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Sexual Violence at Christian and Secular Universities: Does Institutional Type Matter?

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ABSTRACT

Sexual violence is a persistent problem on the college campus. One method of addressing sexual violence is to endorse bystander intervention, whereby students are encouraged to interrupt potential sexual assault situations. Although initial research indicates that the Christian college campus provides a cultural context where fewer acts of sexual violence are committed, nothing is known about whether students on such campuses are more or less likely to intervene as a bystander. Five research questions were addressed in this study, which involved asking 851 students who attended three Christian institutions and one secular university to complete self-report surveys about their sexual assault and bystander intervention experiences. The responses indicated that violence was less common at the Christian colleges than at the secular institution. We also found that both men and women are more willing to intervene to prevent sexual violence at Christian campuses than on the secular campus. Implications of these and other results are discussed.

Sexual assault persists as a troubling problem on college and university campuses, despite decades of research and programs to address the issue (Cantor et al., 2015; Fedina et al., 2018; Fleck-Henderson, 2012; Foubert, 2011). Estimates of the incidence of sexual assaults on campuses vary based on methodological differences regarding samples, definitions, and time period (Cook et al., 2011; Krebs et al., 2011; McCallum & Peterson, 2017); however, researchers have consistently found that approximately one in four women report experiencing some form of sexual violence, defined as a range of unwanted sexual experiences of varying severity and intrusiveness from either known or unknown perpetrators (Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004) during their time as college or university students (Best, 2017; Cantor et al., 2015; Fedina et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2000; Krebs et al., 2007). Bystander intervention approaches, where students are encouraged to take responsibility and action to identify and reduce attitudes and behaviors of their peers that are linked to sexual violence, have become widely used by campuses in their efforts to reduce sexual assault (Bannon & Foubert, 2017; Banyard et al., 2005; Coker et al., 2011; Foubert et al., 2010).

An important component of the bystander intervention approach is that it moves beyond "blame the victim" approaches by addressing contextual-level factors,

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particularly campus culture, and linking these to individual behaviors of perpetrators. In a parallel development, recent research has also shown that Christian campuses provide a unique cultural context that is related to lower rates of sexual violence against women (Vanderwoerd & Best, 2018; Vanderwoerd & Cheng, 2017). The promise of bystander interventions, combined with the potential for Christian campuses to be a positive factor in reducing sexual violence, leads to the questions addressed in our present study: Does the Christian context of a campus influence bystander attitudes and motivation, and does Christian context influence the incidence of sexual assault?

Literature Review

Some researchers have long held that social contexts rather than individual characteristics should be the primary focus in addressing sexual assault and violence (Barnett et al., 2005; Donovan, 2000; Heise, 1998; Lawson, 2012; Levy, 2008). Other researchers have examined individual-level and contextual variables to increase explanatory and predictive power (Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004; Cass, 2007; Hines, 2007; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002). Two theoretical approaches—routine activities theory (Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004) and male peer support theory (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013)—offer examples of how individual and contextual variables can provide fuller explanations for factors related to sexual violence.

Routine activities theory suggests that although college campuses may indeed be contexts that put women at higher risk for sexual assault, differential rates of victimization can also be attributed to differences in women's daily activities. Following this thinking, researchers have identified groups of activities that put women at greater risk of being sexually victimized, including proximity (e.g., higher frequency of contact with males and higher frequency of attendance at events where males are present) and recreational and leisure activities (e.g., frequency of attending parties, frequency of going to bars or pubs, frequency of attending athletic events; Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004; Cass, 2007; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002).

Similarly, *male peer support theory* focuses on male perpetrators by identifying particular contexts and activities that increase the risk of men victimizing women, which are similar to the high-risk contexts identified in routine activities theory (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013). Specifically, male peer support theory suggests that, within the larger context of a patriarchal culture, male participation in activities that are typical of college campuses, such as partying, heavy drinking, and male-only clubs and social activities, reinforces patriarchal values and condone—even reward—men's violent and abusive behavior toward women (Schwartz et al., 2001).

Both routine activities theory and male peer support theory suggest that explanations of sexual violence require greater understanding of how social contexts operate to reinforce, constrain, or encourage activities and behaviors that place women at risk for sexual victimization (Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013). Although this literature makes it clear that college and university campuses are risky contexts, it does not adequately address different types of campuses or whether and how variations in campus culture might act to shape either women's routine activities

or men's male peer support networks in ways that decrease the risk of women's sexual victimization.

One promising line of inquiry related to different campus contexts has been the exploration of religion as both an individual and a contextual characteristic. Early studies investigating the relationship of religiosity and family violence hypothesized that increased religiosity—specifically, conservative religiosity—was positively associated with family violence. As scholars explained, "much of the rationale for suggesting a relationship between religion and wife abuse stems from the assumption that members of more fundamentalist groups tend to be more patriarchal" (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992, p. 17). However, extensive literature also demonstrates that religious involvement is a protective factor for various maladaptive behaviors, including criminal activity, drug use, and alcoholism (Geppert et al., 2007; Koenig, 2015, 2012). Meanwhile, moral development researchers and theologians have identified religiosity as contributing toward pro-social behavior and moderating the effects of harmful influences, such as pornography use (Baltazar et al., 2010; Hardy & Carlo, 2005). Stark (1996) developed the concept of "moral communities" to describe the influence that a shared religious context has on the behaviors and attitudes of individuals within a specific community. Building on this concept, several researchers have demonstrated that religious communities, including Protestant Christian campuses, may be an important factor in curbing harmful or antisocial behaviors and attitudes (Burdette et al., 2009; Hill, 2009; Regnerus, 2003; Vanderwoerd & Cheng, 2017). Finally, Foubert and Rizzo (2013) demonstrated that both male and female students with higher intrinsic religiosity were more likely to engage in bystander interventions compared to students with higher extrinsic religiosity.

Our review of the relevant literature and theory suggests that Christian higher education institutions may provide a "moral community" that could reduce the risk of being victimized by sexual violence. Specifically, Protestant evangelical colleges have policies and practices, including informal cultures, that draw on these colleges' Christian beliefs, which set them apart from their secular counterparts. However, the specific mechanisms by which these Christian beliefs and behaviors work are not yet clear. Given that bystander intervention approaches include a focus on changing the cultures of campuses, it is worth exploring the connection between the Christian context of campuses and whether this influences bystander attitudes and behaviors of students, and ultimately, the incidence of sexual assaults. Therefore, this study sought to address five questions:

> Research Question 1: Is there a statistically significant difference in experiencing sexual assault when comparing men and women at Christian and secular colleges?
>
> Research Question 2: Is there a statistically significant difference in perpetrating sexual assault when comparing men and women at Christian and secular colleges?
>
> Research Question 3: Is there a statistically significant difference in men's and women's willingness to intervene as bystanders when comparing Christian to secular colleges?
>
> Research Question 4: Is there a statistically significant difference in men's and women's confidence that they could intervene in various bystander situations when comparing Christian to secular colleges?

Research Question 5: Is there a statistically significant difference in the barriers to intervening as a bystander when comparing men and women at Christian and secular schools (where lower numbers on the scale indicate more barriers to intervene)?

Based on the prior research indicating that sexual violence is less common at Christian institutions than at secular institutions, we used unidirectional hypotheses for experiencing and perpetrating sexual assault, such that participants were hypothesized to report lower levels of sexual violence committed against them and perpetrated by them at Christian colleges. Given the lack of research on bystander variables at Christian colleges, bi-directional distributions were assumed for the remaining research questions.

Method

Design

Given our interest in systematically studying the phenomena in question in a way that promotes generalization through the use of surveys, we used a quantitative methodology. An online anonymous self-report survey design was used to reduce barriers respondents might feel in disclosing sensitive or stigmatizing experiences (Brock et al., 2015; Krebs et al., 2011). Four institutions granted IRB permission to complete the present study on their campus; two of these were selected based on their being the home institutions of the authors, where we had access to participant pools. Contacts at the other two institutions provided permission to access their students after the first author requested permission to do so. The first institution was a large, public institution in the American Midwest. Participants on this campus were recruited via online research participant pools that undergraduate and graduate students who were enrolled in Education and Psychology classes could access. Participating students were rewarded with a participation credit required by their class. As noted later in this article, caution should be taken in making generalizations given that data representing "secular universities" were gathered from only one institution. The second institution was a small, liberal arts Christian college in a mid-sized city in central Canada. The third institution was a small, liberal arts Christian college in the American Midwest. The fourth institution was a medium-sized, specialized Christian institution that granted permission to collect data on two of its campuses, both in the United States. Participants at each Christian campus were recruited via an email sent through an institutional research office. These participants were offered the opportunity to enter a drawing for one of two $50 Amazon gift cards. Two cards were raffled for each participating institution. In all cases, participants were treated with all appropriate protections for human subjects in accordance with the study approval we received from our IRB.

Participants

In the present study, there were 851 participants: 296 men and 555 women. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 57, with the average age being 21.7 years old. Aside from the 7.4% of participants who were graduate students, the participants were equally distributed across the four undergraduate years. Female participants comprised 64% of the sample. Two-thirds of the participants identified as Christian, while about 2% of participants identified as Atheist. Of the 29.3% of participants who did not identify with any

Table 1. Demographics of participants.

			Men	Women
Students at Christian Colleges		Total	170	314
	Religion	Christian	166	307
		Not Christian Identified	2	5
		Missing	2	2
	Ethnicity	Caucasian/White	141	252
		Native American	1	1
		African American	3	8
		Asian American	18	34
		Hispanic/Latino	5	15
		Missing	2	4
	Year in School	First Year	43	78
		Sophomore	34	56
		Junior	36	76
		Senior	36	74
		Graduate Student	19	29
		Missing	2	1
Students at Secular College		Total	126	241
	Religion	Christian	107	202
		Not Christian Identified	19	107
		Missing	0	0
	Ethnicity	Caucasian/White	85	181
		Native American	5	20
		African American	25	13
		Asian American	5	15
		Hispanic/Latino	5	12
		Missing	1	0
	Year in School	First Year	32	36
		Sophomore	36	73
		Junior	28	74
		Senior	28	44
		Graduate Student	2	13
		Missing	0	1

faith, an assortment of beliefs was represented, including humanism, agnosticism, and "spiritual, but not religious." See Table 1 for demographic characteristics of participants.

Participants included undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at a participating institution. At the public institution, any student with access to the participant pools was eligible to participate regardless of their age, gender, or religious identity. Likewise, any student receiving an invitational email at a Christian college was eligible to participate regardless of age, gender, or religious identity. Recruitment was narrowed by discipline, targeting those in the social sciences, including education, psychology, and business. This process was used due to practical limitations at several institutions with available participants.

Measures

The online survey was comprised of several measures. These measures included a brief demographic questionnaire; three bystander measures developed by Banyard (2008) that

capture bystander efficacy, barriers, and confidence levels; and an inventory examining the sexual assault experiences of participants, both surviving and perpetrating (Koss & Oros, 1982).

Bystander Efficacy Scale

Perceived ability to intervene as a bystander was measured by the Bystander Efficacy Scale developed by Banyard et al. (2005). This efficacy scale measures participants' beliefs that they could perform each of 18 bystanding behaviors by indicating their level of confidence in performing the behavior. Participants rate items on a scale of 1 to 100%, indicating the percent to which they believe they know how to intervene in the given scenario. Criterion validity of this scale was established through a significant correlation between bystander efficacy and actual bystander behavior ($r = .30$, $p < .05$). Construct validity was established with a significant correlation between bystander efficacy and rape myth acceptance ($r = .24$, $p < .05$; Banyard, 2008). Reliability of this measure as shown by Cronbach's alpha is .93, indicating excellent internal consistency reliability (Foubert & Bridges, 2017).

Bystander Willingness to Help Scale

The Willingness to Help Scale was developed by Banyard et al. (2005) and measures participants' degree of likelihood of engaging in 12 bystanding behaviors on a 7-point scale ranging from not at all willing to intervene to very willing to intervene. Items for the scale were developed from the research literature and discussions with advocates and professionals working in the field of sexual violence. Criterion validity of this scale was established through a significant correlation between bystander willingness to help and actual bystander behavior ($r = .37$, $p < .05$). Construct validity was established with a significant correlation between bystander efficacy and rape myth acceptance ($r = .32$, $p < .05$; Banyard, 2008). Reliability of this measure as shown by coefficient alpha is .86, showing good reliability (Foubert & Bridges, 2017).

Barriers to Bystander Intervention Scale

The instrument contained 16 items of the Barriers to Bystander Intervention scale (Burn, 2009). Participants rated the extent to which the behaviors represented in each item influenced whether they would intervene while they were a bystander in an emergency situation involving sexual violence. Participants responded to all items on a 1–7 Likert scale. Items related to one of five types of barriers to bystander intervention. Internal consistency reliability for the subscales of this measure range from .70 to .89, demonstrating adequate to very good reliability (Burn, 2009).

Sexual Experiences Survey (SES)

The Sexual Experiences Survey (SES; Koss & Gidycz, 1985) is a 10-item survey that asks respondents to indicate whether they have perpetrated behaviors ranging from engaging

in fondling, kissing, or petting through excessive psychological pressure on a woman to more extreme behavior such as unwanted sexual intercourse. Participants respond to each question by answering yes or no. An individual's score on the instrument is the number of the highest question (closest to 10) to which they answered yes. If participants answer yes to questions 8, 9, or 10, rape is indicated; 6 or 7 indicates sexual coercion; 4 or 5 indicates attempted rape; and 1, 2, or 3 indicates unwanted sexual contact. Scores on each item are not added together. Rather, the participant's score is the number of the highest (closest to 10) question to which they responded yes. Participants also indicate the number of times they have committed each act, to allow for further analyses if necessary.

Koss and Gidycz (1985) reported that the SES was designed for normal populations and was used in a study of 10,000 college students nationwide. When measuring the internal consistency of the SES among 448 introductory psychology students (305 women, 143 men), a Cronbach's alpha of .74 was found for women and .89 for men. Test-retest reliability was assessed among 71 females and 67 males who completed the instrument a week apart; agreement emerged on 93% of the items. In a validity study of the SES, Koss and Gidycz (1985) administered the SES to a group of 386 students who were also interviewed by a psychologist assessing the same behaviors. Of these students, 242 were women and 144 were men. For women, SES scores correlated ($r = .73$, $p < .01$) with the behaviors they reported in an interview. Correlation for men between written SES scores and responses from an SES personal interview was $r = .61$, $p < .05$. Koss and Gidycz (1985) reported that men tended to deny behaviors to a psychologist that they had admitted on paper. This inconsistency in reports did not occur in the test-retest survey situation. Thus, Koss and Gidycz (1985) suggested that the survey format has stronger validity than individual interviews. Koss et al. (1987) found that 93% of male participants in their validity study of the SES reported the same information on the survey as in the interview. When participants differed in their reports, they admitted behavior on the questionnaire that they would not admit to an experimenter in person. When participants rated their honesty in completing the measure, on average they indicated 95% honesty.

Procedure

Participants completed the survey online using Qualtrics (2005). The first page of the survey was the informed consent information expressly articulating the type of questions contained in the survey as well as the purpose of the research project. Upon conclusion, the participants were presented with local information, both on-campus and off, concerning sexual assault and counseling resources.

Results

Descriptive analysis was conducted in order to reveal the demographic characteristics of our sample. To investigate the research questions, t-tests were used to compare the means of Christian college students to those at the secular institution. The present study

Table 2. Results for each research question.

		Statistic	Effect Size
Is there a statistically significant difference in experiencing sexual assault when comparing men and women at Christian and secular colleges?	Men	$\chi^2(1) = 8.817$	$\varphi = .244$
	Women	$\chi^2(1) = 7.121$	$\varphi = .160$
Is there a statistically significant difference in perpetrating sexual assault when comparing men and women at Christian and secular colleges?	Men	$\chi^2(1) = 1.333$	$\varphi = .095$
	Women	$\chi^2(1) = .933$*	$\varphi = .058$
Is there a statistically significant difference in men's and women's willingness to intervene as bystanders when comparing Christian to secular colleges?	Men	$t = 5.63$	$d = .667239$
	Women	$t = 4.00$	$d = .34203$
Is there a statistically significant difference in men's and women's confidence that they could intervene in various bystander situations when comparing Christian to secular colleges?	Men	$t = 2.3$	$d = .265687$
	Women	$t = -.95$*	$d = .081739$
Is there a statistically significant difference in the barriers one has to intervening as a bystander when comparing men and women at Christian and secular schools?	Men	$t = 1.02$*	$d = .120687$
	Women	$t = 4.40$	$d = .382916$

Men, n = 296; Women, n = 555.
*non-significant result, $p < .05$.

sought to answer several research questions. Below, we enumerate the results in accordance with each research question.

As shown in Table 2, chi-square analysis was employed to answer research question one and two; whereas t-tests were used for the research questions three, four, and five. Below, we enumerate the results in accordance with each research question.

Research Question 1: Is there a statistically significant difference in experiencing sexual assault when comparing men and women at Christian and secular colleges? We found that both men (5%) and women (25%) experienced significantly less sexual assault at Christian institutions than men (21%) and women (40%) at the secular university. One-tailed chi-square analysis supports this claim, as both men, $\chi^2(1) = 8.817$, $p < .001$, $\varphi = .244$, and women, $\chi^2(1) = 7.121$, $p < .01$, $\varphi = .160$, at the participating secular institution were more likely to experience sexual assault.

Research Question 2: Is there a statistically significant difference in perpetrating sexual assault when comparing men and women at Christian and secular colleges? We found that men (10%) at the secular university were more likely to perpetrate sexual violence than men (5%) at Christian schools. Once again, one-tailed chi-square analysis demonstrates that this difference is significant, $\chi^2(1) = 1.333$, $p < .05$, $\varphi = .095$. However, the low number of women who report perpetuating sexual assault is statistically equivalent when comparing school type (secular university = 3%; Christian institutions = 1%; $\chi^2(1) = .933$, $p > .05$, $\varphi = .058$).

Research Question 3: Is there a statistically significant difference in men's and women's willingness to intervene as bystanders when comparing Christian to secular colleges? When comparing men and women at each of these respective institution types, we found that men at Christian colleges are more willing to intervene ($M = 6.0$, $SD = 1.3$) than men attending the secular university ($M = 5.2$, $SD = 1.3$), $t = 5.63$, $p < .000$, $d = .667239$. We also found that women at Christian colleges are more willing to

intervene ($M = 6.4$, $SD = 1.2$) than women attending the secular university ($M = 6.0$, $SD = 1.3$), $t = 4.00$, $p < .000$, $d = .34203$.

Research Question 4: Is there a statistically significant difference in men's and women's confidence that they could intervene in various bystander situations when comparing Christian to secular colleges? We found that men at Christian schools are more confident that they know how to intervene ($M = 78.1$, $SD = 14.3$) than men at secular schools ($M = 74.5$, $SD = 19.9$) $t = 2.3$, $p < .05$, $d = .265687$. By contrast, we found that women at Christian schools were just as confident that they know how to intervene ($M = 79.9$, $SD = 15.2$) as women at secular schools ($M = 81.1$, $SD = 14.5$) $t = -.95$, $p > .05$, $d = .081739$.

Research Question 5: Is there a statistically significant difference in the barriers one has to intervening as a bystander when comparing men and women at Christian institutions and the secular university (where lower numbers equal more barriers to intervene). We found that men at Christian colleges reported the same amount of barriers to intervene as a bystander ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.2$) as men at the secular university ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 1.2$) $t = 1.02$, $p > .05$, $d = .120687$. By contrast, we found that women at Christian colleges reported fewer barriers to intervene ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.3$) than women at the secular university ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.1$) $t = 4.40$, $p < .000$), $d = .382916$.

Discussion

As current events and literature indicate, sexual assault is a pressing issue across the higher education landscape (Cantor et al., 2015; Fedina et al., 2018). This study examined whether students experienced differences in incidents of sexual assault depending on institution type. Students from both the Christian campuses and the secular university were studied regarding sexual assault experiences and likelihood to perpetrate a sexual assault. Furthermore, the study explored any differences between students attending the Christian campuses and students attending the secular university regarding outlooks on bystander intervention practices when presented with sexual assault incidents. Using the Bystander Efficacy Scale, the Bystander Willingness to Help Scale, the Barriers to Bystander Intervention Scale and the Sexual Experiences Survey, this study provided challenging results regarding differences for students based on institution type.

Sexual Assault Experiences

The primary objective of this study was to determine whether students attending Christian affiliated schools experienced differing levels of sexual assaults compared to students attending secular institutions. This study found that both men and women who attended Christian institutions reported having experienced significantly fewer sexual assaults compared to students attending secular schools. This finding accompanies the literature that Christian practices may help limit maladaptive behavior (Geppert et al., 2007; Koenig, 2012, 2015). Furthermore, the notion that Christian communities play an important role in limiting harmful behaviors or attitudes parallels this study's findings (Burdette et al., 2009; Hill, 2009; Regnerus, 2003; Vanderwoerd & Cheng, 2017).

The policies, practices, and expectations at Christian institutions, although viewed by some as restrictive, may create an environment where students experience and commit lower levels of sexual assault. This study found that men at secular institutions were more likely to perpetrate sexual violence compared to men at Christian institutions. These two findings support the research hypothesis that religiosity and, in part, Christian institutions are a significant variable in sexual assault research. A tool that higher education leaders offer students to help confront sexual assault is bystander intervention practices. The second part of this study analyzed whether there was a difference based on institution type regarding students' confidence to intervene, along with any perceived barriers that may inhibit bystander intervention.

Bystander Intervention

Bystander intervention has become a significant programing tool across higher education to equip students who may face sexual assault situations. Both male and female students are encouraged to have agency and help diffuse potentially dangerous sexual assault occurrences. Studies show that when done well, bystander intervention often contributes to sexual assault prevention (Andresen & Blais, 2019; Edwards et al., 2017; Exner-Cortens & Cummings, 2017).

This study found students attending Christian institutions were more willing and felt better equipped to intervene as a bystander. Both men and women at Christian institutions reported they would intervene as a bystander at higher levels when compared to men and women at secular institutions. Additionally, men at Christian schools exhibited more confidence in knowing how to intervene as a bystander as compared to men at secular schools. These findings support prior research that men and women with higher levels of religiosity are more willing to intervene in potential sexual assault occurrences (Foubert & Rizzo, 2013).

Although bystander intervention is a primary preventative practice taught in higher education, students report that barriers may inhibit their ability or willingness to intervene. Lower levels of bystander efficacy, a fear of facing negative consequences, or in some cases a fear for personal safety, are some of the barriers reported in the literature (Krauss et al., 2017). This study found a difference in the perception of barriers such as these between students attending a Christian-affiliated institution and a secular university, particularly as reported by women. Women at Christian colleges reported significantly fewer barriers inhibiting them from intervention than did women at the secular university. Researchers suggest that continual training and understanding of bystander intervention practices may lead to higher levels of efficacy (Krauss et al., 2017). The barriers to intervention practices can be mitigated if institutions continually train students on the importance of bystander intervention and when to recognize dangerous sexual assault situations and act.

Limitations

Given our interest in studying the most common type of sexual violence on college campuses, we studied male perpetrators and female victims. In making this choice, we

left out an exploration of other kinds of sexual violence, particularly male-on-male sexual violence. We encourage researchers to study this important phenomenon, particularly as it occurs in Christian colleges and universities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Many potential areas for future research are suggested by the results of this study. A logical question that follows from the finding that students at Christian colleges are more willing to intervene to prevent sexual violence is why? Is there something about the culture of Christian colleges that makes students at such colleges more likely to intervene, is it something about the individuals who choose to go to Christian colleges that makes them different, or might it be a combination of both?

The findings of this study suggest that less sexual violence happens on Christian college campuses. Again, a question that invites future research is why is this so? Is it that students at Christian colleges are less frequently engaging in consensual encounters making them less likely to experience non-consensual encounters? This area is ripe for further study. Additional research is recommended to continue to explore the nuances found in this study, particularly why women report equally low barriers to intervene in a sexual assault situation regardless of institution type. Qualitative research examining the reasons for this finding could be illuminating, as would be any result showing likelihood of intervening. In addition, because researchers have noted that the intersection of religion and same-sex attraction among college students is fraught with challenges, subsequent research should investigate sexual violence in Christian colleges among persons who identify as LGBTQ (Chonody et al., 2013).

Implications for Practice

This study provides preliminary evidence to student development practitioners at Christian colleges suggesting that their campuses may be safer institutions to attend, from a sexual violence perspective, than are secular institutions. With lower rates of women experiencing sexual violence, lower rates of men committing sexual violence, and higher rates of intervening as bystanders, this study demonstrates that the Christian colleges in this sample were environments where sexual assault was less likely to occur. Extreme caution should be taken to make generalizations based on our study, however, given that only one secular institution was used as a comparison to Christian institutions. Still, student development practitioners might present the results of this study to parents and students from their institutions to reinforce students' desire to intervene in dangerous situations. For example, if students hear that students at Christian colleges are more likely to intervene as bystanders, this finding may serve as motivation for students to act in accordance with that norm. In addition, sharing results from this study with potential students seems wise, as long as it is acknowledged that future research replicating these findings is needed.

Conclusion

This study is a first step in better understanding potential differences between students' experiences with sexual assault based on institution type. Unfortunately, sexual assault occurs across the landscape of higher education. However, the findings of this study suggest that students attending the Christian affiliated institutions in our sample experienced lower levels of sexual assaults than reported at the public institution in our sample. Additionally, students attending Christian institutions feel better equipped to step in and intervene when a potentially dangerous sexual assault occurrence presents itself. However, the basic premise that religiosity plays an important role in curbing harmful behavior aligns with this study's conclusions. Choosing an institution of higher education is a critical decision many make. This study provides another variable that students may use to help make this decision.

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