be underreported. Second, I studied the specific barriers to reporting sexual violence among college students, along with gender differences in barriers to reporting. I hypothesized that the perceived overall campus rates, peer rates, and personal rates of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense would be significantly higher than the official reported statistics and U.S. census data. No specific hypotheses pertaining to the barriers to reporting or to any possible gender in the barriers to reporting each type of sexual violence were made.

Method

Participants

Participants included 807 undergraduate students from a small, private, liberal arts University in the Pacific Northwest with an undergraduate population of approximately 2,600 students. Every student who was enrolled during the 2012-2013 academic school year, a total of 2,587 students, received an email invitation to participate in the study by completing a confidential online survey. Of those 2,587 students, 807 completed ($n =$

643) or partially completed ($n = 164$) the survey, yielding a response rate of 31.19%. The mean age of the participants was 20.44 ($SD = 1.64$). In terms of class ranks, respondents included 9.47% freshmen, 19.72% sophomores, 27.02% juniors, and 43.79% seniors. The majority of the participants were female (68%). The other respondents identified as male (31.4%), transgender (0.46%), and other (0.30%).

Measures

Participants completed a set of questionnaires regarding students' perceived rates of the four following types of sexual violence: sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense. In addition to reporting the perceived overall campus rates for each of these four types of violence, respondents were also asked to report whether they knew anyone on campus who had experienced each type of sexual violence (*peer rates*), as well as whether they themselves had experienced sexual violence (*personal rates*). For the overall rates of sexual violence (i.e., considering all four types of sexual violence combined), participants were also asked to estimate the percentage of male and female victims and perpetrators. Finally, respondents were asked to indicate the salience of several different barriers to reporting incidents of sexual violence.

Perceived Rates

Students' *perceived campus rates* referred to each participant's perceived frequency with which sexual violence took place on campus over the last year. The four forms of sexual violence assessed in this study were sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense. Participants were asked to estimate the number of students who had been affected by each of the four forms of

sexual violence by selecting a number from zero to 3,000 using an interactive sliding bar. A sample perceived rates questions was: “How many offenses of *sexual harassment* among students do you think take place on the Puget Sound campus in a given year?” Immediately following this question, respondents were provided with a detailed definition of sexual harassment (corresponding to the definition presented in the Introduction of this paper), to ensure that participants clearly understood what was meant by this term. This same question/prompt (i.e., “How many offenses of ... among students do you think take place on the Puget Sound campus in a give year?”) followed by a definition of the specific type of sexual violence being queried was used for the other three types of sexual violence, namely sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense. Additionally, participants were asked to estimate the percentage of male and female victims and perpetrators of sexual violence using a sliding bar that ranged from 0-100%. Sample wording for these questions was as follows: “Based on all of the offenses described above combined (forcible sex offense, nonforcible sex offense, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment), please estimate what percentage involves a male victim.” This same questions was then asked in regards to a female victim, male perpetrator, and female perpetrator.

Peer Rates

The peer rates portion of the survey asked participants about the experiences of their peers, in relation to the four forms of sexual violence. Specifically, for each of the four types of sexual violence, participants were asked: “Do you know any student who has experienced an incident of ... during his or her time as a Puget Sound student?” Participants were asked about each type of sexual violence separately, for a total of four

questions, which could be answered with a response of “Yes,” “No,” or “Uncertain.”

Personal Rates

The personal rates portion referred to the personal experiences of each student. Participants were first asked, “Have you experienced an incident of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, or forcible sex offense in the past year?” to which they could respond by indicating “Yes,” “No,” or “Uncertain.” Next, participants were asked to specify which form(s) of sexual violence they had experienced (sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and/or forcible sex offense).

Barriers to Reporting Sexual Violence

The Importance of Barriers to Reporting Rape and Sexual Assault Questionnaire (Sable et al., 2006) asked participants to rate the importance of specific barriers to reporting cases of rape and sexual assault. This questionnaire includes a total of 15 different barriers, each of which are rated on a 5-point Likert Scale, where 1 indicates “Not Important” and 5 indicates “Extremely Important.” The specific prompt given to respondents on this measure is as follows: “Please rate the importance of the following barriers to reporting rape and sexual assault, from Not at all Important to Extremely Important. Please select the answer that reflects your best estimate of the importance for each barrier described in the question.” Sample items include: “Shame, guilt, and embarrassment,” “Fear of being judged,” “Fear of being judged as gay,” “Fear of retaliation,” and “Confidentiality Concerns.” The ratings for each barrier were scored individually, with higher scores for a given item indicating greater salience or importance of that particular barrier to reporting rape and sexual assault. Additionally, a total score for this questionnaire was obtained for each participant by summing the scores for all

individual items, with higher scores indicating an overall higher number of salient barriers to reporting experiences of rape and sexual assault.

Procedure

The internet-based questionnaire was administered confidentially to the entire student population at the University of Puget Sound. The Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Dean of Students Office, and the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) reviewed the survey and granted approval to administer the survey to the entire student body. The survey was created and administered in collaboration with the OIR, using Qualtrics Research Suite. Prospective participants were invited to participate in the survey via an email. The email explained the nature and purpose of the study along with the content of the survey, informed students that they would be entered in a drawing for an iPad mini as compensation for their participation, and provided students with a link to the survey. The survey link sent participants to the survey, which first asked participants to consent to participating in the research. The survey took no more than 20 minutes to complete. Confidentiality was maintained in collaboration with the university's OIR. More specifically, the Qualtrics survey administration program tracked the ID numbers of students who completed the survey in order to verify who had completed the study and to randomly select the winner of the iPad mini upon completion of the study, which was done by a member of the OIR staff. Following the survey's completion, respondents' data in the aggregate, without any identifying information of participants was then released by the OIR to the Principal Investigator and the Faculty Supervisor for this study. Once participants completed the survey, they were provided with a debriefing sheet, which thanked students for participating in the study and explained the importance

of the research. A list of several online and local resources to assist and support survivors of sexual violence were also provided, for any participants who might feel that they could benefit from such services following the completion of the survey.

Results

A total of four sets of analysis were conducted in this study, which corresponded to the major goals of this investigation. For the first set of analyses, a series of one-sample t tests were used to compare the perceived overall campus rates of sexual violence (based on the present survey) with the documented reported campus rates based on official campus statistics. The second set of analyses focused on the peer and personal rates of sexual violence, using one-sample chi-square analysis to compare the reported personal and peer rates collected in this sample with both official campus statistics as well as general population census data on forcible rape. The third set of analyses was designed to test for gender differences in perceived overall campus rates, peer rates, and personal rates for all four types of sexual violence using independent-groups t tests. Finally, another set of independent-groups t tests was used to investigate gender differences in the perceived importance of barriers to reporting sexual violence (as assessed by the Importance of Barriers to Reporting Rape and Sexual Assault Questionnaire (Sable, et al., 2006)). An alpha level of .05 (2-tailed) was used for all the statistical tests in this study.

Perceived Overall Campus Rates and Official Documented Rates Comparison

The descriptive statistics for the perceived rates are summarized in Table 1, along with the results of the one-sample t test comparing the perceived rates of the four forms of sexual violence to official campus statistics. As indicated in Table 1, all four of these

tests were significant, suggesting that the perceived overall campus rates (over the past year) of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense, were all higher than the official documented rates based on official statistics. This, in turn, provides evidence of significant underreporting on campus for all four types of violence.

Comparison of Peer and Personal Rates with Official Documented Rates

Multiple one-sample chi-square tests were run to compare the peer and personal rates to the documented campus statistics for each type of sexual violence. The results of these tests are summarized in Table 2. As indicated in this table, all four of these tests comparing the peer rates to the documented campus statistics were significant, indicating that peer rates (over the past year) of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense, were all higher than the official documented rates based on official statistics. For the personal rates, all of the comparisons between the overall rates, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense and the documented campus rates were statistically significant, suggesting that personal rates for the four types of sexual violence were all higher than the official documented rates based on official statistics.

One additional one-sample chi-square test was conducted to compare personal rates (based on the survey data in the present study) to official U.S. census data specifically for forcible sex offense. The relationship between the personal rates and U.S. census data was significant, $\chi^2(1, 661) = 1424.01, p < .001$, which indicates that the personal rates for forcible sex offense were higher than the official documented rates based on U.S. census data (for the general population).

Gender Differences in Peer and Personal Rates

The results of multiple chi-square tests comparing gender to peer rates and personal rates can be found in Table 3. The first test was performed to examine the relationship between gender, specifically males and females, and the peer rates of all four types of sexual violence. The comparison between peer rates and forcible sex offense was statistically significant, suggesting that females know more fellow students who have experienced forcible sex offense than males. For the other three categories of sexual violence, namely sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and nonforcible sex offense, there was no difference in the peer rates of men and women, indicating that females and males report knowing a similar number of peers who have experienced these three types of sexual violence.

The subsequent chi-square tests examined gender differences in the overall personal rates (for all four types of sexual violence combined) as well as each of the four specific categories of sexual violence. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender, specifically males and females, and whether or not they had personally experienced sexual violence. The relationship between personal rates and gender was significant, demonstrating that females have experienced more incidents of sexual violence than men on the Puget Sound campus within the last year. More specifically, four chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine the relationship between gender, specifically males and females, and their personal experience with sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense. The relationship between these variables can be seen in Table 3. The relationship between personal rates and gender was significant for sexual harassment,

sexual misconduct, and forcible sex offense, indicating that females have experienced more incidents of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and forcible sex offense than men on the Puget Sound campus within the last year. The relationship between personal experience of nonforcible sex offense and gender was not significant, indicating that there was no difference between the personal experiences of men and women in relation to non-forcible sex offense.

Gender Differences in Barriers to Reporting Sexual Violence

The descriptive statistics for the barriers to reporting sexual violence are summarized in Table 4. Females rated each barrier to reporting sexual violence higher than males. The most significant barriers for women included shame, guilt, and embarrassment, fear of being judged, fear of not being believed, confidentiality concerns, and fear of retaliation. The least significant barriers for women included cultural or language barriers to obtaining help, financial dependence on perpetrator, and lack of available services. The most significant barriers for men include shame, guilt, and embarrassment, fear of being judged, confidentiality concerns, fear of retaliation, and fear of not being believed. The least significant barriers for men include cultural or language barriers to obtaining help, lack of resources to obtain help, and financial dependence on perpetrator.

Discussion

I hypothesized that all four forms of sexual violence would be underreported on the Puget Sound campus. The findings of my study supported this prediction. The comparisons between the perceived rates for sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense and the reported campus statistics were

all statistically significant. Taken together, these findings provide evidence that each form of sexual violence is underreported on campus. For example, twenty-eight students indicated that they had experienced a nonforcible sex offense or a forcible sex offense within the last year, yet only two cases were reported. This suggests that roughly 7% of rape that took place on campus was reported. These findings are consistent with previous research claiming that sexual violence is underreported. According to the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), fewer than 5% of completed or attempted rapes against college-aged women are reported to law enforcement (Sable et al., 2006). This study expanded the knowledge on the reporting rates of multiple types of sexual violence beyond rape, suggesting that other types of sexual violence are also underreported as well.

Gender differences in the experiences of sexual violence and reporting rates were also examined in this study. Among these findings, female students reported experiencing significantly more incidents of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and forcible sex offense within the last year than men. The results of the present study are consistent with previous research suggesting that women are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted within their first two months of the academic year than men (Hines, Armstrong, Reed, & Cameron, 2012). The findings from the present investigation are also consistent with extant research, which indicates that college is a vulnerable time for students, particularly for women. Women are considered to be at a particularly high risk for unwanted sexual experiences (Kimble, Neacsu, Flack, & Horner, 2008). This concept of vulnerability allows for the abuse of power associated with sexual violence to take place. My data supports this vulnerability hypothesis because an overwhelming number of female

students reported experiencing sexual violence within the last academic year. Although not all of the students who experienced sexual violence were females, my research supports the concept of female students' particular susceptibility and vulnerability to sexual violence during college.

According to my results, males do experience sexual violence, but much less than female students. Therefore, male students may be relatively less vulnerable than other groups during their college years. Typically, the power dimension of sexual harassment is "gender-related power," which refers to the idea that men have power over women, especially when it comes to sex and sexuality (Mayekiso & Bhana, 1997). This is an aspect of gender that puts men in a position of power over women, which is dually reinforced by the ideas that men are expected to initiate sexual activity and that men are generally much more receptive to offers of sexual intercourse than women (Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003). This explanation of power and the relation to sexual violence may begin to explain why males are at a lesser risk than female college students. The current study supports this hypothesis due to the fact that females experienced significantly more incidents of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and forcible sex offense than men did within the last year.

In terms of the barriers to reporting, females rated the following five barriers as highly important: shame, guilt, and embarrassment, fear of being judged, fear of not being believed, confidentiality concerns, and fear of retaliation. By comparison, males rate the following five barriers as highly important: shame, guilt, and embarrassment, fear of being judged, confidentiality concerns, fear of retaliation, and fear of not being believed. Females reported all of the 15 barriers to reporting as more important than men,

yet college aged men and women reported the same five barriers as the most important. Although the orders and levels of importance differed, these results may suggest that there is a specific set of important barriers that are pertinent to college-aged individuals, regardless of gender.

Despite men and women having identified the same set of barriers, it is clear that women perceived the importance of each of the barriers more than men. The gender of the victim may be one of many factors that affect the perceived importance of each barrier to reporting. Regardless of gender, many victims often find it hard to admit, even to themselves, that they have been raped (Mezey & King, 1992). Additionally, feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, and guilt can cause a victim to be hesitant about reporting the case. Furthermore, if sexual violence is reported, the legal procedure can be draining since the victim must prove that they were raped against their will (Ford, Liwag-McLamb, & Foley, 1998). These personal obstacles, societal structures, and potential gender influences combined with other barriers to reporting begin to explain why sexual violence is such an underreported crime.

The findings on barriers to reporting sexual violence in this particular sample differ from previous research based on samples of adult women (e.g. Sable et al., 2006). Sable and colleagues (2006), for example, found the following barriers to reporting sexual violence to be most important among adult women: fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, financial dependence on the perpetrator/perpetrator not allowing the victim to obtain help, not wanting family members or friends to be prosecuted, lack of resources to obtain help, such as transportation, childcare, money, and insurance, and cultural or language barriers to obtaining help and adult men: shame, guilt, and embarrassment,

concerns about confidentiality, and the fear of not being believed. In contrast, the current study found the barriers to reporting sexual violence to be most important among college-aged women: shame, guilt, and embarrassment, fear of being judged, fear of not being believed, confidentiality concerns, and fear of retaliation by perpetrator and college-aged men: shame, guilt, and embarrassment, fear of being judged, confidentiality concerns, fear of retaliation, and fear of not being believed. For adult women and college-aged women the only barrier that pertains to each group is fear of retaliation by perpetrator. The lack of overlap between the perceived barriers to reporting incidents of sexual violence for adult women and college-aged women suggests that the barriers to reporting experiences of sexual violence may differ for women of different ages. For adult men, all three of the barriers selected pertain to the college-aged male group. The overlap between the perceived barriers to reporting incidents of sexual violence for adult men and college-aged men suggests that the barriers to reporting experiences of sexual violence do not differ for men of different ages. This similarity in perceived barriers between college-aged men and adult men could be explained by the fact that young boys are more at risk for experiencing sexual violence when they are young, compared to women who are at a high risk during their college years. Furthermore, since men and women reported the same barriers as being the most important or salient (albeit with minor differences in the order of some of these barriers), it is possible that the barriers to reporting identified in this study encompass the barriers that are present on a college campus. In addition, female participants rated each barrier as more important than male participants did. This could relate to the fact that more women in the sample have experienced sexual violence, during their time as students.

Other analyses suggest further gender differences in relation to sexual violence. First of all, female students in this sample know more students who have experienced forcible sex offense on campus within the last year than men. Second of all, females in this sample have experienced more incidents of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and forcible sex offense than men on the Puget Sound campus within the year. There was no difference between the reported rate of nonforcible sex offense experienced by the men and women in this sample. These findings may also explain why women rated each barrier as more important than men, since they have not only experienced more sexual violence but know more people who have experienced sexual violence.

Strengths and Contributions of the Present Study

First of all, the present study had a relatively high sample size and a relatively high response rate to the survey (particularly for this type of investigation). Moreover, the present study explored a broader range of different types of sexual violence than previous research on the subject of the rates of sexual violence and the reporting trends among college students. Previous research specifically explored the rates of completed and attempted rapes among college-aged females and determined that rape was a severely underreported crime on college campuses. The present study adds to the existing body of knowledge on reporting trends for sexual violence by indicating that sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense were *all* found to be underreported crimes among the college students sampled in the study. Another strength of the present study was the inclusion of college-aged males as well as females, given that the majority of previous research has focused on the experiences of women alone.

Implications of the Present Study

Most importantly, the current investigation brings sexual violence into the public eye. It supports but also expands the findings of previous research, since all four types of sexual violence were found to be underreported among a college population. It highlights the importance of awareness about sexual violence, since this can be a heightened period of risk for students. This study also provides valuable information relating to the factors that contribute to underreporting, specifically among college students, by exploring the perceived importance of the barriers to reporting for men and women. Since the barriers for college-aged women and adult women differ, it is possible that the barriers pertain solely to the college population and campus life. Therefore, universities would do well to tailor education, preventative, and supportive programming based on the knowledge of the underreported crimes and the barriers to reporting each for of sexual violence for men and women.

Limitations of the Present Study

Despite the strengths of this study, there are a few limitations that are worth noting. In particular, the study has potentially limited generalizability in a few key respects. Given the relative under-representation of males in this study, it is unclear whether the results generalize as well to males as to females. In this regard, future research with a more equal representation of males and females would be beneficial. There were also a small number of gender-minority participants among the respondents in this study, which unfortunately prevented statistical analysis of gender similarities and differences for those who identified as transgender or “other.” Future research should expand upon gender and investigate whether or not sexual violence is underreported

within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) community and also determine the specific barriers to reporting for gender minority groups. Additionally, the study was conducted at a relatively small, liberal arts college. It would be valuable to see whether these results generalize to other educational settings, including larger state and private universities, as well as community colleges. There is also minimal racial diversity on the Puget Sound campus, with 74% of students identifying as Caucasian (*About Puget Sound*). In the current study, demographic information on race was not collected. Therefore, future research could expand upon race to determine the personal rates of sexual violence experienced by different races and the barriers to reporting. A more diverse sample would elucidate the frequency of sexual violence, the degree to which sexual violence is underreported, and the barriers to reporting sexual violence.

Furthermore, the current study only examined the reporting trends of the types of sexual violence and the barriers to reporting those incidents. The specific factors that contribute to sexual violence and reasons for the period of heightened risk among college students was not explored. One factor pertaining to sexual violence stated by previous research is that college-aged women are more likely to experience acquaintance rape or assault, which means that the perpetrator is a known individual to the victim. Previous research states that 9 in 10 college women who were victims of rape have known their offender (Sable et al., 2006). Therefore, future research could examine the extent to which various types of sexual violence were perpetrated by acquaintances. Another factor that may contribute to sexual violence on college campuses is the excessive use of alcohol (McMahon, 2010). Future research could explore the number cases of sexual violence that involved alcohol and whether the victim, perpetrator, or both parties were

intoxicated. Additionally, the use of alcohol may be a significant barrier to reporting; therefore the effects of alcohol on reporting and the barriers associated with cases of sexual violence involving alcohol could be explored in the future. More details relating to each case of sexual violence could highlight the reasons for a trend of underreporting on college campuses and the reasons for the importance of each barrier to reporting.

Conclusions

According to this study, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offenses, and forcible sex offenses are all underreported crimes on college campuses. When the personal rates were compared by gender, females were found to have experienced more incidents of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and forcible sex offense than males. Additionally, females knew more students who have been affected by sexual violence than males. The experience of these woman and their friends may have influenced women's rankings of the barriers to reporting sexual violence. The most important barriers to reporting for both men and women included: shame, guilt, and embarrassment, fear of being judged, fear of not being believed, confidentiality concerns, and fear of retaliation. Nevertheless, women rated each barrier higher than men. Furthermore, when the barriers for this population were compared to previous research (i.e., Sable et al., 2006), the barriers were quite different for the women in this sample (compared to samples of adult women), suggesting that these barriers are specific to the college population. Future research should determine the ability to generalize the findings of the current study through samples with a more equal representation of males and females, as well as a larger representation of gender-minority participants. A broader, more diverse sample could clarify the frequency of sexual violence, the degree to which

it is underreported, and the barriers to reporting. Future research should also explore the specific factors that contribute to sexual violence and the reasons for a period of heightened risk among college-aged females. Further details pertaining to each case of sexual violence could highlight other reasons for a trend of underreporting on college campuses and allow universities to customize educational, preventative, and supportive programming relating to sexual violence.

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Table 1. One-sample t Test Results for the Perceived Overall Campus Rates of Sexual Violence with Documented Campus Statistics

Type of Violence	Documented Rates	Perceived Campus Rates		<i>t</i>	95% CI
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Overall	9	1314.72	1342.09	25.56 ^{***}	1205.40 to 1406.03
Sexual Harassment	5	691.22	689.32	26.07 ^{***}	634.55 to 737.89
Sexual Misconduct	2	359.22	441.37	21.15 ^{***}	324.06 to 390.38
Nonforcible Sex Offense	0	137.49	346.81	10.18 ^{***}	110.96 to 164.02
Forcible Sex Offense	2	144.17	278.56	13.24 ^{***}	121.09 to 163.25

Note. The perceived campus rates for sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense were compared to the reported campus statistics for the four types of violence from the last year. CI refers to the 95% Confidence Interval.

^{***} $p < .001$

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Peer and Personal Rates and the Results of One-sample Chi-square Tests

Variable	Documented Rates		Peer Rates			Personal Rates		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	χ^2	<i>n</i>	%	χ^2
Overall	9	.35	1148	44.38	9.525*	660	25.51	846.4***
Sexual Harassment	5	.19	459	17.74	4.594*	154	5.95	5912.93***
Sexual Misconduct	2	.08	374	14.46	180.54***	59	2.28	23391.16***
Nonforcible Sex Offense	0	0	91	3.52	10321.29***	11	.04	159134.95***
Forcible Sex Offense	2	.08	224	8.66	1891.65***	17	.66	290.95***

Note. Participants disclosed whether or not they knew any students who had been affected by sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense within their entire time in college. The possible responses were “Yes,” “No,” and “Uncertain.” Only the “Yes” values are displayed in the table above. Participants also disclosed whether or not they had been affected by sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, nonforcible sex offense, and forcible sex offense within the last year. The possible responses were “Yes,” “No,” and “Uncertain.” Students who disclosed that they were uncertain about experiencing one of the four forms of sexual violence and students who had experienced one of the four forms of sexual violence were asked to specify which form. Only the “Yes” values are displayed in the table above. The estimated percentages for the documented rates were calculated by dividing the *n* for each rates category by the number of undergraduate students enrolled at Puget Sound during the 2012-2013 school year (2,587). CI refers to the 95% Confidence Interval.

* $p < .05$

*** $p < .001$

Table 3. Gender Differences in Perceived Campus, Peer, and Personal Rates

Variable	Perceived Rates				Peer Rates				Personal Rates			
	Male (<i>n</i> = 204)		Female (<i>n</i> = 439)		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Overall	1178.79 ^a	1127.22	1348.65 ^b	1373.29	305	11.79	798	30.85	23 ^a	.89	209 ^b	8.08
Sexual Harassment	658.79	659.74	692.22	673.94	128	4.95	314	12.14	16 ^a	.62	133 ^b	5.14
Sexual Misconduct Nonforcible Sex Offense	296.79 ^a	350.4	383.17 ^b	461.827	103	3.98	259	10.01	4 ^a	.15	52 ^b	2.01
Forcible Sex Offense	114.01	302.150	138.69	337.89	29	1.12	56	2.16	3	.12	8	.31
	112.53	249.85	154.83	286.36	45 ^a	1.74 ^b	169	6.53	0 ^a	0	16 ^b	.62

Note. The gender differences for males and females for the peer and personal rates are presented above. The percentages were calculated by dividing the *n* for each rates category by the number of undergraduate students enrolled at Puget Sound during the 2012-2013 school year (2,587). The superscripted letters a and b indicate significant contrasts with differing between males and females.

Table 4. Barriers to Reporting Sexual Violence Based on Gender

Barrier	Males (n=199)		Females (n=433)		<i>t</i>	95% CI
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Total	52.35	11.04	56.21	11.58	.25	54.63 to 56.43
Shame, guilt, and embarrassment	4.2	1.04	4.32	.95	.57	4.22 to 4.37
Fear of being judged	4.05	1.07	4.23	.97	.01	4.10 to 4.26
Fear of being judged as gay	3.4	1.29	3.6	1.15	4.91*	3.45 to 3.64
Fear of retaliation	3.77	1.16	4.03	.97	18.12***	3.87 to 4.04
Confidentiality concerns	3.91	1.01	4.09	.95	1.10	3.95 to 4.11
Fear of not being believed	3.68	1.14	4.12	1.08	2.22	3.89 to 4.07
Financial dependence on perpetrator	3.22	1.12	3.37	1.16	.93	3.22 to 3.41
Does not want family member or friend to be prosecuted	3.52	1.06	3.77	1.09	.47	3.61 to 3.79
Disbelief in successful prosecution	3.53	1.12	3.84	1.04	6.22*	3.67 to 3.84
Unaware of importance of treatment	3.47	1.11	3.66	1.12	.002	3.52 to 3.70
Lack of knowledge about how to get help	3.56	1.17	3.86	1.11	4.14*	3.68 to 3.86
Lack of resources to obtain help	3.19	1.23	3.58	1.18	.13	3.37 to 3.56
Lack of available services	2.98	1.22	3.39	1.21	1.14	3.16 to 3.35
Dislike or distrust of police and justice system	3.27	1.2	3.54	1.11	2.09	3.37 to 3.55
Cultural or language barriers to obtaining help	2.96	1.26	3.31	1.22	.02	3.11 to 3.31

Note. Participants rated barriers on a 5-point Likert Scale, where 1 represented “Not Important” and 5 represented “Extremely Important.” CI refers to the 95% Confidence Interval.

* $p < .05$

*** $p < .001$