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Ethics in College Sexual Assault Research

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The persistently high rates of sexual assault on college campuses have led to an increasing demand for a solution to the problem. In response, research in the field is growing rapidly. With any expanding field, proper focus needs to be given to ethical dilemmas that may arise when studying a sensitive topic. College students who have experienced a sexual assault are a highly vulnerable population. As the current literature is limited, this article considers the ethical implications of conducting research with college sexual assault victims. Drawing upon the 2010 American Psychological Association Ethics Code, specific ethical concerns including respect for persons, competence, confidentiality and privacy, and beneficence and nonmaleficence are discussed. Recommendations for researchers studying sexual assault in college students are provided.

Keywords: college students, ethics, sexual assault

Sexual assault of college women has been a recognized problem in the United States for 30 years (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). With this recognition in the 1980s, and growing public awareness, the number of research studies has grown. Specifically, ongoing investigations focus on what puts college women at risk, the outcomes of experiencing a sexual assault, and what can be done to reduce the rates of sexual assault. Although rates vary, a study by the Association of American Universities (2015) led to the conclusion that approximately 23% of female students have experienced a sexual assault in college. Despite the increased attention to this topic of research, researchers have yet to develop effective methods that can be widely disseminated and implemented to help reduce sexual assaults.

Although a solution to the problem of sexual assault on college campuses is unclear, progress has been made in identifying risk factors and outcomes. Women are at the highest risk for sexual assault during college than at any other time in their life (Koss et al., 1987). Specifically, when women are new to campus in their freshman year, they are at the most risk in their college careers (Carey, Durney, Shepardson, & Carey, 2015). Researchers also report that 14% of female drinkers report being taken advantage of sexually and that one in 20 college women report being raped while intoxicated (Mohler-Kuo, Dowdall, Koss, & Wechsler, 2004; Presley, Meilman, & Lyerla, 1995). In addition, being a previous victim of sexual assault is a strong predictor of future sexual assaults. Hanson and Gidycz (1993) found that women who experienced an attempted or completed rape prior to college were twice as likely to experience sexual assault during college. This revictimization may be explained by unresolved trauma and the resulting poor psychological adjustment following the initial assault (Gidycz, Coble, Latham, & Layman, 1993). Sexual victimization is also more likely for women who have had more consensual sex partners due to sheer exposure to sexual contact (Franklin, 2010; Koss & Dinero, 1989). Moreover, approximately 90% of college women who have been sexually assaulted know the perpetrator (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). An extensive literature exists exploring victim risk factors and ways for them to reduce their risk of experiencing a sexual assault; however, this is beyond the scope of this article.

Experiencing a sexual assault can cause a multitude of negative health implications. Some researchers found that approximately 31% of rape victims will go on to develop posttraumatic stress disorder (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992). Others report that approximately 43% of sexual assault victims develop depression (Frank & Stewart, 1984). Victims of sexual assault are also likely to increase their alcohol consumption after an assault and are 2.8 times more likely to meet criteria for alcohol abuse than nonassaulted women (Kilpatrick, Acierno, Resnick, Saunders, & Best, 1997). Sexual assault also has a large societal cost. Rape is considered the most expensive crime in the United States, with victims spending approximately \$127 billion annually on medical costs, productivity loss, and costs associated with a decrease in quality of life (Miller, Cohen, & Wiersema, 1996).

With the consistently high rates of sexual assault on college campuses, the negative psychological impact, and the high financial cost, there is heightened pressure for a solution to the problem. In response to this pressure, the government has taken a greater role in attempting to reduce sexual assault on college campuses. In 1994, colleges that receive federal funding were mandated to make sexual assault prevention programs available to all students (National Association of the Student Personnel Administrators, 1994). Twenty years later, to address the lack of change in college sexual assault rates, the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault was formed to improve the response to college sexual assault, and ultimately provide funding to develop effective programs (Obama, 2014). This task force has sparked a noticeable increase in the amount of funding available and research studies being conducted on college sexual assault. For example, a review of the United States Department of Justice's (2016) Office on Violence Against Women grant program shows an increase in grant funding of more than \$6.5 million from 2015 to 2016 for campus programs, with more than \$15 million in grants awarded in 2016. Researchers, university officials, and the government therefore all have a vested interest in reducing sexual assault rates on college campuses. When pressure is high, all parties need to remain vigilant of their ethical responsibilities to the people they are trying to help. Attention needs to be

given to ethical dilemmas that can arise when studying a vulnerable population such as college sexual assault victims.

Research into violence against women, which includes research on sexual assault, has been declared a sensitive topic of research by Fontes (2004). Drawing upon Lee and Renzetti's (1990) definition of a "sensitive topic," Fontes argued that violence against women research may pose a threat to those involved and therefore the research process may be problematic. Lee and Renzetti's criteria include intruding into the private sphere; studying a deviant topic; impinging on the exercise of coercion and dominance; and dealing with sacred topics such as love, sexual integrity, and power. Fontes argued that although there is no hierarchy of sensitivity in research, violence against women research has a high degree of sensitivity. Women who participate in violence research and speak about their experiences often feel shame, disbelief, and fear (Fontes, 2004). Researchers need to remain mindful of the sensitivity of sexual assault research and to be vigilant of ethical dilemmas.

Currently there is little published literature on the ethical implications of conducting research on sexual assault with college students. A small body of research has examined the effects of participating in sexual assault survey studies and risk reduction programs (i.e., programs for women that help reduce their risk of experiencing a sexual assault) on college participants (e.g., Gidycz et al., 2015; Gómez, Smith, Rosenthal, & Freyd, 2015; Yeater, Miller, Rinehart, & Nason, 2012). A larger and growing body of literature exists on the effects and ethical considerations of trauma-focused research participation on the general public (e.g., Collogan, Tuma, Dolan-Sewell, Borja, & Fleischman, 2004; Legerski & Bunnell, 2010). In addition, there is a small body of literature on the ethics of violence against women research (e.g., Ellsberg & Heise, 2002; Fontes, 2004; Sullivan & Cain, 2004). Each of these existing literatures contributes to our understanding of ethical dilemmas that may occur while conducting research with college sexual assault victims. The literature on violence against women provides the most significant source of comparable concerns. However, the ethical issues and suggestions provided in the violence against women literature represent too broad of an overview to fully extend to college women. To the author's knowledge, there is no known literature that specifically addresses ethical dilemmas that would affect college victims of sexual assault who participate in research in the United States.

This article draws on the available literature and the American Psychological Association (APA; 2010) Ethics Code to contemplate the ethical issues on conducting research on sexual assault in college women. Specifically, the article highlights issues addressed in the violence against women literature adjusted for a college population. The author takes into consideration her own research experience to provide relevant insight of the concerns in conducting research with a college population. Recommendations for research practices are provided to assist others in this growing field.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

As research into sexual assault on college campuses continues to grow, ethical guidelines are necessary to protect and serve a vulnerable population. The following section reviews relevant ethical concerns including respect for persons, competence, confidentiality and privacy, and

beneficence and nonmaleficence. Each ethical concern has a focus on the relevant ethical considerations to which sexual assault researchers and Institutional Review Boards need to attend. An emphasis is placed on how the ethical dilemmas affect the research participants, namely, college women.

Respect for Persons

Sexual assault is a violation of a person's body and mind. Victims are therefore vulnerable and already disinclined to report their experiences to formal sources (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003). Researchers must take this into consideration when working with sexual assault victims by taking steps to protect participants and respect their autonomy. Informed consent should be used to take the initial step.

By its nature, sexual assault research asks participants to divulge sensitive descriptive information about their sexual experiences. The APA (2010) Ethics Code Standard 8.02a, *Informed Consent to Research*, requires psychologists to provide an appropriate explanation of the research procedures during informed consent. How much information about study procedures should be provided to participants in the informed consent procedures? This is debatable. Experts in the field have yet to reach a consensus on what information is appropriate during the consent process (Newman, Walker, & Gefland, 1999). As reported by Ellsberg and Heise (2002), in the 1997 World Health Organization multicountry study on violence against women, consent procedures described the research to participants as a study on women's health and life experiences. This type of procedure is designed to allow rapport to build before addressing issues of violence, thereby reducing alarm that women may experience due to the subject matter (Newman et al., 1999). However, if the study's primary focus is on sexual assault, a participant may feel ill-informed about that which they are being asked to divulge. As college sexual assault studies often exclusively include measures directly relevant to sexual assault, not including a fuller description of study procedures in the informed consent process can be deceptive. Full disclosure is necessary. Moreover, sexual assault research can be emotionally distressing and therefore, according to the APA Ethics Code Standard 8.07b, *Deception in Research*, should not involve any kind of deception of participants.

Fear of alarming potential participants is a valid concern for researchers in need of collecting an adequate amount of accurate information about the population they are trying to help. When working with a population that is already unlikely to report the issue of concern, it is important to develop appropriate language for the research sample that will encourage participation while still respecting a person's right to be properly informed. Therefore it is necessary to understand factors that affect the population of interest and how that might affect their perception of sexual assault.

Three important factors to consider when using a sample of college women are age, experience, and beliefs in common rape myths. College women who are most vulnerable for sexual assault are young, new to college, and experiencing greater freedoms to socialize in potentially dangerous situations (Carey et al., 2015; Koss et al., 1987). Although they are likely aware of statistics and risk factors, as colleges are mandated to provide this information to their students (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1994), their behaviors often do not reflect the risk. Instead, young college women believe that they are too smart and strong to be a victim of sexual assault (Russell, 2003). Despite sexual assault programming, college

students are still susceptible to believing rape myths (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Although men believe rape myths more than women, a recent research study found that 41% of college women believe that a woman who was raped while intoxicated was responsible (Aronowitz, Lambert, & Davidoff, 2012). These beliefs, and a general reluctance to acknowledge experiencing a sexual assault, lead to a failure to recognize and label the experience as an assault (Orchowski, Untied, & Gidycz, 2013).

In consideration of these factors, researchers of college sexual assault may need to adjust their terminology to be more comprehensive and comprehensible. The APA (2010) Ethics Code Standard 3.10a, *Informed Consent*, highlights this need for language to be understood by a target population. Using the terms “sexual assault” or “rape” in recruitment and consent materials may dissuade participation. Using terminology such as “unwanted sexual experience” or “sex without consent” may capture a wider subject pool while still providing adequate information about the study. In addition, using these more inclusive and less stigmatized terms throughout the study procedures may improve the quality of data collected.

Researchers in in-depth sexual assault studies may ask participants to reveal an increasing amount of personal and detailed information. The depth of the information may cause discomfort to the participant. Participants may be unaware of the depth of sensitive information asked of them at the time of consent (Fontes, 2004). Researchers need to remember that consent is a continual process. With every question asked of a participant, the participant has the right to refuse to answer. This issue is particularly problematic with college students who may feel coerced into participating in research to receive course credit or otherwise obtain instructor favor. College students who have experienced sexual assault have already been coerced in a different manner (i.e., nonconsensual sexual contact). The students may therefore be even less inclined to refuse to answer a sensitive question that they normally would prefer not to answer. To emphasize the voluntary nature of the research and in alignment with the APA (2010) Ethics Code Standard 8.04a, *Client/Patient, Student, and Subordinate Research Participants*, college students should be well informed of their right to discontinue without penalty including receipts of compensation. During interviews and assessments, research staff should receive specialized training in obtaining sensitive information (see the Competence section); researchers must be able to pay close attention to—and recognize—the reaction of participants when sensitive questions are asked. When participants are noticeably experiencing discomfort, the researcher should be empathetic and remind them that they do not have to provide a response. In addition, priming participants about the type of information asked in each part of the study may help prepare them for more sensitive questions (Fontes, 2004). However, before these in-session issues can even transpire, competency of the research staff needs to be ensured.

Competence

Researchers have an obligation to maintain competence to provide quality care, and therefore quality results, for their population of interest. College sexual assault research necessitates proper training in working with sexual assault victims and an understanding of college culture.

As previously discussed, interviewing sexual assault victims and asking them to disclose sensitive information may be distressing. All research staff who interact with participants need to be trained to recognize the impact their questions may have and how to best respond to distressed participants (Ellsberg et al., 2002) to be considered competent to work with sexual

assault victims and, therefore, to be in accordance with the APA (2010) Ethics Code Standard 2.01, *Boundaries of Competence*. Research staff may need to handle unanticipated situations that require specialized knowledge and skills that cannot be sufficiently managed by following a script for the research procedures (Sullivan et al., 2004). Gradual exposure to working with sexual assault victims and obtaining specialized training from local services for women who have experienced violence can help researchers obtain competence (Sullivan & Cain, 2004). As the research staff in college sexual assault studies are often graduate students or others early in their career, training is essential for ensuring minimal distress to participants and the development of proper skills to handle situations for when distress does occur. Supervisors have a responsibility to provide high-quality ongoing training opportunities before and during a research study for junior research staff. This training will ensure participant appropriateness and acceptability of the research and data quality.

Proper language in sexual assault research is not only applicable during informed consent but throughout the research process. Victim blaming is a common concern of sexual assault research, particularly research that is designed to lead to a better understanding of ways that college women can reduce their risk of experiencing assault (Gidycz & Dardis, 2014). Carefully defining terminology and clearly stating expectations of the research can reduce victim blaming. In fact, college risk reduction research has been shown to empower victims of sexual assault, and participants have reported less self-blame (Gidycz et al., 2015). It is therefore essential that research staff be trained to avoid victim blaming during research procedures. Training should include encouraging research staff members to analyze their own beliefs about sexual assault (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002). Research staff often hold the same misconceptions and biases about victims, as do the general public and victims themselves (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002). Addressing these beliefs can reduce victim blaming and improve clinical judgment and sensitivity in young research staff. Researchers should also have the proper knowledge to address concerns about victim blaming from academics and the public. Having the expertise to defend college sexual assault research is necessary for obtaining necessary support in order to continue addressing relevant issues and effecting university policies.

Every population has its own unique culture, including college students, to which researchers must attend when designing and implementing a study. Limited research has been conducted examining what is unique to college culture in comparison to other groups (Wiecko, 2010). Moffatt (1991) argued that college culture extends adolescence in a social environment without the gray realities of the real world.

A specific aspect of college culture receiving recent attention is the “hookup culture” phenomenon. Hooking up, or sexual interactions in a noncommitted relationship, has changed sex and dating in college (Bogle, 2008). Researchers of college sexual assault need to be cognizant of how “hooking up” and the overall social environment may be affecting participants and the data. For example, a researcher who tells college women not to drink or not to socialize with men they just met unduly restricts women’s social activities while perpetuating rape myths and victim-blaming tendencies. Instead the researcher needs to develop competence with the college population to determine the best culturally sensitive approach in addressing sexual assault.

Researchers in university settings are already highly exposed to college students and are likely able to develop and maintain competence through student interaction. However, researchers should pay attention to their own biases toward college student behavior and be careful of

self-comparison. Young research staff, particularly undergraduate research assistants, may need to pay additional attention to their interactions with participants. Although being closer in age and to the college culture experience may be advantageous for developing rapport, young research staff may be at higher risk for self-comparison and inappropriate self-disclosure. In accordance with the APA (2010) Ethics Code Standard 2.05, *Delegation of Work to Others*, supervisors should take an active role in assisting their research staff to meet and maintain competence. Not taking college culture into account may lead to biased results or unethical behavior on the part of the research staff.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Ensuring confidentiality and privacy is paramount for women's safety and validity of data. Women who have experienced a sexual assault have greater concerns for their physical safety and emotional vulnerability than women without such experiences. These concerns may be exacerbated by participating in research that is conducted in a college setting.

When participating in research, all participants should feel comfortable and confident that the information that they share will remain confidential. However, women who have been victimized are more fearful of future victimizations and may be more cautious of participating in research out of the risk of a confidentiality breach (Fontes, 2004; Grauerholz, 2000). College communities are often small, highly social, and subject to peer influences. The majority of victims know their perpetrators (Fisher et al., 2000) and are likely to see them on campus or often find themselves in social situations with the perpetrator. College women may be in dating violence situations akin to domestic violence where they are in a relationship or living with the perpetrator. College women who know their perpetrator may fear potential repercussions if others know they are participating in sexual assault research where they are asked to reveal potentially compromising information. Increased fear is also likely for women that have contracted a sexually transmitted infection or lost their virginity due to an assault (Fontes, 2004). Participating in research may be the first time the young women have ever disclosed their assault, amplifying their fear.

Security concerns of the participants should be taken into account when designing a study. Women may be fearful of anyone, working with data they provide, recognizing their identity (Fontes, 2004). As the research staff members are likely active members of the college community, these fears need to be taken into consideration to ensure the staff are well trained in confidentiality. Turnover of research staff can cause unforeseen security concerns as well. For example, a new research assistant or graduate student could be completing training or assessing interrater reliability with deidentified interviews that provide clues to the identity of a person he or she knows. Thus, the new staff member is exposed to sensitive information to which he or she was previously not privy. It is therefore important that any identifying information, including details of what the person looks like, is avoided in video or audio recordings. In addition, training should emphasize the importance of not making attempts to determine the participant's identity while reviewing recordings. Taking into consideration the APA (2010) Ethics Code Standards 8.02, *Informed Consent to Research*, and 8.04, *Client/Patient, Student, and Subordinate Research Participants*, any unintended breaches of confidentiality, with or without regard to recordings, can violate a participant's rights, therefore causing an ethical dilemma that must be addressed. Senior researchers or supervisors should provide oversight and be available

to help develop alternative solutions when issues occur to ensure participant privacy and support to new staff in navigating these circumstances. These specific concerns related to a participant's confidentiality should be raised with all research staff with regular reminders to immediately desist the research activity if they suspect even possible identification of a participant. Researchers should therefore choose staff carefully to ensure capability of working with sexual assault victims, sensitive data, and following considerable procedures to protect participant rights.

Research into college programs that address sexual assault raises a number of privacy concerns. Often, programs that aim to reduce the risk or prevent sexual assault occur in group settings where participants are encouraged to actively engage in the program. Participants are therefore revealing confidential information to not only the researchers but to other participants in the group. Any number of scenarios could cause a participant to feel uncomfortable in a group situation, such as two participants already being acquainted in a social or academic setting. Researchers need to create a safe space for the program that includes not only a private and accessible location of campus but also a welcoming environment to encourage disclosure. Although researchers cannot control what group members reveal outside the session, they can strongly encourage privacy and respect for others in the group. In addition, informing participants during recruitment and before arrival to the study session that others in the group have experienced a sexual assault may help prepare them for the group setting or provide them with an opportunity to decline participation before entering the room.

The physical location of the research study can also cause privacy concerns. College student programming often occurs in public places such as a student union or large auditorium. Having an advertised study in an easily accessible location is helpful for bolstering participation in the study but can also lead to confidentiality breaches. Students may be recognized going to the program, causing unforeseeable consequences for the student participant. Programming can also occur in on-campus residential halls where the participants live. Conducting research in a woman's home may make her feel more comfortable with the content, but it may also cause the research procedure to be less structured or put social demands on the participant (Fontes, 2004). Researchers need to carefully consider how the location of the research study can cause unintended harm for the participants.

Beneficence and Nonmaleficence

Sexual assault research on college students should be conducted to benefit the students. College students are often considered a sample of convenience. In this circumstance, with the high rate of sexual assault for college women, they should be studied in their own right with findings benefitting the field of psychology and the general public as a secondary outcome.

Trauma researchers, and the Intuition Review Boards considering the studies, need to examine the risk and benefits of the proposed trauma study (Collogan et al., 2004). The APA (2010) Ethics Code Standard 3.04, *Avoiding Harm*, dictates that psychologists must do no harm. Is asking participants to discuss their trauma harmful? This complex question can be broken down in a number of ways. Generally, participating in trauma research is not the same as retraumatization; however, that does not exclude participants from experiencing distress (Collogan et al., 2004; Legerski et al., 2010). Most participants in trauma research do not experience distress (Legerski & Bunnell, 2010). However, some do experience distress; that percentage varies across studies. There

is some evidence to suggest that having greater symptoms of depression or posttraumatic stress, or greater trauma exposure, may contribute to the participants' distress level (Johnson & Benight, 2003; Walker, Newman, Koss, & Bernstein, 1997). Researchers should therefore consider what risk factors the participants have and how to reduce distress when designing the study.

A limited amount of research has been conducted examining distress in college students who participate in sexual assault research. Yeater and colleagues (2012) randomly assigned participants to complete either a questionnaire related to sexual violence or cognitive measures. Participants who completed the sexual violence questionnaires reported slightly elevated levels of distress compared to participants in the cognitive measure group but reported fewer mental costs and greater perceived benefits of the study (Yeater et al., 2012). Another study showed that answering questions about sexual violence was no more distressing than day-to-day life experiences for the participants and that participants believed that asking the questions was important (Gómez et al., 2015). Generally, asking about sexual violence can be minimally distressing, and college students find it to be an important issue for research.

Sexual assault research often utilizes interviews or group interventions where participants are encouraged to be open and discuss their experiences with the researchers. Even if the study is not designed to include a therapeutic intervention, it often has a therapeutic effect. Many participants may have never told anyone about their assault and may welcome a nonjudgmental environment in which to speak openly (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002). For college students, who may be unaccustomed to the idea of therapy or lack knowledge for accessing mental health services, participating in the research study may be an important step for seeking help. Although currently there is no consistently proven program that reduces sexual assault on college campuses, risk reduction programs increase sexual assertiveness and self-protective behavior (Gidycz et al., 2015). College students are therefore participating in skills training activities akin to therapy. Clinically skilled interviewers may conclude their interviews by instilling hope in the participants by emphasizing the woman's strength and, therefore, minimizing her distress (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002).

Debriefing is an important step in all research studies, but it can have greater implications for sexual assault research compared to other topics. As previously discussed, participants often enter research studies unaware of the level of intimate detail they will be asked to reveal about themselves. Debriefing allows for participants to appreciate why they were asked the questions. As many college students report the importance of researchers asking questions about sexual violence, debriefing allows them to understand what they are contributing and highlights the importance of the research. In addition, it allows the researchers to receive feedback on the benefit or harm the participant may have received (Fontes, 2004). Researchers in clinical psychology are also in a unique position to use their clinical judgment to compile and provide the best available community resources for participants. For college students, that may mean referring student participants to the school's counseling services, which are often free for students.

Research has the potential to change a community (Fontes, 2004). Participants and others may feel empowered by the sexual assault research going on in their campus and decide to act themselves. The students understand their community better than any researcher, university official, or government agent. They are therefore able to use their resources to advocate for changes on their campus to raise awareness and, it is hoped, reduce sexual assault. Ultimately, the more invested the community is in the issue of sexual assault, the greater the likelihood that the research will be beneficial to those most affected.

DISCUSSION

Ethics in college sexual assault research is not black and white. Researchers should be aware of the gray areas in order to ensure ethical research behavior. In any growing field, recommendations are necessary to protect the population served.

Recommendations

The following is an overview of the recommendations for researchers working with college students to study sexual assault. Not every recommendation will be appropriate for every researcher, but it is my hope that this overview will provide guidance for ethical dilemmas that may occur during the course of research.

Informed Consent

Informed consent should be full, and the process should not involve any deception. Participants should be informed, to the best of the researchers' abilities, of the level of information that will be asked of them and in what type of setting participants will be disclosing personally sensitive information (i.e., in a group, recorded, etc.). Evidence suggests that college students believe asking about sexual assault is an important topic. Therefore, being open about the information being collected will encourage greater participation, will decrease distress, and may lead to greater community involvement.

Consent as a Process

In adherence to consent being a continual process, researchers should make opting out of questions easy for participants. This process should include continuous reminders that participants do not need to answer any question they do not want to and an "I prefer not to answer" option on questionnaires. Efforts to make research voluntary for college students should include alternative participation options and dissuading participation that may result in instructor favoritism.

Accurate Language

Researchers should be wary of the stigma that surrounds the study of sexual assault and the reluctance to recognize rape as rape. To address this, more inclusive language should be used to encourage broader participation. In addition, the researchers should include information about rape myths during the debriefing of the study and allow participants to ask questions. Providing accurate information about sexual assault to college students will help reduce stigma.

Training

Research staff should receive a high level of training. Supervisors should take an active role in instructing junior staff members in interactions with sexual assault victims, procedures for

handling a distressed participant, and work with college students. All researchers should examine their own biases before interacting with any participant.

Maintaining Confidentiality

Supervisors should monitor their study staff to ensure they are maintaining confidentiality. Study staff should not have multiple relationships with participants and need to remain vigilant to the possibility of this occurrence. Depending on the circumstance, a research staff member may need to be removed from the study or a participant may need to be discouraged from participating. In a small college community, it is essential that the integrity of the research or the privacy of the participant does not become compromised from breaches of confidentiality. All data should be deidentified and securely stored. If possible, a master key with participant names and identification numbers should not be kept. Instead, researchers should consider having participants calculate a unique identification number using personal information that each participant provides, which can be easily re-created with prompts at future study visits.

Privacy

In keeping with participant safety, researchers should provide a safe environment for the study to be conducted. The location should be on campus for accessibility. If participants previously experienced a sexual assault, the location should not be in a residential building or any other building with high student traffic where students may be identified by others as victims. When conducting research in a group setting, participants should be informed of the content to be asked of them before agreeing to meet. In addition, researchers should discuss with participants the limits of the group confidentiality and ask them to sign an agreement to maintain the confidentiality of the others participating in the group. College students who know extra protections are being made to protect their privacy will feel more comfortable participating in the research.

Do No Harm

Sexual assault research can have indirect benefits to participants but also can be distressing. As previously recommended, researchers should be well trained in working with sexual assault victims and have skills to reduce a participant's distress. To create benefits from participation, researchers who have clinical training can create a therapeutic experience. Researchers should look for opportunities for these indirect benefits to be included in the study. In addition, accessible and low-cost resources should be provided to all college students participating in the research.

CONCLUSION

As research and policy addressing sexual assault on college campuses continue to grow, so will the potential ethical dilemmas. Responsible parties need to remain vigilant of the needs and rights of sexual assault student victims while conducting the necessary research. The

recommendations provided in this article are the start of a conversation that will need to be continued as ethical dilemmas arise. Open discussion, public input, and seeking consultation are encouraged to produce ethical research that will one day lead to a reduction in college sexual assault rates.

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