Factors that Influence Bystander Intervention of Sexual Harassment

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Sexual violence, which includes sexual assault, stalking, and harassment, continues to be a pervasive problem within the collegiate population. Studies have shown that college students are four times more likely to experience sexual violence than the general population. Women are twice as likely than men to be a target of sexual harassment in day-to-day life, which creates feelings of hypervigilance and anxiety. These feelings, as reported by victims, make it difficult to focus on academic work and/or work with the opposite sex in academic settings. Bystander interventions, which includes both confrontational and nonconfrontational responses, have been shown to be effective in mitigating and reducing sexual harassment in work and academic settings. The present study investigates the factors which influence confrontational or nonconfrontational bystander intervention within a collegiate campus. Factors investigated include gender, sense of community, which was measured through a three-item sense of community scale which participants answered on a Likert scale, and knowing a sexual violence victim. The present study utilizes secondary data collected during the 2003-2004 school year at a Northeastern public university. Participants were given a sexual harassment scenario and were asked to rank confrontational nonconfrontational responses as most to least likely to engage in if that scenario were to occur. Responses were coded as “willing to engage in intervention” and “unwilling to engage in intervention.” Chi-squared and Mann-Whitey U-tests were run to analyze if a significant relationship exists between gender, knowing a sexual valence victim, and sense of community, and being willing to engage in either a confrontational or nonconfrontational intervention strategy. Sense of community was found to have a significant relationship to being willing to engage in a nonconfrontational intervention strategy. The current study provides essential information towards creating harassment prevention strategies on collegiate campuses.