

Sexual Assault is NEVER 'Normal'

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Sexual assault - “any type of forced or coerced sexual contact or behavior that occurs without consent” (Office on Women’s Health, Department of Health and Human Services). This growing epidemic is occurring in communities across America, especially college campuses, at outrageous rates. The result - an unconscious complacency that leads to the normalization of sexual assault. In this deliberation, we will be assessing the multiple factors contributing to this normalization in the Penn State community by approaching the issue from three different angles: policy, sex education, and rape culture.

Before we begin, it is important to note that Penn State does have policies in place regarding sexual assault. The question to consider has become whether or not these policies are effective in driving the community to (1) lower the

number of people who are victimized by sexual assault, (2) inform involved individuals how to avoid and/or prevent sexual assault from occurring, and (3) clearly define what consent is and to what extent it can be given under intoxication.

Being that Penn State is a very diverse campus, enrolled students arrive on campus with a broad continuum of differing sex education backgrounds. The gray area existing between drunken hookups and rape is one that has often gone unnoticed. But not anymore. By participating in this deliberation, we will discuss the important issue of the normalization of sexual assault within the Penn State community. Doing so is a joint effort to raise awareness of the problem while allowing the community to discuss possible solutions that could lead to the end of the normalization of sexual assault at Penn State.



Redefining Penn State's policy and infrastructure.

While Penn State's policy defines sexual assault, many have trouble interpreting whether or not it explicitly defines what is consent. The policy in place is not actively solving the problem. Rather it only aims to combat the issue while it exists on campus, reinforcing the normalization. The goal of this approach is to clearly define what consent is on Penn State's policy page while also discussing more ways that the policy can be made more effective.

Improving sex education.

There is varied opinion on the roll sex education should play in providing students the tools they need to combat sexual assault. This is perpetuated by students' different sex education backgrounds. As a result, the definition of consent and sexual education tends to vary. The goal of this approach is to discuss ways that Penn State can try and improve its students' sexual education and level the playing field between students' previous sexual education levels.

Reforming Penn State's rape culture.

The "rape culture" ingrained into Penn State contributes to the normalization of sexual assault. Penn State is without a question a "party school." Just by common association, participants are inevitably inclined to undermine the emergence of sexual assault due to sheer frequency of occurrence. To change this, we must reassess the roles and responsibilities of all involved stakeholders. The goal of this approach is to discuss ways that the university and individuals can take on their responsibilities to end Penn State's rape culture.

Framework For Deliberation

Whether it is through the reformation of policy infrastructure, sex education or campus rape culture, we must change the nature of sexual assault. Sexual assault is NEVER "normal." Penn State's community needs to stand up against the normalization of sexual assault which has begun to plague it culture. While this is not at all an easy task, canceling out the factors that contribute to its position as a social norm will alleviate some of the tension behind the issue. In order to achieve this, the community and the university must come together and discuss their responsibilities towards changing the issue. This deliberation will work to raise awareness for the problem of sexual assault on Penn State's campus while working with community members to come up potential solutions.

By participating in this deliberation, community members will gain a better understanding of the current policy and rape culture at Penn State. They will also focus on the contribution that student's differing sex education backgrounds makes to the problem of sexual assault at Penn State. By altering the perspective in which most people see the issue, the deliberation will naturally inch us, as a community, closer toward a solution for the normalization of sexual assault at Penn State.

APPROACH ONE: Redefining Penn State's Policy and Infrastructure



According to Penn State’s official policy on sexual assault (Policy AD85), the goal of the University is to maintain an environment “free of harassment and free of discrimination against any person because of age, race, color, ancestry, national origin, religion, creed, service in the uniformed services (as defined in state and federal law), veteran status, sex, sexual orientation, marital or family status, pregnancy, pregnancy-related conditions, physical or mental disability, gender, perceived gender, gender identity, genetic information or political ideas. (Policy AD85, 2014).” The AD85 deems sexual assault to be when a person engages in sexual intercourse or deviate sexual intercourse without the victim’s consent; this includes rape, fondling, incest, or statutory rape. The AD85’s purpose is to “establish University policy prohibiting sex and/or gender-based harassment and misconduct, as well as to define types of misconduct that must be reported (Policy AD85, 2014).”

The Issue of Consent and Alcohol

Consent is a challenging concept to define as it is often situational. It must be freely given and mutual. Consent cannot be given under the threat of physical force or if an individual is under duress. It must instead be an uncoerced and definite “yes”. When incapacitation due to alcohol/drugs consumption is involved, consent cannot be given. According to the Washington Post, “Drinking is central to college culture and to sexual assault (Brown, Hendrix & Svrluga, 2015)”. This highlights a major flaw in the

AD85: the lack of articulating correlation between underage drinking and sexual assault. According to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll, there is a clear connection between intoxication and sexual assault; this is especially prevalent in a college environment (Policy AD85, 2014).

Stuart Dunning III, the country prosecutor in charge of the area surrounding Michigan State University, oversees 50,000 college students and their community. According to Dunning, the majority of the cases that cross his office involve young individuals who have been drinking. Dunning goes so far as to refer to alcohol as a “date-rape drug” (Brown, Hendrix & Svrluga, 2015). However, it is important to recognize that correlation does not equal causation when it comes to alcohol consumption and sexual assault. Regardless, when addressing the issue of consent, the role of alcohol or other intoxicating substances should be outlined in the AD85 policy.

The Lack of Clearly Listing Available Resources

In a college environment, it has become more challenging than ever to “catch” the perpetrator of a sexual assault incident, based on the array of factors involved. Furthermore, it is increasingly difficult to allocate blame when both individuals involved in a sexual assault were intoxicated. It is nearly impossible to prove intoxication by the time a rape kit is conducted, and by that point, 63 percent of all college sexual assaults will have been missed or overlooked (Brown, Hendrix & Svrluga. 2015).

The Penn State University policy includes information on where to report a sexual assault incident and assures the victim that if they were intoxicated and happen to be underage, they will not be penalized for it. However, it fails to address the psychological duress that is often a result of sexual assault. It does not mention the resources available to sexual assault victims at Penn State, such as the Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS); these resources should be provided to anyone who reports an incident of sexual assault. CAPS and Penn State's other resources can help with difficulties such as anxiety, depression, difficulties in relationships, sexual assault and sexual abuse recovery, etc (CAPS, 2016). The absence of this information undermines the importance of the fact that victims of sexual assault often require help after going through those situations and that mental health is important, especially for students to have an equal education. There are also resources at the University like the Center for Women Students, which supports students who have been victims of sexual violence, relationship violence, stalking, and/or harassment. They have resources like Title IX information, Penn State's Policy on Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Related Inappropriate Conduct. Additionally, they offer Penn State Libraries Resources on Child Abuse and Neglect, and Pennsylvania Crime Victim Rights: Your Rights as a Crime Victim (Center for Women Students). This is a very important resource since it provides victims with information about their rights and what they can do if they decide to report an incident or go further into legal matters with it. This is a place should have been included in the policy does not appear as a resource to victims. This in turn gives victims

the idea that they do not have any support from their Penn State community.

Another resource that is not necessarily linked to Penn State, but still serves as a resource, is the Centre County Women's Resource Center, which has a 24- hour hotline to aid victims. It also offer professional free help for women, men and children, who have experiences sexual assault, domestic violence, and or stalking. It also offers its services to people of all gender and sexual identities. This is an important resource that helps victims know that not only do they have support from Penn State, but also from the community at State College (Centre County Women's Resource Center). These resources are very important and should be included in the policy as a way to not only list the details of the policy, but also what happens next for these victims and what is available for them. It also has no costs, therefore including it in the policy would translate a more comprehensive policy. Another aspect to look at would be adding follow- ups to notification of Sexual Assault, to see if the perpetrator has been attained, and if they received any consequences. Did they even find this person? These details offer relieve and awareness to the normalization of Sexual Assault and these are solutions that are very simple and can help the victims tremendously.

What We Could Do

We propose curbing the normalization of sexual assault through improvement of Penn State's AD85 policy. This includes providing clearer and more comprehensive definitions of "consent" and "sexual assault" as well as



clearer outlines of the legal repercussions for perpetrators and the steps victims can take to report incidents (Policy AD85, 2014). Furthermore, the policy should include a more comprehensive list of university and community based resources for victims of sexual assault. While the recommended actions work toward this overall goal, they do each have their own trade-offs that must be considered.

- * **Clearly define “consent” and “sexual assault” on Penn State’s policy page.**

But it is not easy to define; so many variables like alcohol, etc.

- * **Clearly outline on Penn State’s policy page the legal repercussions for perpetrators of sexual assault as well as the steps victims can take to report sexual assault incidents.**

But so many variables to consider (ex. alcohol and drugs, regret the following morning after “giving consent” the night before, etc.) that this could change on a case-by-case basis.

- * **List a “one stop shop” of local resources - both university and community based - on Penn State’s policy page where victims can get help without feeling they are “just another number adding to a very large statistic of people who are sexually assaulted at Penn State.”**

But if sexually assaulted, the policy page is likely not the first place victims will think of going to if seeking help.

APPROACH Two: Improving Sex Education



Penn State's Approach to Improving Sex Education for Its Students

Penn State developed two online educational learning modules, AWARE and SAFE, to help prepare incoming freshmen deal with the very real issues of alcohol and sexual assault on campus. These programs are "required" to be completed during the spring or summer months prior to arriving for New Student Orientation (NSO).

Penn State AWARE is a confidential, online sexual assault awareness tool that focuses on teaching students how to handle these situations. The program educates students about relationship violence, sexual assault, stalking and sexual harassment. The program's goal is to help freshmen develop practical skills to keep them and their friends safe. The module is designed to take 45 minutes to complete, it can be taken in segments and the entire program must be completed to fulfill the requirement.

Penn State SAFE is a confidential, online alcohol educational tool. The module uses science-based research to educate students about alcohol and its effects. Whether the participants drink or not, the program is designed help them make educated decisions regarding alcohol and introduce them to the campus's typical drinking behaviors (First Year - Education and Learning Modules).

Unfortunately, there are major loopholes diminishing the effects of AWARE and SAFE. The program's software does not require the participant to remain on the webpage as the educational information is presented. Additionally, there are few if any summary

"quiz" questions to test that the participant has understood the information presented. Some students don't even complete the modules yet face no concrete consequences. Many freshmen when asked about the modules openly confess they did not pay any attention to the lessons taught by Penn State AWARE and SAFE.

Once at NSO, students are required to participate in one seminar that shows sexual assault educational videos followed by questions. However, this too garnered little more reaction than a rolled eye by freshmen. There were more stimulating and important things to do at NSO such as picking classes.

Official Legislation on the Subject of Sex Education and Consent

Sex education is not implemented uniformly across the country. Each state has a different legislative policy on sex education for its secondary school system. Furthermore, what can (and cannot) be taught in sex education as well as the implications of "consent" and "sexual assault" vary greatly.

The state of Pennsylvania requires public school districts to teach a variety of issues related to sex education: "Instructions and materials must be age appropriate and all information presented must be medically accurate" (National Conference of State Legislators). It also stipulates providing information on sexting and affirmative consent (National Conference of State Legislatures).

As of right now, only nine states have legislative policy regarding consent. These



states include Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Washington and Utah. Additionally, Ohio law specifically states that abstinence is the preferred teaching.

What We Could Do

We propose curbing the normalization of sexual assault by improving the implementation of sex education both at the university and secondary educational level. The university should place greater emphasis on creating effective SAFE and AWARE campaigns. Further sex education can take the shape through Freshmen Seminar courses. If waiting until college is too late to instill fundamental sex education concepts, then implementing a uniform sex education curriculum in high school would improve overall knowledge of sexual assault. While the recommended actions work toward this overall goal, they each have their own trade-offs that must be considered.

*** Enhance Penn State’s role in teaching sex education by putting greater emphasis on the SAFE and AWARE campaigns. This includes mandating that all freshmen complete the modules prior to scheduling classes at NSO and incorporating summary quizzes that**

must be passed in order to show retention of information.

But if this approach is to work, students’ entire mentality surrounding these modules will have to change. Currently, little attention is given to these “trivial” modules as students try to get through the material as fast as possible without actually absorbing the information presented.

*** Build into the Freshman Seminar curriculum a series of lessons related to sex education, particularly lessons that are about protecting oneself from sexual assault.**

But no one actively wants to sit through “boring” sex education lessons.

*** Implement a uniform sex education curriculum in high school.**

But sex education is a states’ rights issue, and it would be difficult to implement uniformly across all schools. Schools would be discussing ethical and moral issues that one might consider to be the responsibility of the parents.



APPROACH Three: Redefining Penn State's Rape Culture



At Penn State University, students are given campus alerts whenever a reported assault case occurs. These reports are usually vague and seldom give any in-depth insight on the actual chain of events.

Penn State's Rape Culture

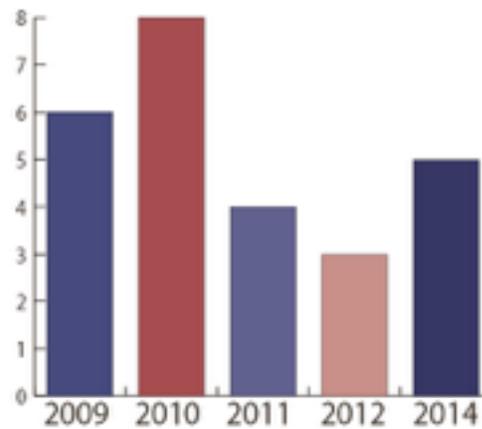
According to a survey done by Penn State University in 2015, of 9,427 respondents, more than a quarter of females said that they were victims of sexual assault while attending the university. Over 80% of female respondents said that they experienced sexual harassment, which by the survey's definition ranges from being "treated differently because of your sex" to being "sent or posted unwelcome sexual comments, jokes or pictures." Despite these numbers, the vast majority said that they didn't report the incidents of sexual assault or harassment (Snyder).

This could be due to rape culture, which according to the Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) rape crisis center is the "way in which society blames victims of sexual assault and normalized male sexual violence("What is Rape Culture?")." We normalize these activities and some unconscious level accept that they will happen. We sometimes sacrifice our values or what we know is right or don't stand up for ourselves or others because we feel like that is a consequence of partaking in certain activities.

One can be certain that a major activity for college students is the partying scene. Penn State University once held the coveted number one spot on the Princeton Review's

The First Eight Weeks: By the Numbers

The State College police focus on the first eight weeks of the semester by putting out extra patrols. Below are the number of sexual assaults reported to State College police in those eight weeks.



Source: Lt. Keith Bell

Alexis Iannuzzi/Collegian

rankings of top party schools in the US (Cole). That was in 2009; Penn State has since dropped out of the top ten, but the party image most certainly remains.

According to an article written for The Daily Collegian, a freshman that was interviewed assessed the situation by stating that "a lot of the things here are centered on drinking and that is how you socialize. My sociology teacher said that part of the culture on this campus is drinking and if you don't drink, you miss out. And I found it interesting that even teachers think you have to drink on this campus (Datwani)."

This issue of drinking complicates the sexual assault problem on campus as it creates an environment where such activities can occur. The lines between right and wrong are blurred, as are the details of last night's events the next morning.

Penn State also has an active Greek life with fraternities at the center of this party life. The Interfraternity Council (IFC) is currently developing a plan to tackle the risky behavior



One in Five Women

will be a victim of sexual assault during her college years*



Stand Up, Speak Up
Stop Sexual Violence at Penn State

For information and resources on how you can prevent and respond to sexual violence on our campuses, visit www.RockEthics.psu.edu/rockethics/leadership



the often occurs at these socials, which includes sexual assault, and as a result, socials at Penn State are currently suspended.

In 2015, Penn State fraternity Kappa Delta Rho came under fire for the supposed involvement of past and present members in posting pictures of nude and apparently unconscious women to a private Facebook page run by the group. There are similar situations occurring at fraternity houses all across the country, not just here at Penn State.

A problem that seems to arise is the attitude towards these practices. One of the Kappa Delta Rho fraternity members commented to a magazine, “Here’s a quick reality check: everyone - from Bill Clinton to your grandfather to every Greek organization in the nation does the same old stuff, just as they have been for the entirety of human history. The fire of indignant, misplaced self-righteousness that looks to ruin people’s lives and unjustly ruin reputations is the abuse and violation that should be at the center of discussion, not the humorous, albeit possibly misguided, antics of a bunch of college kids (Otterbein).”

While there may be some truth to his first statement that “everyone’s doing it;” that

certainly doesn’t make it right. This attitude is one that people hesitate to put forth, but may be more common than you think. This approach would say that this is precisely the problem; the acceptance of this as normal male activity is what needs to change. Another aspect worth mentioning is that fraternities are the ones hosting socials, which reinforces the patriarchal structure that places the men in the power position since the women there are their guests.

What We Could Do

Many people think that the campus sexual assault problem can be attributed to other larger societal issues and attitudes, surrounding systems of power and the societal structure that is already in place. Therefore, by this view, to simply put a policy in place or to have students take an online survey is to put a band-aid on a much bigger wound. Penn State’s sexual assault problem is too complex for it to be eradicated solely through such band-aid style solutions. Instead, the fundamental culture in which it thrives in must change in order to tackle this problem and create a safer campus environment.

We propose curbing the normalization of sexual assault by reforming Penn State’s rape culture - a sociocultural environment

that is a direct product of the involved stakeholders. The university and students must take responsibility in reforming this culture. The university should reform the image of Penn State as a party school, offering alcohol-free alternatives to the party scene. Likewise, Greek life could be made coed to reverse traditional gender roles and monthly statistics could be added to Timely Warning reports to mitigate sexual assault normalization. Finally, the students must take personal responsibility in changing the rape culture by taking a conscious stand against the normalization of sexual assault. While the recommended actions work toward this overall goal, they each have their own trade-offs that must be considered.

*** The university must accept its responsibility towards reforming the school's image as a party school. In order to change this image, Penn State could sponsor more alcohol-free events for its students to serve as alternatives to the weekend party scene. It can advertise the events run by the Office of Student Activities through a weekly newsletter that is emailed to each University Park student with details on the available weekend activities.**

But by providing more alternatives to the weekend party scene, Penn State would have to delegate a greater proportion of its yearly budget to the Office of Student Activities thereby decreasing funding to another department. By minimizing the party culture, the university would be crossing boundaries by controlling off-campus activities. Also, the university's recruitment endeavors could be hurt by taking away Penn State's party school image.

*** Make all of Greek life coed. This action would result in the reduction of male-dominant power structures that run parties and socials. The site of the parties would also no longer occur in all-male houses, limiting the ability of fraternities to be engaged in the sexual assault of female visitors.**

But fraternities and sororities would either be hesitant or would resist the changes altogether. They might be unwilling to give up traditional gender roles, feeling that the university is overstepping its role.

*** Add monthly summary statistics and analysis reports to the Timely Warning system.**

But the Timely Warning system increases students' exposure to sexual assault situations. This in turn increases the normalcy of sexual assault within the Penn State community. Plus, the likelihood that students will take time out of their day to read these reports is low.

*** It is the personal responsibility of the student at Penn State to stand up against sexual assault. The student must become the force that chooses to reform the rape culture at Penn State. The first step to achieving reform requires each student to become conscious of the problem and attempt to decrease the culture's emphasis on sexualization through their own behaviors and actions.**

But it would be incredibly difficult to change an aspect that is so ingrained into the culture of Penn State. Students' own morals and opinions might lead them to believe that the sexual assault issue is not a problem or that is not their individual responsibility to end it.

IN SUMMARY

Sexual assault is NEVER “normal.” Unfortunately, the nature of the college environment surrounding Penn State has created a community where sexual assault is being normalized. As responsible citizens, we can take action to do something about this. The first step is by participating in this deliberation. Through community discussion, we can assess possible solutions as well as any potential limitations each solution brings. No idea is a bad idea; together we work to make Penn State and the State College community a safe environment for everyone.

Change can come through the reformation of policy infrastructure, sex education and campus rape culture. Penn State’s current policy can be improved by clarifying the language presented, disincentivizing perpetrators by outlining legal consequences, and aiding sexual assault victims by including the steps to report incidents as well as listing all available resources that can be used by victims to get the help they deserve. However, there are many variables to consider when making something as concrete as policy. Also important is the consideration that victims might not think to consult the policy page after experiencing something as traumatic as sexual assault.

Sex education is another area that change can be implemented to reduce the normalization of sexual assault. This is two fold - at the university level and at the secondary education level. Penn State’s

SAFE and AWARE online modules do provide some information on the topic, but they are often disregarded by most students. Lessons on preventing sexual assault can be incorporated into the mandatory Freshman seminar courses. However, how much will this change the attitudes of the students? At the secondary education level, there is no uniform sex education curriculum. Changing this and enforcing the idea that sexual assault is not normal prior to students ever arriving at college will likely mitigate the issue, but this crosses boundaries into the topic of states’ rights.

Finally, Penn State’s rape culture needs to be reformed if the normalization of sexual assault is ever going to be fixed. This change can come about when both the university and its students address their personal responsibilities. Penn State should assess role in portraying the university as a “party school” while the students must consciously stand against the normalization of sexual assault - key word: conscious. However, these roles are rooted in age-old tradition, and it would be near impossible to change the perceived responsibility in this community overnight.

The normalization of sexual assault is a complex issue. Every solution has its trade-off. We as a community must come together to discuss what is best for us as a whole and what we are willing to do to combat this growing epidemic.

Approach One: Redefining Penn State's Policy and Infrastructure

<u>Our proposed solution</u>	<u>Potential consequences or limitation</u>
Clearly define “consent” and “sexual assault” on Penn State’s policy page	<i>But</i> it is not easy to define; so many variables like alcohol, etc
Clearly outline on Penn State’s policy page the legal repercussions for perpetrators of sexual assault as well as the steps victims can take to report sexual assault incidents	<i>But</i> so many variables to consider (ex. alcohol and drugs, regret the following morning after “giving consent” the night before, etc.) that this could change on a case-by-case basis
List a “one stop shop” of local resources - both university and community based - on Penn State’s policy page where victims can get help without feeling they are “just another number adding to a very large statistic of people who are sexually assaulted at Penn State.	<i>But</i> if sexually assaulted, the policy page is likely <u>not</u> the first place victims will think of going to if seeking help

Approach Two: Improving Sex Education

<u>Our proposed solution</u>	<u>Potential consequences or limitation</u>
Enhance Penn State’s role in teaching sex education by putting greater emphasis on the SAFE and AWARE campaigns. This includes mandating that all freshmen complete the modules prior to scheduling classes at NSO and incorporating summary quizzes that must be passed in order to show retention of information	<i>But</i> if this approach is to work, students’ entire mentality surrounding these modules will have to change. Currently, little attention is given to these “trivial” modules as students try to get through the material as fast as possible without actually absorbing the information presented
Build into the Freshman Seminar curriculum a series of lessons related to sex education, particularly lessons that are about protecting oneself from sexual assault	<i>But</i> no one actively wants to sit through “boring” sex education lessons
Implement a uniform sex education curriculum in high school	<i>But</i> sex education is a states’ rights issue, and it would be difficult to implement uniformly across all schools. Schools would be discussing ethical and moral issues that one might consider to be the responsibility of the parents

Approach Three: Redefining Penn State's Rape Culture

<u>Our proposed solution</u>	<u>Potential consequences limitation</u>
<p>The university must accept its responsibility towards reforming the school's image as a party school. In order to change this image, Penn State could sponsor more alcohol-free events for its students to serve as alternatives to the weekend party scene. It can advertise the events run by the Office of Student Activities through a weekly newsletter that is emailed to each University Park student with details on the available weekend activities</p>	<p><i>But</i> by providing more alternatives to the weekend party scene, Penn State would have to delegate a greater proportion of its yearly budget to the Office of Student Activities thereby decreasing funding to another department. By minimizing the party culture, the university would be crossing boundaries by controlling off-campus activities. Also, the university's recruitment endeavors could be hurt by taking away Penn State's party school image</p>
<p>Make all of Greek life coed. This action would result in the reduction of male-dominant power structures that run parties and socials. The site of the parties would also no longer occur in all-male houses, limiting the ability of fraternities to be engaged in the sexual assault of female visitors.</p>	<p><i>But</i> fraternities and sororities would either be hesitant or would resist the changes altogether. They might be unwilling to give up traditional gender roles, feeling that the university is overstepping its role</p>
<p>Add monthly summary statistics and analysis reports to the Timely Warning system</p>	<p><i>But</i> the Timely Warning system increases students' exposure to sexual assault situations. This in turn increases the normalcy of sexual assault within the Penn State community. Plus, the likelihood that students will take time out of their day to read these reports is low</p>
<p>It is the personal responsibility of the student at Penn State to stand up against sexual assault. The student must become the force that chooses to reform the rape culture at Penn State. The first step to achieving reform requires each student to become conscious of the problem and attempt to decrease the culture's emphasis on sexualization through their own behaviors and actions</p>	<p><i>But</i> it would be incredibly difficult to change an aspect that is so ingrained into the culture of Penn State. Students' own morals and opinions might lead them to believe that the sexual assault issue is not a problem or that is not their individual responsibility to end it.</p>

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