

When "No" isn't enough

Date rape comes out from under the covers

by Robb Frederick
The Collegian

She was walking back from a party when she saw him, standing behind a car in the dark parking lot. His eyes were bright from under the ski mask, but not quite as bright as the light reflecting off the knife in his hand. Suddenly afraid, she tried to run, but he was too fast, knocking her to the ground, covering her mouth, pressing her exposed back against the cold, hard asphalt. She should have never been alone; she should have known better. After all, this is how most rapes happen, right? Wrong.

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"The fact is, date rape is the most common type of sexual assault," explains Patricia Puline, community education coordinator for the Erie County Rape Crisis Center. "Unfortunately, it's also the least understood type."

The confusion surrounding date rape has intensified in recent months, as a nation of television viewers tuned in to the highly publicized rape trials of William Kennedy Smith and Mike Tyson.

As the cases unfolded, the stereotypical image of rapists shifted from menacing "bogeymen" lurking in dark alleys to well-known individuals who knew their victims, who admitted to having sexual relations with those victims, and who simply explained that "things got out of hand."

This revised attacker profile has been supported by a number of studies, including a report from the Center for Women

*This is a fictitious name.



Greg Geibel/The Collegian

Just one more: Alcohol consumption, according to Dean of Student Services Dr. Chris Reber, can open the door for sexual assaults. "However, if you think alcohol will protect you in a court of law -- you're wrong," he says.

Studies at University Park, which claims "50 to 70 percent of all rapes are committed by someone the victim knows."

The report also warns that "nearly half of all assaults occur in the victim's home," adding that many acquaintance rapes take place during established dating relationships.

According to Puline, only 10 percent of all actual rapes are reported.

"They (the Smith and Tyson cases) have had a really negative impact on the number of reported rapes," she says. "This is a matter that should have been

handled privately, not on the network news."

The suggested frequency of rape incidents varies significantly among reports; a federal study released two weeks ago found that 683,000 American women were raped in 1990, while the FBI estimates that a rape occurs every three minutes and that one in every three women will be raped sometime during her life.

The numbers take on a new meaning for college students.

"One in every six college women will be raped during her college years," the University Park study reports. Jill*, a student here at Behrend, admits that she has already become one of those women.

She had invited a friend to her residence hall room one night last spring, she says, without discussing or agreeing on the possibility of sexual relations.

As she explains, the situation "just went entirely too far."

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What can you tell me about that night?

I had been out earlier in the evening, and he had gone out with some of his friends. When I got back to my room, he called and asked if he could come over.

I guess he had been drinking, and I had had a few beers earlier too, so we were just talking and then we both fell asleep.

You were comfortable with him in the room?

Yeah. I mean, we were friends, we had already gone out a few times, and he had never tried anything like that before.

Then what happened?

Well... I remember waking up in the middle of the night, and I was totally undressed and he was on top of me. And then it happened.

How did you react to that?

I was confused about the whole deal; I couldn't believe that

a light on, so I had to go to a psychologist. That helped a lot.

It still bothers me, though. It does. I guess that I didn't have any inkling at all that anything like this would happen.

I guess eventually I'll kind of grow out of it, but it's going to take a while.

Did you tell your parents about this?

Uh... no (laughs). I think my dad would probably be really upset. I think he'd be initially very angry, but then... I don't know.

As over-protective as my mother is, I think she'd understand. But knowing her, she'd probably shift the blame to me, for even letting him come up and, I mean, for even putting myself in that position.

I had to deal with that in my counseling because I thought I had done it to myself. I should have known better.

Like many rape victims, Jill decided against pressing charges against her attacker.

The office of Student Services does receive reports of sexual assaults each year, however.

"We have very, very few reports of sexual assaults," says Dean of Student Services Dr. Chris Reber.

"Each year we have one or more alleged cases -- cases we learn of but where the victims choose not to report the incident - but there's always the fear that

He said we were going out, and that he had a right to do that if he wanted to.

it was happening. Afterwards... I don't know, I was ashamed that it did, because I knew I should have handled it differently.

I just remember feeling suffocated at the time, but the next morning I understood what had really happened.

Do you think he realized what he was doing?

He knew what he was doing, but he didn't know it could be considered rape. I told him, "I didn't consent to it; there was no reason for you to totally strip me down, no reason at all."

And how did he react?

He said we were going out, and that he had a right to do that if he wanted to.

How did you deal with this?

I couldn't sleep without my roommate in the room or without

this is just the tip of the iceberg."

Charges were filed last year against one individual, but they were eventually dropped, says Larry Silvis, manager of Police and Safety.

"Sometimes it's difficult," Silvis explains. "A victim can almost be raped a second time through the investigation that follows."

"I feel Behrend is a very safe campus," he adds, "but I do believe there's more of this than what we're seeing."

To encourage victims to report sexual assaults, Reber says, the University provides free emergency medical treatment, confidential counseling, and year-round programming.

"This matter is taken very seriously here," he says. "The victim is our foremost concern, and we will do whatever it takes to meet each of their needs and protect their identity at all costs."

Where to turn

If you are a victim of a date rape or sexual assault, the following sources can help arrange emergency medical care and post-trauma counseling. All efforts will be made to guarantee confidentiality.

Erie County Rape Crisis Center
870-7087
Toll Free Hotline
1-800-352-RAPE

Family Crisis Intervention, Inc.
456-2014

Penn State-Behrend Student Services
898-6111

Penn State-Behrend Police & Safety
898-6101

Wesleyville Police Department
899-0681