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Engaging Men on College Campuses: Gendered Assumptions in Sexual Assault Prevention Education Material

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ABSTRACT: A recent trend among sexual assault prevention programs is to target men rather than the traditional approach of focusing on women. The aim of this research is to analyze how sexual assault prevention education materials are used to engage men on U.S. college campuses and the gendered assumptions these programs make about men and about masculinity. Using discourse analysis methods, this research analyzes five sexual assault prevention programs curated for college men: A Call to Men, The Men's Program, Men's Workshop with Alan Berkowitz, Mentors in Violence Prevention, and Men Can Stop Rape. Programs curated with heterosexual, cisgender men as the exclusive intended audience work within a gender binary by assuming the best way to address this issue is to redefine masculinity rather than to deconstruct it. Critiquing gendered discourse and identifying patterns of assumptions allows us room to refine our messages to be more effective, which is imperative to addressing the issue of sexual assault on college campuses.

Sexual assault is a prevalent social issue that has been garnering heightened attention in recent years. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), the largest anti-sexual assault prevention nonprofit in the U.S., sexual assault is defined as sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim.¹ Examples of sexual assault include rape, attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching, or forcing a victim to perform sexual acts.² In scientific literature, consent is most commonly defined as “the freely given verbal or nonverbal communication of feelings of willingness to engage in sexual activity.”³ Statistics across a variety of studies show that approximately 15–38 percent of women and 7–16 percent of men have experienced some form of sexual assault during their lives.⁴ Sexual assault can be both emotionally and physically traumatic for victims, resulting in unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, headaches, sleep disturbances, drug abuse, and damage to academic and social lives.⁵ The United Nations has found that women who have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner are more than twice as likely to have an abortion, almost twice as likely to experience depression, and in some regions one-and-a-half times more likely to contract HIV than women who have not experienced this type of violence.⁶

1 RAINN.org, “Sexual Assault,” 2019, <<https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault>>.

2 RAINN.org, “Sexual Assault.”

3 Raymond Massey McKie, “‘Just Say Yes’ – Sexual Consent and Boundary Setting On- and Offline: An International Perspective of Men of Varying Sexual Orientations,” M.S., Trent University (Canada), 2015, 7.

4 McKie 8. The range of variability in these percentages is due to differing methodologies and research approaches taken. The World Health Organization supports the finding of 35% of women having experienced sexual assault.

5 McKie 8; Laura Lynne Kerner, Jim Kerner, and Susan D. Herring, “Sexual Assaults on College Campuses,” *Journal of Academic Administration in Higher Education* 13.2 (2017): 43.

6 UN Women, “Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women,” 2017, <<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>>.



On college campuses, sexual assault makes up 32 percent of all violent crimes reported under the Clery Act, and college women ages 18–24 are three times more likely than women in general to experience sexual assault.⁷ These statistics indicate that institutions of higher education are spaces where sexual assault occurs frequently, due in part to college campus culture, which tends to include increased alcohol and drug consumption, partying, and hook ups.⁸ Although this culture does not cause or excuse assault, it does lead to situations in which many assaults occur. While prevention methods have traditionally focused on engaging women exclusively, men are now more frequently incorporated into educational programs aimed to address the issue of sexual assault.⁹ In this paper, I analyze gendered assumptions embedded in sexual assault prevention education material used to engage men on U.S. college campuses. This analysis also sheds light on gendered assumptions about men within institutions of higher education at-large.

I begin by reviewing sexual assault prevention education programs, including relevant terminology and theoretical frameworks. I examine the shift from engaging women to engaging men in prevention education, steps to and challenges of bystander intervention, use of modeling in the mainstream media, and the likelihood of men's long-term engagement in prevention work. I also explore sexual assault prevention research, programs, and theory. Next, in the methodology and analysis sections, I outline my original research examining five sexual assault programs, explain my methods, analyze the findings, and draw conclusions. Finally, both the limitations of this paper and the implications for future research are discussed.

I approach these sexual assault programs through a gendered lens, a research perspective that emerged from feminist academic scholarship and focuses on how privilege and power work to subjugate knowledge.¹⁰ This approach is fundamentally meant to be a political act of social justice, as it destabilizes norms by critiquing dominant narratives of prestige.¹¹ By using this approach to analyze the discourses used in sexual assault prevention programs and the tactics such programs use to engage college-aged men, I provide insight into the broader context of gendered assumptions in our system of higher education.

I use the term “men” to refer to the gender identity that is socially constructed within what is frequently understood as a gender binary of “men” and “women.” Gender theorist Judith Butler has

7 2017 National Crime Victims' Rights Week Resource Guide: Crime and Victimization Fact Sheets, “School & Campus Crime,” 2017, <https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/ncvrvw2017/images/en_artwork/Fact_Sheets/2017NCVRW_SchoolCrime_508.pdf>; RAINN.org, “Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics,” 2019, <<https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence>>.

8 Brooke E. DeSipio, “The Relationship between Rape Myth Acceptance, Emotional Intelligence, Leadership and Self-Esteem among Collegiate Male Athletes: An Exploratory Study,” Diss. Widener University, Center for Human Sexuality Studies, 2014, 48, 30, 90.

9 Nicole Bedera and Kristjane Nordmeyer, “‘Never Go out Alone’: An Analysis of College Rape Prevention Tips,” *Sexuality & Culture* 19.3 (2015): 534.

10 Mona Livholts, ed., *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2012) 3.

11 Livholts.



attempted to destabilize perceptions that these gender categories are biologically determined.¹² Butler coined the term “performativity” to describe repetitive socialized actions of a performative nature that both represent identities and reproduce them.¹³ These actions reinforce the social binary of gender as well as the characteristics and assumptions that are prescribed based on gender assignment. The actions and their implications become “norms” in our society, so socially anticipated that they are misunderstood as essential. The context of our society and culture has fostered an environment where hierarchical structures such as the patriarchy could develop. Forms of violence, including social hierarchies and exploitation of marginalized people, have been institutionalized as methods of social organization.¹⁴ Sexual assault occurs directly from a manifestation of these power hierarchies, which explains why unwanted sexual encounters are most commonly experienced by social minorities, particularly women of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community.¹⁵

The gender norms associated with masculinity maintain positions of institutional power over alternative, subjugated identities such as those of women or gay men.¹⁶ R.W. Connell, a leading theorist on masculinity, developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity.¹⁷ In his book *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*, he underscores that masculine identities do not necessarily have total cultural dominance, as hegemony is constructed relative to subordinate identities.¹⁸ This relational definition of hegemonic masculinity allows for both hegemonic and nonhegemonic masculinities to exist simultaneously. These identities are in constant flux and under renegotiation, depending on social context and personal positioning.¹⁹ Hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily rely on the personalities of men who maintain these privileges.²⁰ For example, a man with the privileges of hegemonic masculinity may be aware of his position and may morally disagree with it. Hegemonic masculinity thus does not make someone a “bad” person in and of itself. It does, however, contribute complacency to institutionalized hierarchies that sustain positions of personal power, and it can also cause displaced aggression toward subjugated identities.²¹

Masculinity studies researcher Michael Flood offers examples of how hegemonic masculinity impacts subjugated identities. In “Men, Sex, and Homosociality: How Bonds Between Men Shape Their Sexual Relations with Women,” he describes the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is manifested in

12 Livholts 95.

13 Livholts 98.

14 Michael Kaufman, “The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men’s Violence,” *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change*, ed. Michael Kaufman (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 3.

15 Council of Presidents, “WA St HiEd Conference on Sexual Assault: Engaging Men in Prevention,” filmed 30 Oct. 2014, YouTube video, 1:03:40, posted 3 Sept. 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02LilVcFYQ>>.

16 R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987) 183.

17 Connell 183.

18 Connell 184.

19 Connell 186.

20 Connell 185.

21 Connell 185.



all-male groups, which in turn organizes men's subordination of women and gay men.²² Flood conducted his case study on friend groups within an all-boys military school in Australia.²³ His findings illustrate that hegemonic masculinities in all-male groups lead group members to socialize with subjugated identities predominately in ways that bolster male bonding among their peers.²⁴ This can have negative impacts on subjugated identities, who may face degradation, ridicule, violence, and sexual exploitation as a result.²⁵ It also secures forms of social power among heterosexual, cisgender men.²⁶

Sexual assault disproportionately affects women due to systems of sexism that perpetuate gender-based violence. Estimates of lifetime sexual assault prevalence among women in the U.S. is 11–17 percent, but only 2–3 percent among men.²⁷ However, this is not to say that men are always the perpetrators and women always the victims. All genders can perpetrate and fall victim to sexual assault. When curating material, prevention education considers social hierarchies that influence assault, targeting those who are at the top of gender and sexual hierarchies, namely, cisgender heterosexual men. This focus may be beneficial in some respects, especially in identifying the influence that patriarchal systems have on gender-based violence.²⁸ However, it might additionally contribute to a misguided narrative that assumes that men do not or cannot experience sexual assault, or that women cannot be perpetrators.²⁹ Studies of sexual assault within LGBTQ+ communities show that approximately 30 percent of gay men have experienced sexual assault in their lives, suggesting that gay men may be increased risk of violence compared to heterosexual men.³⁰ Additionally, a national survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that 43 percent of self-identified lesbians reported experiencing intimate partner violence in their lifetime.³¹ The assumption that men cannot be victims of assault or that women cannot be perpetrators contributes to the prevalence of prevention programs in schools that work in heteronormative, cisnormative paradigms.³² Those who fall outside of the traditional cis-hetero narrative might feel their experiences are invalidated, or they might face challenges accessing support services.

22 Michael Flood, "Men, Sex, and Homosociality: How Bonds Between Men Shape Their Sexual Relations with Women," *Men and Masculinities* 10.3 (2008): 339.

23 Flood.

24 Flood 355.

25 Flood 341.

26 Flood 355.

27 Emily F. Rothman, Deinera Exner, and Allyson L. Baughman, "The Prevalence of Sexual Assault against People Who Identify as Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual in the United States: A Systematic Review," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 12.2 (2011): 55.

28 Claire Cannon and Frederick Buttell, "Illusion of Inclusion: The Failure of the Gender Paradigm to Account for Intimate Partner Violence in LGBT Relationships," *Partner Abuse* 6.1 (2015): 65.

29 Cannon and Buttell.

30 Rothman et al. 55. This study is a meta-analysis, so the 30% statistic was found among the studies included in the author's analysis. Please refer to the source for more information on this figure.

31 Cannon and Buttell 66. "Intimate partner violence" is the term used by the researchers. This includes sexual assault but may additionally encompass other forms of assault in a partnership, such as physical violence.

32 Cannon and Buttell 66.



Programs curated with heterosexual, cisgender men as the exclusive intended audience acknowledge social hierarchies that position these men with heightened social power, but they also continue to work within a gender binary by assuming that the best way to address this issue is to redefine masculinity and not to deconstruct it. Deconstruction is a method of critical analysis to understand the origins of implicit concepts within language and meanings, which can shed light on how masculinity works and why. Redefining masculinity reaffirms a gender binary and fails to question the origins of masculinity. Critiquing gendered discourse in prevention programs allows us to refine our messages to be more effective, which is imperative to addressing the issue of sexual assault.

The following literature review outlines relevant research in the field of sexual assault prevention education, including theoretical frameworks, shifts in prevention messages from engaging women to engaging men, the use of a bystander intervention model, and cases of male participation in sexual assault prevention education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS USED IN SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Sexual assault prevention models have been borrowed from the theoretical frameworks used in criminal justice interventions and reapplied in the context of intimate partner violence prevention.³³ Thus, sexual assault is commonly regarded as a legal issue, with the perpetrator characterized as a criminal breaking the law. This approach can be beneficial, giving victims a legal platform to call the police, file a restraining order, or press charges if they so desire. One consequence of criminalizing sexual assault, however, is the disproportionate impact on people of color, particularly black men.³⁴ Systems of institutionalized white power and racism cause the frequent association of black men with criminality.³⁵ Unjust profiling contributes to the disproportionate arrests and convictions of people of color as well as the occurrence of police brutality.³⁶ Between 1930 and 1964, approximately 90 percent of men executed in the U.S. for rape crimes were black men, and black men convicted of raping white women received sentences three to five times longer than other rape cases.³⁷ These statistics do not align with estimations that only about 3 percent of rapes were committed by black men.³⁸ Black men today are still more likely than white men to be convicted of rape, and people of color who are victims of assault are deemed less credible than white victims by legal systems.³⁹ Hegemonic systems of oppression influence what and who we categorize as “criminal.” Black men are negatively and wrongly implicated by these criminal categorizations, which in turn affects how we develop prevention programs as well as the target audience of these programs, i.e., men of color.⁴⁰

33 Fran S. Danis, “The Criminalization of Domestic Violence: What Social Workers Need to Know,” *Social Work* 48.2 (2003): 238.

34 Kelly Pinter, “Sexual Assault and Academic Achievement: Creating More Ideal College Campuses for Sexual Assault Survivors by Taking into Account Intersectionality and Multiracial Feminism,” Diss. Loyola University Chicago, 2015, 71.

35 Pinter 71.

36 Danis 240.

37 DeSipio 21.

38 DeSipio 22.

39 DeSipio.

40 DeSipio 13.



Prevention programs are based on a variety of theoretical frameworks, including social exchange/deterrence theory, social learning theory, feminist theory, and ecological theory.⁴¹ Social exchange/deterrence theory assumes that the course of human interaction results from pursuing awards and avoiding punishment.⁴² Prevention is viewed from a cost-benefit perspective.⁴³ Costs of being violent might be, for example, arrest, imprisonment, loss of social status, or a loss of family or a loved one.⁴⁴ Social learning theory assumes that people learn or “unlearn” violent behaviors through experiences or by observing (“modeling”), or through awards or punishments implemented immediately after an action (“reinforcement”).⁴⁵ From this perspective, behavior is flexible, as it can be learned. Feminist theory draws from the assumption that sexual assault is a manifestation of “rape culture” and the patriarchal structures that underlie our society.⁴⁶ In practice, such educational prevention approaches tend to engage men in psychoeducational programs and women in empowerment groups.⁴⁷ Ecological theory claims that no one theory can best serve in the development of prevention methodologies; rather, sexual assault is the result of combinations of micro-, meso-, and macrolevel societal influences and must be prevented by using a combination of theoretical frameworks and methodologies to develop program strategies.⁴⁸ This framework typically undergirds generalized care practices, such as social service institutions.⁴⁹

Materials from the five sexual assault programs I analyzed are based on social learning theory and feminist theory. They tend to view sexual assault as a manifestation of patriarchal structures, which aligns such programs with feminist theory. The materials and programs are also aligned with social learning theory in that they involve efforts to “teach” men by modeling communication, consent, and in some cases, bystander intervention.

PREVENTION MESSAGES

Many scholars attribute the root cause of sexual assault to sexism and patriarchal structures in our society. Traditionally, however, sexual assault prevention initiatives have primarily engaged women in their prevention efforts.⁵⁰ Because sexual assault had been widely interpreted as exclusively a “woman’s

41 Danis 239.

42 Danis 239.

43 Danis 239.

44 Danis 239.

45 Danis 239.

46 Danis 239.

47 Danis 239.

48 Danis 239.

49 Danis 239.

50 Emily Marchese, “No Women Allowed: Exclusion and Accountability in Men’s Anti-Rape Groups,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 9.2 (2008): 63.; Marc D. Rich, Ebony A. Utley, Kelly Janke, and Minodora Moldoveanu, “‘I’d Rather Be Doing Something Else’: Male Resistance to Rape Prevention Programs,” *Journal of Men’s Studies* 18.3 (2010): 274; Rachel Hall, “‘It Can Happen to You’: Rape Prevention in the Age of Risk Management,” *Hypatia* 19.3 (2004): 4.



issue,” most prevention education in the 1980s through the early 2000s focused on women.⁵¹ In these programs, the responsibility of prevention fell on the woman, who was told to adjust her behavior to avoid sexual assault.⁵² While this discourse is still prevalent in many sexual assault prevention messages, feminist movements have begun to push for a shift in prevention efforts to engage men. In response to a call from activists, colleges and universities have begun focusing on education programs targeted toward men in their mission to eliminate sexual assault from their campuses.

In an analysis of forty college websites, Nicole Bedera and Kristjane Nordmeyer examine the most popular sexual assault prevention messages among four-year institutions.⁵³ All of the schools in their sample have physical campuses, a mixed-sex student population, and the presence of Greek life.⁵⁴ The following were the most common messages on these colleges’ websites:

- There are no safe places for women.
- Women cannot trust anyone.
- Women should never be alone.
- Women are vulnerable.⁵⁵

These messages are problematic for several reasons. First, they affirm victim-blaming attitudes that hold those who experience assault responsible instead of the perpetrator. Second, they situate women as weak and vulnerable, which disempowers women and neglects to acknowledge men who are victims, women who are perpetrators, queer relationships, and nonbinary identities.

In 62.5 percent of the schools Bedera and Nordmeyer study, no prevention messages were provided at all. Only one school offered a message for men: “No means no.” Although well-meaning, this message is not comprehensive. Lack of a “no” does not mean “yes,” and even a verbal “yes” may not be consensual. Consent depends on enthusiastic agreement, so consent becomes invalidated when alternative pressures manipulate someone’s decision to say yes or when someone is afraid of the consequences of saying no. These factors should all be considered when creating prevention messages that address communication during sex.

While verbal communication is important, the message “no means no” risks valuing vocal language above nonverbal body language, which holds equal value in consent. For example, Hansen, O’Byrne, and Rapley examine miscommunication in acquaintance rape.⁵⁶ According to the researchers, women are socialized to be less direct and more defensive when saying “no,” often inferring “no” through verbal hesitation, use of the words “um” and “uh,” and closed body language rather than directly speaking the word “no.”⁵⁷ The researchers find that heterosexual men commonly argue that miscommunication about

51 Hall 3.

52 Bedera and Nordmeyer 534; Hall 1.

53 Bedera and Nordmeyer 535.

54 Bedera and Nordmeyer 535.

55 Bedera and Nordmeyer 535.

56 Susan Hansen, Rachael O’Byrne, and Mark Rapley, “Young Heterosexual Men’s Use of the Miscommunication Model in Explaining Acquaintance Rape,” *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 7.1 (2010): 45.

57 Hanson, O’Byrne, and Rapley 46.



consent occurs when women do not vocalize “no” clearly during sex, “justifying” the men’s actions as not realizing they were crossing boundaries.⁵⁸ This explanation is what Hansen and colleagues call the “miscommunication model.” The researchers link their findings to other studies showing that a clear, verbal “no” is also expected in gay and bisexual sexual encounters between men to indicate a lack of consent, so women may not be the only group implicated by the miscommunication model.⁵⁹ Most notably, Hanson, O’Byrne, and Rapley’s study indicates that men are fully equipped to pick up on nuanced body language that indicates “no” despite the assumption otherwise.⁶⁰

Although men can pick up on both body language and verbal hesitation cues, anti-sexual assault education initiatives often work to empower women to be assertive in their vocalization of “no” and to educate men about how to better interpret nuanced cues. Hanson, O’Byrne, and Rapley show that these initiatives are largely ineffective.⁶¹ They may instead prove to be harmful by circulating “rape myths” about the role of miscommunication in consent, which encourages victim-blaming and excuses perpetrators’ actions. A 2014 study found that college men are significantly more likely to accept rape myths than college women and that men who readily accept rape myths are more likely to have cognitive dispositions for committing sexual assault than men who do not.⁶²

THE BYSTANDER INTERVENTION MODEL

Bystander intervention is an increasingly common model used in men’s sexual assault prevention education materials.⁶³ The aim is to create a culture of upstanders among students. The idea behind being an “upstander” was first introduced in former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power’s book *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, which discusses “bystanding” in times of genocide post-Holocaust.⁶⁴ Power defines upstanders as those who have acted seriously upon the commitments they have made to themselves to make changes for the social good, despite personal sacrifices.⁶⁵ The term *upstanders* has been popularized by the nonprofit Facing History and Ourselves, an international educational and professional development agency, and has since been used to describe actions in a variety of situations outside of the context of genocide. The Oxford English Dictionary added the term to its collection with the following definition: “A person who speaks or acts in support of an individual or cause, particularly someone who intervenes on behalf of a person being attacked or bullied.”⁶⁶

58 Hanson, O’Byrne, and Rapley 46. This is a heteronormative argument. Heteronormativity operates under the assumption that people identify as heterosexual.

59 Hanson, O’Byrne, and Rapley 47.

60 Hanson, O’Byrne, and Rapley 47.

61 Hanson, O’Byrne, and Rapley 48.

62 DeSipio 76.

63 Erin Casey and Kristin Ohler, “Being a Positive Bystander,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27.1 (2012): 63.

64 Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) XVII; “Samantha Power on America and the Age of Genocide: Transcript,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 26 Mar. 2002.

65 “Samantha Power on America.”

66 Facing History and Ourselves, “Upstander,” 2019, <<https://www.facinghistory.org/upstander>>.



This approach to reducing sexual assault builds on cognitive behavioral theory, a method within the social learning framework discussed previously. Cognitive behavioral theory aims to reshape behavioral norms of masculinity.⁶⁷ This method may help to reduce the stigma that often keeps men from feeling comfortable standing up against sexist language or behavior. Erin Casey and Kristin Ohler explore these themes in their study “Being a Positive Bystander” for which they interviewed men currently attending college. They find that the men most comfortable intervening admitted to using a strategy that the authors name “nonhegemonic masculinity,” a method that men use to “one-up” peers to look “cooler” than other men in front of romantic interests.⁶⁸

Bystander intervention in sexual assault prevention can involve several steps. Casey and Ohler interviewed forty-three men aged eighteen and older who had joined an anti-violence against women organization within the previous two years.⁶⁹ Among these men, the most common steps mentioned for becoming involved in bystander intervention were (1) noticing a troubling situation, (2) interpreting it as problematic, (3) assuming personal responsibility for action, (4) identifying an accessible course of action, and (5) implementing this action.⁷⁰ Many sexual assault prevention education programs take these steps into account when curating material. They hope to strengthen these steps in men’s responses to problematic situations, such as speaking out against sexism, homophobia, or rape-supportive language; speaking with a friend or family member who is mistreating their partner; and intervening to address sexual harassment or other abusive situations.⁷¹

Promoting bystander intervention is challenging. Comfort in intervening is dependent on the individual. Some might feel more comfortable intervening with strangers, as they care less about what strangers may think, while others may feel more comfortable intervening with those whom they are close to.⁷² Some might feel more comfortable intervening in large groups, as there may be a greater chance to find allies, whereas others may feel more comfortable intervening in small groups or while one-on-one.⁷³ Studies analyzing the likelihood of bystander intervention have consistently found that men are more willing to intervene if they feel they share a common social identity with the perpetrator or victim.⁷⁴ In tailoring educational material to take advantage of this inclination, many programs focus heavily on situational interventions that model a state of “emergency” where the victim is in obvious distress, but they do not necessarily cover other areas of intervention such as witnessing sexist language or behavior.⁷⁵ A common fear among men uncomfortable stepping in is a perceived lack

67 Casey and Smith 955.

68 Casey and Ohler 71.

69 Casey and Ohler 67. The authors do not specify the type of “anti-violence against women” organization required for participation, so this study may include members of anti-sexual assault groups as well as other types of groups focused on preventing violence against women.

70 Casey and Ohler 64.

71 Casey and Ohler 69.

72 Casey and Ohler 70.

73 Casey and Ohler 75.

74 Casey and Ohler 65.

75 Casey and Ohler 64.



of self-knowledge, background, or necessary language to make a good case against the problematic behavior witnessed.⁷⁶ Thus, improving bystander intervention in a variety of circumstances, including situations where the victim is not in immediate and visible distress, is important for sexual assault prevention education.

Studies indicate that approximately 99 percent of reported sexual assault crimes on college campuses are committed by men, many of whom are involved with male-exclusive organizations such as fraternities or sports teams.⁷⁷ College-aged men are also the least likely to intervene if they notice problematic behavior that might indicate threat of sexual assault, especially when the instigator is a male peer.⁷⁸ Their desire to fit into the organization may prevent them from challenging their peers. In interviews about peer intervention for a 2012 study, men most commonly indicated they were afraid of standing up to their peers for fear that they would be labeled as sensitive, emotional, or a “goodie two-shoes” or “police.”⁷⁹ Through interviews with college males, Barone, Wolgemuth, and Linder find that men believe that the most effective way of reducing sexual assault through education material would be by “reclaiming cool masculinity.”⁸⁰ The men interviewed believed that prevention education programs should redefine masculinity so that nonaggressive masculinity is more highly valued than aggressive masculinity. Prevention education programs designed for men currently attempt to do just this. Prevention is thus focused exclusively on men, neglecting important research and development of prevention initiatives that incorporate those who do not identify as male.

Men are more inclined to intervene if they perceive that their male peers would likely do the same.⁸¹ For this reason, many initiatives are recruiting well-known men such as celebrities or famous athletes to speak out in the mainstream media to promote the idea that it is “normal” or “expected” for men to be upstanders in sexual assault prevention. Using male icons to promote “ideal” masculine behavior is a common example of the social learning prevention model being used to help reshape perceptions of gender.⁸² Unfortunately, celebrities often use this opportunity to speak out to benefit their self-image or to cover up transgressions of their own, as revealed by the recent #MeToo movement.

“ALLYSHIP” AND CASES OF VOLUNTARY MALE PARTICIPATION

The #MeToo movement involves people posting on social media about harassment or abuse they have experienced to shed light on the issue of assault and call out perpetrators. The movement was championed by actress Alyssa Milano, who publicly claimed that film producer Harvey Weinstein sexually harassed and abused her.⁸³ This accusation spurred a stream of accusations from other

76 Casey and Ohler 73.

77 Ryan P. Barone, Jennifer R. Wolgemuth, and Chris Linder, “Preventing Sexual Assault through Engaging College Men,” *Journal of College Student Development* 48.5 (2007): 585.

78 Casey and Ohler 75.

79 Casey and Ohler 72.

80 Barone, Wolgemuth, and Linder 592.

81 Casey and Smith 956.

82 Danis 239.

83 Hadassah Fidler, “#Metoo?” [In English], *Jerusalem Post*, 25 Oct. 2017.



public figures. At least 414 high-profile executives and employees have been exposed as perpetrators by the movement.⁸⁴ Celebrities like Matt Lauer, Morgan Freeman, Louis C.K. and many others were also called out for sexual misconduct.⁸⁵ The five allegations against Louis C.K. came as a surprise to many, sparking debates about his actions. Many people had seen him as a feminist due to his work to bolster the careers of female comedians, who are often underrepresented in the industry, as well as his incorporation of women's issues into his comedy.⁸⁶ Although Louis C.K. never publicly identified himself as a feminist, he was seen as a role model who had a positive influence on reshaping gender norms. He is just one example of the many perpetrators whose "allyship" and participation in women's movements is used (if not by him, by others) to brush off rumors of abuse and hide personal transgressions.⁸⁷ As this example shows, the "ideal" representations of masculine behavior glorified in popular media may be merely performances with ulterior motives, not true allyship that promotes anti-abusive behavior.

The possibility of ulterior motives forces us to question the authenticity of male participation in sexual assault prevention programs. Participation is frequently mandatory for members of organizations such as men's collegiate sports teams. Can these programs be effective if men are forced to participate as a requirement for being on the team? Brooke DeSipio examines the influence of male sports teams on sexual assault as well as effective engagement tactics in sexual assault prevention programs for collegiate male athletes. She finds a gap in the literature between feminist research and sports research. Feminist literature identifies aspects within all-male sports teams that lead to an environment that increases the likelihood of sexual assault, such as participation and socialization within an all-male peer structure, sexist and homophobic attitudes that can arise from a hypermasculine environment, language and conformance to rigid gender roles, male bonding activities, alcohol use, and the elevated status of athletes on college campuses.⁸⁸ Many of these are cultural environments that researcher Michael Flood also finds increase the perpetuation of abuse toward subjugated identities.⁸⁹ On the other hand, sports literature argues that participation in sports fosters emotional intelligence, leadership, and self-esteem in men, all of which reduce the chances of sexual assault perpetration.⁹⁰ DeSipio finds a positive correlation between rape myth acceptance and acts of sexual assault, but a negative correlation between rape myth acceptance and emotional intelligence.⁹¹ She concludes that emotional intelligence, leadership, and self-esteem within teams is essential to decreasing rape-myth acceptance, which can additionally decrease the

84 Jeff Green, "#MeToo Has Implicated 414 High Profile Executives and Employees in 18 Months," *Time*, 25 June 2018.

85 Ibid.

86 Melena Ryzik, Cara Buckley, and Jodi Kantor, "Louis C.K. Is Accused by 5 Women of Sexual Misconduct," *New York Times*, 9 Nov. 2017.

87 Ryzik, Buckley, and Kantor.

88 DeSipio 162.

89 Flood 339.

90 DeSipio 162.

91 DeSipio 157.



likelihood of sexual assault.⁹² Building a positive culture of emotional intelligence within sports teams could increase prevention program participation, decrease resistance to the prevention program, and work toward the goal of decreasing the likelihood of sexual assault.⁹³ Programs that debunk rape myths might additionally erode cis-heteronormative narratives, as they would ideally address the myth that men cannot be raped.

In “‘How Can I Not?’ Men’s Pathways to Involvement in Anti-Violence Against Women Work,” Erin Casey and Tyler Smith analyze interviews with men voluntarily involved in sexual assault prevention organizations.⁹⁴ They outline factors that contribute to the likelihood of men’s continued participation. All of the men interviewed for the study had three common motivators. First, they each had an exposure or experience that sensitized them to the issue of sexual assault. In most cases, they had learned about a domestic or sexual violence incident that a close female friend, family member, or girlfriend had experienced or they had witnessed this type of violence in childhood. The victimization of a person they knew pushed them to empathize with those affected by gender-based violence. Second, they each felt a sense of obligation, generally caused by the first sensitizing experience and their positionality as men, which motivated them to get involved and stay involved. Third, they each had access to a sexual assault prevention organization.⁹⁵

Most sexual assault prevention initiatives designed with men in mind are researched and developed by women, with little evaluation to determine their effectiveness.⁹⁶ Consequently, it is difficult to know whether these programs could be more effective if more men contributed to the research and teaching. In her study “No Women Allowed: Exclusion and Accountability in Men’s Anti-Rape Groups,” Emily Marchese finds a trend among some male-focused sexual assault prevention groups of excluding women entirely from research, participation, and evaluation of group meetings.⁹⁷ While engagement in prevention groups is a positive step, such groups could be problematic if they are ignoring potentially relevant research developed by woman, particularly given that substantially more women than men work in this field. Michael Kimmel, a masculinity studies scholar, argues that masculinity has changed in the United States in “reaction” to rising feminist movements.⁹⁸ This change may take one of two forms: either men adapt to alternative forms of masculinity accepted by feminism or they reject feminism and attack the movement, fearing that women are eroding men’s power.⁹⁹

92 DeSipio 161.

93 DeSipio 161.

94 Erin Casey and Tyler Smith, “How Can I Not? Men’s Pathways to Involvement in Antiviolence Against Women Work,” *Violence Against Women* 16.8 (2010): 967.

95 Casey and Smith 957. “Access” includes access to the physical location of the organization as well as having time to commit. Note that even though the researchers used a random sample of men involved in sexual assault prevention organizations, all of the men interviewed were white. This may indicate a lack of inclusivity of men of color in these groups, perhaps due to lack of access.

96 Marchese 62.

97 Marchese 61.

98 DeSipio 74.

99 DeSipio 74.



METHODOLOGY: EVALUATING PREVENTION PROGRAMS

I used the information from the literature review as a lens through which to evaluate gendered assumptions about masculinity embedded within the program materials of five sexual assault prevention education initiatives curated for men on college campuses: A Call to Men, The Men's Program, Men's Workshop with Alan Berkowitz, Mentors in Violence Prevention, and Men Can Stop Rape. Critiquing gendered discourses and evaluating messages targeted toward men can help improve these initiatives and ultimately reduce the incidence of sexual assault on college campuses.

The five prevention programs were nominated as effective programs for colleges in the United States and are included in the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education list of promising programs.¹⁰⁰ The programs listed in this collection are deemed to show evidence of effectiveness, show promising directions for future effectiveness, and use emerging literature that builds on a base of previous research.¹⁰¹ These programs are also available to any university that requests their services in the United States.¹⁰²

The five programs I analyzed are either privately funded outreach initiatives that partner with universities and send representatives routinely, or they are university-led groups run by professors or peer students. Regardless of whether the program seminars are university- or representative-led, the materials used in the courses are generally drawn from programs conducted by exterior initiatives and not from the university itself. I chose five programs that clearly state, either in their title or in their description, that men are their intended audience.

I evaluated the way the programs frame sexual assault and masculinity to understand the implicit gendered assumptions they make about men. This includes tips, recommendations, and messages for men regarding how they can reduce the incidence of sexual assault.

I conducted a discourse analysis of both print and video materials, looking for patterns and narratives. Discourse analysis is an understanding derived from Foucauldian theory that patterns of communication and knowledge are powerful structures that perpetuate societal norms and a generally accepted "truth."¹⁰³ This legitimized "real" knowledge is at the top of social hierarchies, which value certain understandings over others.¹⁰⁴ Discourse analysis recognizes that language is not objective; rather, it is used to convey significance and meaning.¹⁰⁵ In this way, linguistics shapes how we view reality and culture, and how we understand our identities.

The materials analyzed are curated for men, specifically men who attend U.S. colleges and are fluent in English. These prevention methods have been adopted by several U.S. colleges, illustrating

100 Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, "Level of Evidence," 2016, <<http://cultureofrespect.org/colleges-universities/programs/level-of-evidence/>>.

101 Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, "Level of Evidence."

102 Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, "Culture of Respect," 2016, <<https://cultureofrespect.org/colleges-universities/programs/>>.

103 Barbara Townley, "Foucault, Power/Knowledge, and Its Relevance for Human Resource Management," *Academy of Management Review* 18.3 (1993): 519.

104 P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: First Anchor Books, 1966) 3.

105 Berger and Luckmann 32.



that although this approach of engaging men in sexual assault prevention programs is relatively new, the materials they use are still a source of mainstream discourse in our society. Knowledge taught in institutions of higher education is highly valued discourse, with great power to shape norms of accepted truth. According to Foucault, discourse can be used as a productive tool to change societal norms by creating new norms and countering oppressive ones.¹⁰⁶ My aim is to use discourse analysis in this sense, as a productive tool to contribute to the field of sexual assault prevention. My research, produced in an institution of higher education and focused on education that is taught in institutions of higher education, can work to identify assumptions within these systems so that their messages may be revised and made more effective to counter oppression.

ANALYSIS: A “NEW, GOOD, AND REAL” MASCULINITY

The Man Box

A common theme among the education materials is to frame sexual assault as a crime committed by those performing what is argued to be an unhealthy version of masculinity. This masculinity becomes a point for men to evaluate and criticize. For example, A Call to Men’s program titled *The Next Generation of Manhood* includes materials that use the phrase “man box,” defined as a pattern of thinking that unknowingly perpetuates problematic behavior.¹⁰⁷ This program encourages men to “break out” of the man box so that they can develop healthy, respectful relationships.¹⁰⁸ The man box is described as a set of rules that men are expected to follow to perform masculinity that meets societal expectations. Thus, the man box refers to socialization and gender norms.

The concept of the “man box” is a *negative* box from which one must “break free.” This characterization implies that the old version of masculinity is “bad,” assumed to be aggressive, violent, and lacking empathy. For example, the materials state, “Making someone feel uncomfortable or threatened is not something that boys naturally do — it is something that they were taught to do by the man box. It is behavior that can be unlearned.”¹⁰⁹ This way of framing sexual assault removes blame from men by assuming they are made to act violently rather than choosing to act violently. It also indicates room for self-improvement, which encourages men to continue with education programs to “break free” of their previous habits of masculinity.

“Heroism” in Men

The “new” and “good” masculinity recommended by these programs involves messages that support gendered roles of heroism in men. For example, many of these programs use the scenario of a drunk woman being led away by a man who is hoping to take advantage of her. In Mentors in Violence Prevention’s role-play activity *Illegal Motion*, this scenario is used to illustrate how a “real” man should

106 Dianna Taylor, *Michel Foucault Key Concepts* (Durham, NC: Acumen, 2011) 8.

107 A Call to Men: The Next Generation of Manhood. “Live Respect: Coaching Healthy and Respectful Manhood,” 2015, 3, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/576c2d15ebbd1aee23f3443f/t/57d83c46cd0f686e46e84625/1473789007440/032916_ACTM_Program_Guide.pdf>.

108 A Call to Men: The Next Generation of Manhood. “Live Respect.”

109 A Call to Men: The Next Generation of Manhood. “Live Respect,” 26.



handle intervening.¹¹⁰ Interestingly, many of the messages portrayed in these male-targeted programs echo the messages Bedera and Nordmeyer found among programs directed toward college women.¹¹¹ Encouraging men to protect women supports the conception of women as vulnerable and unsafe when alone, perpetuating stereotypical associations between women and weakness. These associations also insinuate that other genders are not vulnerable to assault, perpetuating assumptions that men have, or should have, the physical strength as well as the ability to protect themselves from assault. These ableist assumptions may serve to emasculate men who do not have the physical characteristics deemed “worthy” of manhood. By portraying variations of this role-play scenario that depict these gendered roles, sexual assault prevention education models perpetuate heteronormative and cisnormative narratives.

Despite these critiques of the “damsel in distress” trope, encouraging a culture of upstanders is effective for starting a dialogue about assault and how to best prevent abuse.¹¹² Perhaps it would be most beneficial, then, for these programs to find an alternative storyline to reach this same goal of increasing bystander intervention.

Simple Solutions

Mentors in Violence Prevention’s *Illegal Motion* activity asks participants to choose how they would react from a list of potential interventions. The participant is expected to choose the “right” one, which in this case is performing the “good” masculinity to save the damsel in distress.¹¹³ Providing multiple-choice answers to a scenario assumes that men seek simplistic one-answer remedies to intervention that ignore other situational factors. Intervention in potentially dangerous situations is much more complex than these programs are implying. However, encouraging men to intervene is not necessarily without benefit. Casey and Smith found that men are more likely to commit themselves to long-term prevention of sexual violence if they feel an obligation to stand up.¹¹⁴ Continuing to advocate for bystander intervention may increase the likelihood of long-term involvement. In the short-term, it might be beneficial to provide a more comprehensive guide to intervention, one that takes the nuance and complexity of these situations into consideration.

The Men’s Program also offers simplistic and fast “solutions” in the education material used in its program *One In Four*. The Men’s Program is a 55-minute curriculum “guaranteed” to change men’s behavior. As stated on its website, “Research has shown ... that high risk men who see the program commit less sexual assault than men who do not.”¹¹⁵

110 Mentors in Violence Prevention, “Illegal Motion,” 2015, 10, <<http://www.mvpstrat.com/pdf/College-Males-IllegalMotion.pdf>>.

111 Bedera and Nordmeyer 535.

112 Casey and Ohler 69.

113 Casey and Ohler 69.

114 Casey and Smith 957.

115 “The Men’s Program. (55 Minutes + Q&A),” *One In Four*, n.d., <<http://www.oneinfourusa.org/themensprogram.php>>, Retrieved Apr. 2017. The website did not cite the research that “shows” the effectiveness of this program. This website has since expired, with no explanation given. However, the program appears to still be available through an alternative source: <<https://cultureofrespect.org/program/mens-program/>>.



Men Can Stop Rape offers another example of a simple solution to prevent sexual assault in its educational handouts, which show an image of a young man looking at the camera, relaying the common scenario discussed previously. Above the image in bold letters are the following words: “When Nicole couldn’t lose that drunk guy, I called her cell to give her an out. I’m the kind of guy who takes a stand. Where do you stand?”¹¹⁶ This message has several implicit narratives. First, it assumes that men are less likely to intervene when confrontation is involved, as indicated by recommending a text message rather than in-person interference. Second, this message reaffirms masculinity as a protector role by indicating that he is the “kind of guy” to take a stand. Taking this stand makes you the “good” kind of guy, the kind of guy who is a “real” man. Third, this message also challenges the viewer’s own masculinity by asking, “I’m a real man. Are you?” While this scenario does reflect findings in Casey and Ohler’s research about bystander intervention, it again, like the *Illegal Motion* activity, skims over the complexity and danger that intervention may entail in real-life situations.¹¹⁷

REFRAMING MASCULINITY

During a panel discussion at Washington State University in 2014, Alan Berkowitz, who leads the Men’s Workshop education program, addressed the issue of violence against women and how it connects to men’s sensitivity to being feminized.¹¹⁸ Berkowitz argued that the root cause of gender-based violence and homophobia is sexism and that it is the reason men reject feminization. As a result of sexism, men reflect deep-seated negative feelings about women and gay men. This narrative also might explain why sexual assault prevention materials tend to affirm masculinity rather than deconstruct it.¹¹⁹ Berkowitz’s work is similar to that of Jackson Katz, co-founder of Mentors in Violence Prevention. Katz also speaks publicly in keynote speeches, trainings, and seminars about gender violence.¹²⁰ His work discusses the role of socialization in the development of masculinity and how this contributes to male violence against women and other men.¹²¹ One of the key aims of his work is to reframe masculinity and what it means to be a man.¹²² To Katz, and as reflected by his prevention program, becoming a “real man” means having the courage to stand up against sexism and homophobia.¹²³ These programs, again, demonstrate that prevention tactics used to engage men are primarily focused on re-creating an ideal masculinity that is enforced socially as the good, “real” version.

116 Men Can Stop Rape, “The Where Do You Stand? Campaign,” 2011, <<http://www.mencanstoprape.org/Strength-Media-Portfolio/preview-of-new-bystander-intervention-campaign.html>>.

117 Casey and Ohler 71. Bystander involvement in sexual assault prevention was found to involve several steps. These include (1) noticing a troubling situation, (2) interpreting it as problematic, (3) assuming personal responsibility for action, (4) identifying accessible course of action, and (5) implementing this action.

118 “Sexual Assault Prevention Workshops and Trainings,” Alan David Berkowitz, Independent Consultant, n.d. <http://alanberkowitz.com/sexual_assault.php>. Alan Berkowitz is a nationally recognized and award-winning sexual assault prevention workshop trainer.

119 Council of Presidents.

120 See <<http://www.jacksonkatz.com>>.

121 DeSipio 72.

122 DeSipio 72.

123 DeSipio 72.



Shaming Deviant Masculinities

The “old” and “new” masculinities represented in sexual assault prevention materials have many parallels. Both masculinities perpetuate gendered norms by challenging the actions of men through shaming tactics. Shaming tactics are linked to questioning the legitimacy of the male identity. Education materials stigmatize what they deem “deviant” masculine behavior, such as aggressive behavior and violence, and encourage male peers to shame one another for engaging in these behaviors. The prevention education materials work to challenge the norms that currently allow for these behaviors to manifest in men by developing new norms that are assumed to counteract them. This framework still uses binaries of “good” and “bad,” and “right” and “wrong” gender performance.

Sexual assault prevention is being enforced in these programs through modeling. These programs send a clear message: Do not commit sexual assault because it is not what good or real men do. A program based on social deterrence theory might use a different approach: Do not commit sexual assault because it is against the law. A message using feminist theory might say the following: Do not commit sexual assault because it is a human rights violation.¹²⁴ It would be interesting to see how or if a program could incorporate all three of these theories to offer an approach that uses ecological theory as a base framework.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The most prominent challenge when critiquing gendered assumptions in sexual assault prevention materials is determining the most effective and least harmful way of continuing research and programming. It is difficult to navigate criticisms of these programs. How can educational programs acknowledge that patriarchal structures and sexism perpetuate gender-based violence while also encouraging men to become more involved in supporting victims and preventing sexual assault? These goals must be met while actively abandoning harmful assumptions about masculinity and gender roles. It is important to deconstruct masculinity rather than create new masculinity norms that continue to perpetuate a gender binary, especially as this fails to acknowledge LGBTQ+ relationships and abuse, as well as female perpetrators. By only targeting men, the most basic underlying assumption is that everyone participating in the program *is* a man, which fails to acknowledge nonbinary or transgender identities. It may be possible to deconstruct masculinity outside of prevention-specific programs in a way that could help address the issue of sexual assault. Such strategies enacted through primary and secondary school education, media representations, and public policies may be longer term solutions to prevent sexual assault.

ENVISIONING A MORE COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION PROGRAM

The sexual assault education materials I analyzed are attempting to perpetuate new gendered norms of masculinity rather than deconstruct existing norms by affirming a “new version” of

124 Diane Otto, “Women’s Rights,” *International Human Rights Law*, ed. Sangeeta Sha Daniel Moeckli, Sandesh Sivakumaran, and David Harris (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010) 347. Feminist theory might mention human rights because feminist movements are increasingly framing sexual assault and gender-based violence as a human rights issue.



masculinity and stigmatizing the “old version.” This method of education assumes that men require reinforcement and validation of a version of manhood to reduce their perpetuation of sexual assault. Gender norms are a reality of our society, so it is unreasonable to suggest a viable sexual assault prevention education program that is entirely void of assumptions about men, as appealing as this may be on a theoretical level. However, a program could work to deconstruct masculinity within its educational framework by incorporating the understanding that gender is socially constructed: fluid, ever-changing, and never static. People look, act, speak, and respond to situations differently depending on the roles they play in each social context. The core message in these programs is respect, but it is reliant on communicating this message through the promise that this respect makes a man *more* of a man. Deconstructing masculinity means taking a step beyond this approach to understand how respect and empathy can improve a person’s social life in ways separate from this gendered goal.

The current discursive shift taking place in prevention education is moving from a point of exclusively engaging women to including men. This progress is important because it considers statistics that highlight the prevalence of male violence against women.¹²⁵ However, sexual assault prevention education must take all forms of abuse into consideration, especially given the prevalence of assault in LGBTQ+ relationships and the occurrence of female violence against men.¹²⁶ Addressing misconceptions about sexual assault and deconstructing masculinity itself may be beneficial for the incorporation of LGBTQ+ and male victims’ experiences into program materials.

Further evaluation of sexual assault prevention programs is needed to help determine the effectiveness of the various educational models used. Because the shift from engaging women to engaging men is relatively new, few studies have documented the long-term outcomes of such programs. A longitudinal study might be an interesting approach to assess the influence of these types of programs among groups of men over time. Additionally, more nuanced research is needed that considers the effectiveness of these programs among men given factors of race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and other intersecting identities. These factors may significantly influence which theoretical models and prevention approaches are most effective. Many researchers focus on college students because they tend to be more accessible than other demographics. Developing prevention education exclusively for college students or evaluating the effectiveness of program by only using college students does not acknowledge that other methods of sexual assault prevention might work better for different demographics. Finally, further research is needed to develop curricula that take an ecological theory approach to sexual assault prevention. A wide range of tactics should be considered when formulating a more cohesive, holistic program to prevent sexual assault. ■

125 McKie 8.

126 Rothman et al. 55.



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