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A Genre Comparison of Sexual Assault on College Campuses

Sexual assault (SA) remains a significant and pervasive issue on college campuses, affecting students regardless of their gender, socioeconomic background, or academic standing. The range of non-consensual behaviors, from harassment to rape, has profound and lasting effects on victims, including physical, emotional, and psychological trauma. Although awareness of the issue has grown, many cases of sexual assault continue to go unreported. This may be due to a lack of faith in the legal and institutional responses or a perception that speaking out will not result in meaningful change. Different genres play a role in how this issue is communicated, influencing how audiences perceive and respond to it. This analysis compares how sexual assault is represented across three different genres: a news article, a documentary, and a social media post.

A New York Times article titled *New Title IX Rules Leave College Officials in the Middle* by Anemona Hartocolis (2021) covers the Title IX policy change and its impact on sexual assault survivors provides a fact driven perspective on the issue. The purpose of the article was to inform its audience about policy changes, statistics, and institutional responses to sexual assault. The intended audience was the general public, policy makers, students, and educators. The tone is very formal and objective and this article heavily relied on facts, expert opinions, and survivor testimonies for credibility. The structure of it was quite traditional, beginning with a

summary which then was followed by background information, commentary, and case studies. The article highlights a case at the University of California, Berkeley, where conflicting interpretations of Title IX policies led to uncertainty in the consequences for accused students. The case involved a student who had been accused but the university struggled to handle the situation due to the shift in the Title IX regulations. This news article presents this case in a way that emphasizes legal and institutional challenges without the use of strong emotional appeals.

A major strength of the news article is its reliance on research-based information, but a limitation is its potential lack of emotional engagement or personal connection for survivors. I can see the push to remain neutral and just present facts but it's not a secret that appealing to emotions can make people more intrigued. Compared to other genres, the news article provides a structured in depth look at the policies connected to sexual assault. Unlike in documentaries which appeal more to the emotions, the article is more neutral and policy driven. However, the article can be overwhelming due to the sheer volume of information, whereas a social media post delivers a quick, concise message.

The documentary *The Hunting Ground* (2015), directed by Kirby Dick and produced by Amy Ziering, portrays an emotional perspective on sexual assault cases at U.S. colleges. The documentary sought to raise awareness, cause emotional responses, and advocate for policy change. The audience includes the general public, activists, students, and survivors. The tone changes throughout the documentary depending on what's being talked about but it switches primarily between persuasive and emotional, by incorporating interviews, presenting statistics, and storytelling. The structure of the documentary is built around survivor testimonies, commentary, and analysis of institutional failures.

A notable example from the documentary is the case of Erica Kinsman, a former student at Florida State University who allegedly was sexually assaulted by a football player, Jameis Winston. It is important to note that as a football player, Winston received preferential treatment, a trend often observed in cases involving high-profile athletes. The film describes how the university mishandled her case, failed to support her, and prioritized the athletic program over justice. By showcasing firsthand experiences like Kinsmans the documentary highlights institutional failures in addressing campus sexual assault. The major strength of this genre is the ability to create empathy and urgency, making sexual assault on college campuses feel important and personal. However, some critics argue that documentaries can be biased because they focus on individual stories rather than the entire system itself.

Social media posts, particularly those from advocacy organizations such as RAINN (rape & Incest National Network), offer a different approach to the issue. Unlike news articles and documentaries, social media posts are meant to quickly get their points across, get public engagement, and advocate. The audience mainly consists of young adults, activists, and survivors. The tone can vary based on the message but it can be controversial, urgent, concise, and most of the time it includes hashtags, emojis, or links to more resources or further explanations.

One specific example is a Twitter thread posted by RAINN on April 6th, 2023. RAINN is the largest anti-sexual violence organization in the United States. It operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800-656-HOPE) and partners with local sexual assault service providers. It also works directly with government agencies, law enforcement, and research institutions. The post included statistics on sexual assault, survivor testimonies, and resources for those seeking help.

The tweet started off like this: “Every 68 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted/ College students are at heightened risk. Here’s what you need to know”. Then it continued to share key data, links to Title IX resources, and personal statements. Another viral post came from Chanel Miller, the survivor of the Brock Turner case, and she uses Instagram to share excerpts from her memoir *Know My Name*, encouraging survivors to speak up and seek justice.

These posts get thousands of retweets and likes, showcasing the amount of power this specific genre has. One of the key strengths of this genre is the ability to reach a large audience in a short amount of time, and get immediate interaction through likes, shares, and comments. However, a huge limitation includes the possibility of misinformation, or too much simplification of complex issues. Unlike a documentary or a news article, a social media post lacks depth making it less effective for individuals seeking a better understanding on the issue and doesn’t really have much to offer whereas somewhere else you may get an extensive analysis.

Each genre presents the topic of sexual assault on college campuses in different ways. The news article provides a research based overview, presenting useful information to policymakers, educators, and the general public. Its reliance on statistics, expert opinions, and survivor testimonies ensures that it maintains credibility. The documentary, in contrast, appeals more to the emotions, and has a more narrative driven approach, aiming to engage viewers on a personal level and push for change. Its strength is the ability to connect with viewers who may not have experienced this type of trauma. Meanwhile, the social media post serves as a tool for immediate engagement and attracting younger audiences. Unlike a news article or documentary which requires significant time being spent to read or watch and retain the information. Social

media posts lack analysis which can be a weakness in comparison to the amount of information provided by the other two genres.

The way sexual assault on college campuses is communicated varies based on genre, audience, and purpose. News articles provide in-depth analysis, documentaries trigger emotional responses, and social media posts prioritize accessibility. By utilizing all three genres, a better understanding of the issue emerges causing more informed decision making and widespread activism. An approach that combines factual reporting, personal narratives, and accessible information helps keep sexual assault a priority in public discourse and promotes solutions that support survivors.

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