



# “I’d Rather Be Doing Something Else:” Male Resistance to Rape Prevention Programs

*Although scholars have argued that sexual assault is a growing crisis on college campuses, there are few studies that highlight the ways in which college men communicate their feelings about sexual assault education. This pilot study fills that void by highlighting college male students’ voices. Using open-ended questions and thematic analysis, the authors noted how respondents confirmed and contradicted earlier findings. The authors conclude by offering future directions for prevention educators and gender studies teacher-scholars.*

**Keywords:** Sexual assault, violence against women, masculinity, rape prevention

Although many people believe that universities are safe havens, college women are in fact three times more likely to experience sexual assault than the general population. Defined as “unwanted sex obtained by threat, force, or the assault of a victim who is incapable of consenting” (Littleton & Henderson, 2009), incidences of sexual assault on college campuses in the United States are extremely high (Abbey, McDuffie, & McAuslan, 1996; Brenner, McMahon, Warren, & Douglas, 1999; Gross, Winslett, Roberts, & Gohm, 2006; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski 1987; Rodriguez, Rich, Hastings, & Page, 2006; Schwartz & DeKeseredy 1997; Simon, 1993; Winslett & Gross, 2009). Because sexual assault is frequently underreported to authorities (Bohmer & Parrot 1993), statistics are difficult to ascertain; however, research over the past two decades has consistently shown that one in four college women will experience attempted rape or rape during her academic career (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993; Brenner et al., 1999; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Koss et. al., 1987). Actual assaults and the threat of violence combine to negatively impact the experiences of college women. Subsequently the quality of their education is further compromised as they take fewer night classes, spend less time at the library after hours, and even drop out of school (Roze & Koss, 2001; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).

<sup>a</sup>Department of Communication Studies, California State University, Long Beach.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Marc D. Rich, Ph.D., California State University, Long Beach, Department of Communication Studies, 1250 Bellflower Blvd. AS 361, Long Beach, CA90840-2407. Email: mrich2@csulb.edu



*The Journal of Men's Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Fall 2010, 268-288.

© 2010 by the Men's Studies Press, LLC. All rights reserved. <http://www.mensstudies.com>

jms.1803.268/\$14.00 • DOI: 10.3149/jms.1803.268 • ISSN/1060-8265 • e-ISSN/1933-0251

Although universities have responded to the sexual assault epidemic in a variety of ways, their efforts have been largely ineffective. First, there has consistently been a focus on stranger rapes despite the fact that female college students know their assailants 90% of the time (Yeater & O'Donahue, 1999). In fact, Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) confirm that campus initiatives typically perpetuate the outdated view that women will most likely be attacked by an unknown assailant. In reality, a female student is more likely to be attacked by an acquaintance walking her to the parking structure than a stranger jumping out of the bushes. Second, universities often focus on "target hardening" strategies such as additional campus police, security cameras, or lighting because it is easier to focus on the physical environment than address the complex attitudinal issues that perpetuate campus rapes (Pitts & Schwartz, 1997). Third, prevention efforts have wrongly targeted the victims of sexual assault rather than the perpetrators.

Historically, programs have focused on rape avoidance strategies and taught women to be aware of their surroundings, act assertively, and utilize self-defense techniques (Barone, Wolgemuth, & Linder 2007; Scheel, Johnson, Schneider, & Smith, 2001). While raising awareness among women is important, it is critical that college men are enrolled to prevent violence as they are the ones most likely to commit sexual assaults against women (Tewksbury & Ehrhardt, 2001). In an oft-cited study, for example, Malamuth (1981) discovered that 35% of college men expressed some probability of raping a woman if they knew they would not be caught. More recently, it was found that 48% of college men acknowledged some likelihood of assaulting a woman, and 19% admitted it would be likely or very likely if they knew there would be no penalty or consequences for committing sexual assault (Burgess, 2007). In a survey of 264 college men across 22 universities, 90% of respondents noted that they had acted in sexually aggressive ways in bar or party contexts, leading the researchers to conclude that sexual aggressiveness appears to be normative in these settings (Thompson & Cracco, 2008). We agree with Schwartz and DeKeserdy (1997) when they assert, "Sexual assault will not stop because women take better precautions. It will stop when men stop assaulting women" (p. 146).

Although contemporary researchers have argued that sexual assault prevention programs should target men (Anderson & Whitson 2005; Crooks, Goodall, Hughes, Jaffe, & Baker, 2007; Foubert, 2000; Katz, 2006; Kilmartin & Berkowitz, 2001; Rich, Robinson, Ahrens, & Rodriguez, 2008; Rozee & Koss, 2001; Smith & Welchans, 2000), there have only been a handful of programs that have responded to this call. For example, one study found that only four out of fifteen surveyed programs targeted men (Bachar & Koss, 2001). In a second study, researchers noted that twenty-one out of twenty-six universities had some form of sexual abuse programming, but only two actually targeted male behavior (O'Donahue, Yeater, & Fanetti, 2003). Contemporary researchers have noted emerging intervention programs such as the Men's Program (Foubert, 2007), the Men's Project (Barone et al., 2007) and the interACT Program (Rich et al., 2008). In addition, new scales are being developed to measure men's acceptance of rape myths. (Burgess, 2007). While the recent emphasis on men and pre-

vention is promising, researchers are still in the early stages of developing and evaluating these models. This study seeks to contribute to the burgeoning areas of inquiry in gender studies and interpersonal violence against women by highlighting the particular ways that a diverse group of college male students communicated their feelings about sexual assault prevention and rhetorically constructed rape as a women's issue. The findings should prove useful for prevention educators as well as teacher-scholars who discuss masculinity and violence against women in their classrooms.

Researchers have discovered some basic assumptions about the ways in which college men respond to violence against women, which include: 1) denying that violence against women pertains to them (Katz, 2006; Scheel et al., 2001), 2) believing that the problem has been greatly exaggerated by feminists (Crooks et al., 2007), 3) subscribing to rape myths (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993), 4) showing defensiveness during prevention education (Bachar & Koss, 2001; Foubert & Marriott, 1996; Katz, 2006), and 5) assuming that learning about gender and violence against women will make them seem less masculine or homosexual (Katz, 2006; Kilmartin & Berkowitz, 2001). In the current study, a diverse group of college men were asked to respond to sexual assault education. While their answers supported some findings in prevention research, these men also contradicted earlier studies. In the first section, the impact of structural masculinity on the college campus is considered. Second, the methodology is discussed. Third, male student voices are presented and analyzed as they respond to prevention education. In the final section, the heuristic value of this study is noted and some tentative conclusions are reached.

### THE COLLEGE CAMPUS AND MASCULINITY

College campuses are breeding grounds for performances of hypermasculinity. From resident halls to fraternity houses, from sports teams to administrative offices, male peer groups frequently perpetuate the objectification and marginalization of women. All-male networks and "hostile masculinity" (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Pakalka, & White, 2006) combine to promote "emotional detachment, competition, and the sexual objectification of women" as the norm in all-male spaces (Bird, 1996, p. 122). Described as "male peer support" (Schwartz & DeKeseredy 1997), men may participate in and/or perpetuate the victimization of women because they believe that other men in their social networks support these behaviors (Gage, 2008) and they do not want to appear weak or have their masculinity called into question (Carlson, 2008). Although not all men rape women, many men who learn and work in college settings support a rape culture in which these assaults are allowed to occur (Barone et al., 2007; Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002). Hence, it is worthwhile to discuss the structural implications of masculinity on the college campus.

At the administrative level, university officials may shy away from openly discussing campus rapes or advocating prevention programs because they fear parents, students, and alumni may equate the efforts with a campus problem. Unless there is a crisis, male administrators may not prioritize sexual assault as an agenda item. Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) argue that university administrators

are dominated by male decision makers who lack a sensitivity to women's concerns. Some of these people are either uncomfortable with or are uninterested in formulating policies designed to reduce the number of women who are victimized by men on campus. (pp. 134-135)

Unfortunately, even when a woman reports an assault, the university judicial process may support patriarchy by revictimizing the survivor (Maier, 2008) and failing to adequately punish the perpetrator. In the past, some campuses would deter reports of sexual assault by charging the victim with underage drinking or filing a false complaint if the charges were dropped (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993). Following a reported assault, universities today still struggle to create and implement a coordinated plan of action that does not blame or stigmatize the victim.

Many young men enter college having never critically examined their performances of masculinity and are given few opportunities to do so during their academic years. (Kilmartin & Berkowitz, 2001). At the college and department level, Deans and Chairs are unlikely to implement mandatory courses about violence against women or encourage prevention education across the curriculum. Although violence prevention and gender issues may be covered in specific majors, it is less likely these topics are covered across disciplines in the arts and sciences. If sexual assault is not discussed in general education courses or new student orientation, college men will probably have little or no exposure to these issues. Considering the staggering statistics regarding sexual assault, we argue that men (and women) in leadership positions can do substantially more to challenge gender oppression and prevent violence against women.

We discuss the consequences of male peer support systems within administrative and faculty circles in order to highlight that sexual assault is a personal issue with systemic roots (Rozee & Koss, 2001). The seeds of masculinity are planted on school playgrounds, and if not challenged, come to fruition on our college campuses with potentially devastating results. If hostile masculinity is problematic among the general male college population, then it is fair to say it has reached a crisis stage among male athletes and fraternity members where group socialization practices are utilized to condemn anything deemed feminine (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997) and hegemonic masculinity serves to marginalize women and facilitate gender inequity (Harvey, 1999). It seems clear that educators need to design course curriculums and utilize prevention programs that target the perpetrators of sexual assault, but what are the barriers to implementing such efforts with college men?

#### METHOD

To ascertain the particular ways that college men respond to sexual assault education, we surveyed one hundred and fifty-seven students in a required general education course at a large, urban university. Of the one hundred and fifty-seven students surveyed, forty-six were White, forty-three were Asian-American/Pacific Islander, forty-one were Latino, ten were African-American, nine were Bi/Multiracial, and eight

classified themselves as “other.” The college participants were told that they would be asked to describe their feelings about sexual assault education. There were no consequences for non-participation, extra-credit was not offered, and students were free to leave if they elected not to participate. The instructor of the class was not present during the study; all of the surveys were anonymous.

As a pilot study designed to describe male reactions to prevention efforts, we utilized grounded theory as a method of analysis—an “emergently inductive activity” that requires an “intensive immersion in the data” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 184). According to Patton (2002), inductive designs such as grounded theory “allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be” (p. 56). The data was analyzed consistent with procedures commonly used in grounded theory analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). All four authors independently noted emergent themes and subsequently met to discuss these themes. In the small percentage of cases when there was a difference in findings, all four authors revisited the data and reached a suitable conclusion. We elected to have all four authors code the data in order to enhance the findings and facilitate what Patton (2002) calls “analytic triangulation” (p. 464).

This study is significant because it highlights men’s voices as they respond to sexual assault education and the strategies they employ to subordinate women. While some of the emergent themes support earlier scholarship, we discovered that the men in this study complicated and at times contradicted the literature.

#### ANALYSIS

Our first question asked college men to describe how they would feel about a hypothetical mandatory or voluntary one-day sexual assault prevention program. A minority of nine men (5%) thought there would be attendance and that such a program would have merit. Eighty men (51%), however, explained that they would not want to attend a program, and argued that prevention education had no relevance to their lives. The following responses are representative:

You probably wouldn’t really see men going to these types of classes because men don’t have to worry about being sexually assaulted.

I wouldn’t like it. I think some would attend, not many. If we got paid to go that would be cool.

I only think men would go if girlfriends/mom made them go.

This situation should be imposed on sex offenders, not your average student.

Whereas eighty respondents were generally against attending any program, we learned that an additional eighteen men (11%) were strongly adverse to a one-day session. The responses of these men are aligned with the notion of “hostile masculinity” as noted earlier in the essay. In fact, many of these men appeared to have a visceral response to the mere suggestion of a one-day workshop:

I would be Angry! Because I have no time and if it were voluntary I don't think men would show up because women are portrayed as rape victims not men.

I would be extremely angry. I think every self-respecting male knows how to not sexually assault a woman.

I would be outraged because it stereotypes men as the perpetrator. Men are also attacked and they chose not to report the case because they will feel emasculated.

I would personally feel offended ... if you respect females you wouldn't need to go.

I would be upset about it. I feel that a one-day class is a waste of time. There are thousands of male students on campus, and a few have committed these crimes.

It is worth noting these men used adjectives such as “extremely angry,” “outraged,” “offended,” and “upset” to describe their feelings. It appears these respondents would feel personally attacked if asked to attend a one-day program. These men use the general term “respect” to argue that only disrespectful men rape women. For these students, programs unfairly cast men in the role of perpetrator and fail to acknowledge that men are also rape victims. Additionally, it is worth noting that they described programs as a “waste of time” or something for which they have “no time.” Unfortunately, some college men are gendered to be concerned only with issues that they believe directly affect them. In sum, it appears that many of the respondents rhetorically construct rape as a women’s issue for which they do not have the time or energy to engage. These findings support and extend earlier research that suggest men often feel unfairly cast as perpetrators and do not believe programs have relevance to their own lives (Scheel et al., 2001).

Although fifty of the respondents (32%) agreed that a prevention program would be useful, many stated that men would not attend a voluntary program:

I think it's an excellent idea. I'm pretty pessimistic about voluntary attendance. Many males would assume that it's simply not their problem or wouldn't think about attending.

I think that's a good idea. If voluntary, men will not attend because it's a hassle and waste of time. It is not required so why waste the time going?

I would feel like it was needed to begin with. Most men wouldn't attend because they believe the course would only be for sex offenders.

Our first question illuminated some interesting themes. First, a total of ninety-eight respondents (63%) were opposed to a one-day voluntary or mandatory program, with eighteen men (11%) reacting in ways that revealed strong resistance and feelings of anger. Students who were against attending a one-day program seemed unaware of

men's accountability in the perpetuation of a rape culture or patriarchy, and instead felt like the program did not relate to their lives. These men also felt like they were unfairly targeted as potential offenders and did not need to attend a workshop because they respected women. These males only understood rape as an act perpetuated by a few deviants, and therefore could easily distance themselves from the problem and subsequently not assume any responsibility for violence against women. Although nearly one-third of the men supported a one-day program, the majority believed that men would not attend a voluntary program. Herein lies a fundamental problem for prevention educators: whereas a voluntary program will likely have poor attendance, required seminars may result in strong resistance from men who feel they are being unfairly targeted as potential perpetrators and do not believe the program has relevance for them. Based on these findings, instructors should be aware of the strong resistance they may face from male students and plan the curriculum accordingly. Unfortunately, many men who need to hear the message may strategically avoid these classes.

Although we cannot conclude that the most resistant men in this study are the ones most likely to sexually assault women, we did see in their responses a subscription to multiple rape myths, a lack of empathy toward women, and a strong tendency to see themselves as victims. We would predict, at the very least, that these respondents would be unsympathetic to a woman who has been sexually assaulted. As a follow-up question, we asked men how they would feel about a mandatory or voluntary semester-long course that focused on sexual assault awareness and prevention. Only thirteen men (8%) said they would attend. Unsurprisingly, one hundred and twenty-one men (77%) were not interested in such a class, an additional twenty men (13%) were strongly opposed to the suggestion, and four men (2%) chose not to respond. As one representative man stated, "The course would suck and be a waste of time for 98% of men."

Our second question was designed to tap into men's adherence to rape myths—such as blaming the victim—as well as the strategies men employ to resist the topic altogether. We asked participants if they thought men should be responsible for rape prevention. Despite the fact that men commit the vast majority of sexual crimes, rape myths and Hollywood movies combine to create a narrative that both blames women for their own victimization and portrays them as sexual predators. Researchers have also found that news stories on sexual assault and domestic violence typically support patriarchal structures, blame women for their own victimization, and subordinate women (Bullock, 2007; Howard & Prividera, 2008; Worthington, 2008). In response to our second question, most men participated in a rhetorical strategy we call "dominant group deflection" by shifting the discussion away from themselves and focusing instead on women. When we asked men to assume responsibility for rape prevention, their level of anger, resistance, and resentment was palpable.

Of one hundred and fifty-seven respondents, only seventeen (11%) agreed that men should be responsible for prevention efforts. The men in this category embraced their role as indicated by their underlined and capitalized words:

*I would agree.* Men commit nearly all of them. Even if there is some far-cut hypothetical in which women contribute to rape culture, the fastest way to a solution is for us to assume all of the responsibility. We can stop this.

Agree with it. We males are the ones responsible for all our *ACTIONS*. It shouldn't be done.

The next two respondents support the claim, but have more problematic responses. Note how the first man agrees to take some responsibility, but still exhibits defensiveness:

In a way I would agree but feel attacked because I am a male.

The second student believes men are responsible, but relies on several rape myths to support his claim.

I would agree because I believe in the stereotype that men think about sex and sex-related things more than females. I think that if men can control how they feel when a girl is dress[ed] provocatively then sexual assault shouldn't be a problem.

First, the respondent equates rape with sex. Second, he believes that how a woman ("girl") dresses is related to sexual violence. Third, this respondent does not understand how power and violence are inextricably linked to rape.

Thirty-nine respondents (25%) took partial responsibility for preventing rape. However, many were quick to argue that women were equally accountable. In doing so, they were able to deflect full responsibility. These students attempted to quantify exactly how much responsibility men should take:

Women as well as men have the same responsibility of preventing rape.

Men should take half the responsibility.

I think its 97% men but that extra 3% goes to women because it's not just men.

I would say that it is not in fact always the responsibility of men.

Although the men in this category were able to take at least partial responsibility for rape prevention, we noted that they also typically exhibited anger and resentment:

I would be appalled. I think we do, as men, have to protect our women from rape but the *full* responsibility can't be put upon us.

Yes men and women have different roles but they both have the same responsibility to stop it!

I would be pissed if someone told me that.



Thirty respondents (19%) were quick to blame women for their own victimization. Of all the survey questions, this one generated the angriest and most vile responses. Perhaps this is not surprising when one considers how members of the dominant group typically react when asked to take responsibility for stopping oppressive actions. Men in this category were quick to offer advice on ways to avoid rape while simultaneously invoking rape myths about manipulative women, suggestive clothing, and provocative behavior. These respondents adamantly refused to take any responsibility for violence prevention, or to be reflective about their potential role in prevention efforts. The following responses reveal a belief in rape myths about a woman's attire and attitude:

Skanky/slutty/revealing attitudes and clothing don't help the issue. Women can control that.

Women can't wear skanky clothes.

Women shouldn't make themselves seem easy.

In the next few statements, men focus on stranger rapes to shift the responsibility back to women:

Women need to be aware of their surroundings to help them avoid dangerous situations.

Women shouldn't subject themselves to danger by walking alone etc.

Women put themselves in *horrible* situations sometimes and aren't aware of the seriousness of the issue.

Here women are blamed for not being aware, walking alone, and placing themselves in dangerous situations. According to Olson (2004), these victim-blaming communicative strategies, "strip women of the opportunity to have their voices heard" and "perpetuate the cycle of violence" (p. 2).

Instead of critiquing rapists for preying on women, these respondents imagine naïve women who do not realize that they live in a dangerous world. Men in this category frequently fell back on the stereotypical image of the evil, female seductress who manipulates men into committing crimes:

Your fking crazy ... women get you horny and women as well as men "rape."

Some girls just mess with the guy's emotions and put thoughts in his head.

These deflection strategies are consistent with the stories of those who blame women in order to downplay men's violent behaviors (Renzetti, 1999) and also reveal a "reverse-victim stance" in which men feel "... victimized, under the control of women's sometimes fickle sexual provocations ..." (Burgess, 2007, p. 15).

Twenty-one of the respondents (13%) disagreed with the notion that men were responsible for prevention, but did not respond with nearly as much anger or resistance.

These men found alternative ways to explain men's behavior (e.g., their upbringing), or simply decided that it was not possible to assign blame:

I would say it is false because mental health, their upbringing, and inclusion of drugs all have or could have a hand in the responsibility of rape. There are many more factors to rape than just horny men or the need to dominate.

The responsibility is to no one.

Nope. Many men don't get "any" so they have to do it the hard way. It would suck for women.

Twenty-three respondents (15%) pointed the finger back at women by asserting that they are also perpetrators of violent crimes. Men's rights groups frequently use this deflection strategy when they grossly overstate the numbers of women who commit such crimes (Katz, 2006). Scheel et al. (2001) argue that college men are unlikely to believe that they can actually be raped, but invoke this strategy to invalidate women's experiences. According to the men in this study:

I strongly disagree because there are women predators out there as well.

Women and children are also capable of rape.

That's wrong because it takes two to rape.

Well not all rapes are committed by men.

Some students focused on who they believed to be the real problem:

Only 2% of men perform these acts the other 98% feel the same way women do about these men.

Finally, twenty-eight men (approximately 18%) were unsure about who should be responsible for preventing rape. In addition to several responses like "I don't know" and "I'm not sure," this student's comment is representative:

Every man is different so it is hard to say.

Despite overwhelming evidence that men are the primary perpetrators of sexual violence, our respondents were either not privy to this information, refused to believe it, or subscribed to popular culture 'crisis in masculinity' narratives that compel men to feel fear and anxiety about their (in)ability to perform masculinity in traditional ways (Rogers, 2007). The mere suggestion that men should be responsible for preventing rape was met with great resistance, and a deep-seated belief in rape myths and anger toward women was voiced in many responses. Kimmel (1990) explains that men's anger is premised on perceived powerlessness:

Everywhere, men are in power, controlling virtually all the economic, political, and social institutions of society. And yet individual men do not feel powerful—far from it. Most men feel powerless and are often angry at women, who they perceive as having sexual power over them: the power to arouse them and to give or withhold sex. This fuels both sexual fantasies and the desire for revenge. (p. 309)

We assert that these feelings of powerlessness contribute to victimization rhetoric that men strategically use in order to refrain from taking primary responsibility for preventing rape.

The responses to our third question illuminate the ways in which men are often confused or misinformed about their role in preventing violence against women. Educators have argued that men want to support survivors, but feel they do not have the strategies to do so effectively (Rich et. al., 2008; Scheel et. al., 2001). When we specifically asked men what role, if any, they should take in the prevention of sexual assault, a minority of five men (3%) said that there was no role for men to take. Forty-four students (28%) did not know how to respond, failed to provide any specific steps or actions, or simply could not answer the question at all:

Do what they can... Escort a woman to her car or something.  
I don't know.

When men did suggest roles, there was profound confusion about what specifically they could do. Forty-two respondents (27%) believed their role should be to increase awareness about sexual assault. According to these men, the following roles would be useful for preventing assault:

Maybe inform men about the consequences of sexual assault.

They should attend a class about it.

They should learn the consequences about rape. That way they will think about their actions before doing such things.

Men should be taught early on about respecting other people's bodies.

It is interesting that these men believed that they should attend a prevention class, learn about the ways in which rape impacts women, and even teach other men about rape. These men were not clear, however, about where they could gain the necessary knowledge that was needed to take a proactive role. In addition, considering the general disdain for program attendance, we found it surprising that respondents noted that men needed to be educated about prevention. This may be an opening for instructors who teach courses on gender roles or interpersonal violence. Because men seem to want knowledge about their role in preventing violence against women, this component could be implemented into the curriculum.

The third largest category of respondents (thirty-three or 21%) believed their preventative role was to act chivalrous, physically intervene as a bystander during an as-

sault, or violently retaliate against the perpetrator. Some men in this category relied on traditional, stereotypical masculine and feminine roles, or believed that brute force should be used to “fix the situation.” Men in this category were quick to invoke the notion of the protective man and weak woman:

We males should protect the females not harm them. Protect them from other males who have no self-control.

Men should try to always watch that girls safely get to their car or class and do something if the girl is attacked. Be a gentlemen. Be chivalrous ... be firm when necessary, yet gentle.

They should be more present to deter assaulters. They will not attack if females are with men and are protected.

Well, if they are ever walking to the parking lot or anywhere at night they can walk with a lady that is by herself to take care of her.<sup>1</sup>

Although these men earnestly felt that their role was to protect women, their patronizing tone and reliance on images of helpless women who need protection from and by men are problematic and aligned with rigid gender roles. In addition, a number of men noted that their role was to walk a woman to her car at night, illustrating their subscription to the stranger assault myth. Furthermore, noting that men need to “be firm but gentle” and “protect females” constructs women as children who need to be shielded by an adult male figure. Several men in this category believed it was their duty to seek revenge on the assailant. As one man explained, “You should just beat the shit out of the guy.” College men may believe that enacting hypermasculine roles such as violence fulfill their duties and support women (Rich et al., 2008) Eight men believed their role was to intervene if they saw an actual sexual assault occurring. For example, one respondent wrote:

Defend her. Men tend to be stronger than women.

Responses like this were problematic because some of the men fell back on the strong man/weak woman paradigm as previously cited, while others were unwilling to completely commit to a bystander intervention as noted in the following statement:

If men feel that they are not endangering themselves, then they can help. It shouldn't be an obligation.

Although there is an articulated desire to help the weaker woman, the man's safety remains paramount. Harari, Harari, and White's (1985) study on male bystander inter-

---

<sup>1</sup>The men surveyed frequently refer to women as girls and ladies. Referring to a woman as a child is the more obvious devaluation. Referencing women as ladies may seem polite, but it often recurs in our study when the men describe women as hapless, fragile, and in need of male protection (Lakoff 1973).

vention reported that men are more likely to intervene when in groups. Not only do men feel safer in numbers, but they may be rewarded within masculine spaces for performing in traditionally gendered ways.

Twenty-four men (15%) felt that their role was simply not to rape women:

Just not doing it. Men may be more capable of committing such a crime but are also more capable of preventing it.

Nine men (6%) believed that their primary role was to respect women:

Work with females not against them.

Be responsible and keep it in your pants that way males can be more gentleman like.

Don't force a woman to do anything.

As long as these men believe that their primary role is to act as a responsible individual, they will fail to see the structural implications of patriarchy and sexual assault.

Our fourth question attempted to gauge how respondents viewed male volunteers in prevention programs. Prior research suggests that male volunteers are seen as homosexual or less masculine by their peers (Katz, 2006; Kilmartin & Berkowitz, 2001). Conversely, we found that the vast majority of respondents (one hundred and thirty-three or 85%) did not view volunteers in these ways. In fact, most of the respondents viewed male volunteers in a very positive light as seen in the following quotes:

I would view him as a good man and I would not think he is homosexual for caring about ladies.

I would give credit to this man. He is just helping spread the awareness.

I would be proud, no not less masculine and not homosexual. He is just standing up for what he believes in.

I mean, he is somebody that is trying to help others not suffer through a lot of pain so I would congratulate him.

I will have respect for the man because he wants to reduce the risk of sexual assault. I wouldn't view the man as less masculine or homosexual....

We also noted that eight of these respondents believed that a man who volunteered was actually more masculine as a result of this choice. Hence it is interesting to see how these respondents redefine masculinity as caring, responsible, and helpful:

I think more masculine, he's taking his responsibilities as a man even further.

I would say that guy is a smart guy because he's actually taking action and making change. I wouldn't see him any less of a man. Actually, probably more of a man.

I would say that man is actually more of a man for wanting to help out. Caring about the welfare of women isn't homosexual at all. It is an obligation to us all.

I would respect him and see him as more masculine. It takes courage to oppose society.

I would see this man as more masculine. An ethical, caring, and positive individual.

I would think highly of the man for wanting to make a difference. Making a stand for what you believe is the most "manly" thing a person can do.

We were surprised to learn that only five respondents (3%) believed that volunteers were less masculine, and two (1%) felt that men involved in prevention efforts were gay. Nine men (6%) believed that men who participated in prevention programs were potential sexual predators and nine additional men (6%) offered no opinion.

The themes that emerged from this question are significant because they call into question earlier findings and provide some hope for educators. Although men showed strong resistance to other questions and frequently invoked rape myths, we were surprised that they looked so favorably upon male volunteers. These results can be interpreted in at least two ways. First, men may be disinterested in a particular issue, but still believe that other men should assume typically masculine leadership roles. Interpreted in this way, respondents in this category who support "taking action," "making change," "wanting to make a difference," "opposing society," and "making a stand" can be viewed as applauding men for fulfilling traditional masculine roles such as independence and problem-solving. From this view, it would appear that respondents can absolve themselves of personal responsibility and still feel satisfied because other men are assuming leadership roles.

A second and perhaps more optimistic interpretation would view these students as honoring a different form of manhood, one that defies hostile masculinity and instead supports peers who stand up against sexual assault. From this perspective there is a potential roadmap for educators who want to enroll men in more positive, prosocial ways. Katz (2006) cites a 2000 poll which finds that 25% of men would do more to prevent violence if asked and subsequently argues that a man's decision to intervene is based largely on how he believes other men would act during a violent episode. As we learned from an earlier question, some men want to take an active stance against rape but are misinformed about how to do so. Lacking new roles to perform, men fall back on what they believe are the only ways to support women—namely being chivalrous or using violence against perpetrators. If programs were designed where men could learn and practice new masculine behaviors, then perhaps these college students would leave seminars rethinking hegemonic masculinity and feeling empowered to intervene in more productive ways (Anderson, 2008; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

In our final question we asked respondents if they would prefer to view a prevention program with all men or in a mixed-sex audience. Scholars have advocated for same-sex formats for a variety of reasons including: 1) potential male defensiveness and

gender polarization (Bachar & Koss, 2001), 2) the need to present the base causes of rape and men's choices in a safe environment (Berkowitz, 1992; Lonsway, 1996; Schewe & O'Donohue, 1996), 3) same-sex interventions have been deemed more efficacious (Kline, 1993; Ullman, 2002), 4) men may feel uncomfortable or intimidated in mixed-sex audiences (Kilmartin & Berkowitz 2001), and 5) different messages need to be relayed to men and women (Roze & Koss, 2001; Schewe, 2002). Despite the arguments for same-sex audiences, one hundred and twenty-four respondents (79%) preferred a mixed-sex audience. Many of these respondents argued that a mixed-sex audience would lead to a richer understanding of the issues, and that it was important to hear from both men and women. In addition, most of the men were reflective about the benefits that could be obtained from working collaboratively with women to learn more about sexual assault:

I would want a mixed-sex class, because it shows that men and women are united not segregated in their efforts to combat sexual assault.

I would rather do it in a mixed audience because discussion in the program would be more complete with perspectives of both sexes. I would prefer both so that it does not have a sexist atmosphere to it like one with only men would.

Mixed. Improved gender relations is the point of all this. I think males need to connect with the perspectives of females and learn to relate to them, and I would enjoy hearing the female perspectives on the proceedings.

Twenty-five of the participants (16%) left the question unanswered or explicitly stated that they had no preference:

I don't care, but a mixed sex audience shouldn't be any problem.

I believe it doesn't matter. Both parties should know about it.

Nine men (5%) stated that they preferred a same-sex audience because there would be less conflict and greater opportunity to speak openly:

I would prefer an all male audience because women would have different views on the issue. A mixed audience may cause conflict and closed-minds. With all-men we would have relate-ability.

I would have to say just men because we are able to say more with just men, than with women in the audience.

Male responses to this item raise interesting questions about the pedagogical implications of sexual assault programs. Are educators more likely to be successful with male-only audiences because there is potentially less conflict and more male disclosure? Or, should the message be delivered to mixed-sex audiences because the vast majority of college men seem to gravitate toward this type of learning environment? Have

mixed-sex programs been less effective due to the specific content, or have the facilitators failed to reduce male defensiveness, handle challenging discussions in effective ways, or offer proactive roles for men to assume? While there are good reasons to isolate the sexes, educators can potentially be successful with mixed-sex audiences if the information is delivered in such a way that invites men and women to work collaboratively to reduce campus rapes. Furthermore, some prevention educators have had success with mixed-sex programs (Heppner et al., 1995; Holcomb, Sarvela, Sondag, & Holcolmb, 1993; Johnson & Russ, 1989; Lonsway et al., 1998; Malamuth & Check, 1984; Mann, Hecht, & Valentine, 1988; Rodriguez et al., 2006). In fact, in a recent meta-analysis of sexual assault education programs, Anderson and Whiston (2005) discovered there was a significant positive effect size for rape attitudes when women were in mixed-sex formats and found that men in mixed-sex groups showed a larger effect in terms of behavioral intentions. In addition, researchers have discovered that men can be enrolled as agents of change and campus leaders (Barone et al., 2007; Rich et al., 2008; Schewe, 2002).

### CONCLUSIONS

Because it is clear that sexual assault is a significant problem on college campuses, and that male students are most likely to be the perpetrators of these violent crimes, it is important to design prevention programs and class curriculums that target men. However, a need exists for studies that evaluate the efficacy of male-oriented programs and highlight the barriers in the classroom. In this study we noted the themes that emerged when men were asked open-ended questions about their potential role in preventing violence against women. Their responses confirmed some earlier findings, challenged some previously held beliefs, and illuminated potential new directions for prevention educators.

While it was perhaps not surprising to learn that men were disinterested in prevention programs, it was disappointing to discover that so many men did not see the relevance to their own lives. In addition, many respondents felt that prevention programs would be a waste of their time. It appears that many male college students rhetorically construct rapists as “the other” and fail to see their own accountability in a rape culture or their responsibility to prevent violence against women. Gender studies educators should be deeply concerned about the force with which some participants expressed their feelings about rape prevention, the widespread subscription to rape myths, and the intense anger that was directed toward women. Our findings certainly support the need for college men to better understand hegemonic masculinity and rape, as well as the social and structural factors that inform hypermasculinity and rigid gender roles. Based on the consistent resistance displayed by study participants, instructors and prevention educators should recognize that they have significant barriers to overcome; the majority of male students do not want to attend prevention programs, and many men feel defensive and angry before presentations on violence against women even begin.

On a more hopeful note, we learned that 27% of respondents believed that men should become more educated about sexual assault, and a surprising 85% approved of



men who volunteer to take a role in prevention efforts. There is a stark contradiction between resistance to education on the one hand, and a desire for education and respect for those who participate in sexual assault education on the other. Based on this preliminary data, we suggest that men may be open to learning about masculinity and rape, but educators must debunk rape myths, clearly explain to participants that attending a program or enrolling in a class is a good use of their time, and illustrate why the issue has relevance to their lives. Since it appears that men do want to help in prevention efforts but tend to fall back on traditional masculine roles that reify patriarchy and view women as “helpless ladies,” educators should find ways to facilitate men’s desire for action while redirecting them to assume more helpful roles. For example, men can learn that one way to prevent violence is to intervene when other men are objectifying women, or they can participate in role-plays where they learn how to de-escalate situations that can potentially lead to an assault.

Although some researchers have argued for same-sex audiences, the participants in this study overwhelmingly supported a mixed-sex approach. Men preferred mixed sex audiences because they believed this would decrease the likelihood for “a sexist atmosphere” and increase the perception that men and women are “united” and “equally responsible” for preventing sexual assault. Although there are risks involved with mixed-sex audiences, if educators are aware of the triggers for male defensiveness, work to create a dialogic environment, and skillfully facilitate conflict, there may be good reasons for working with male and female college students at the same time. In the right environment men can come to understand women’s experiences, and women can show public support for men who are willing to disrupt patriarchy and the behaviors that lead to violence against women. More research is needed to evaluate mixed-sexed approaches that include strategies to reduce male defensiveness. Furthermore, future studies should consider whether women prefer mixed or same-sex audiences.

Although this study highlights male voices and resistant strategies, several important questions still need to be addressed. First, it is unclear if the men who are most resistant to prevention efforts are most likely to assault women. If this is the case, specific pedagogical techniques may need to be utilized with this sub-group. Second, pre and post-test surveys should be taken that consider men’s level of defensiveness before and after gender studies courses and rape prevention programs. This line of inquiry would be useful to ascertain the curriculums and programs that have the greatest impact on reducing defensiveness. Third, scholars should consider what types of roles men are willing to take on campus and how they can best be enrolled. Finally, future studies should continue to recruit diverse subject pools and consider the racial, ethnic, and cultural implications of prevention education. As researchers learn more about male resistance to prevention efforts, programs can be created to reduce the numbers of college women who are sexually assaulted.

#### REFERENCES

- Abbey, A., Ross, L. T., McDuffie, D., & McAuslan, P. (1996). Alcohol and dating risk factors for sexual assault among college women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 20, 147-169.

- Anderson, E. (2008). Inclusive masculinity in a fraternal setting. *Men and Masculinities, 10*(5), 604-620.
- Anderson, L.A., & Whiston, S.C. (2005). Sexual assault education programs: A meta-analytic examination of their effectiveness. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 29*, 374-388.
- Bachar, K., & Koss, M.P. (2001). From prevalence to prevention: Closing the gap between what we know about rape and what we do. In C. M. Renzetti, J. L. Edleson, & R. K. Bergen (Eds.), *Sourcebook on violence against women* (pp. 117-142). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Barone, R.P., Wolgemuth, J.R., & Linder, C. (2007). Preventing sexual assault through engaging college men. *Journal of College Student Development 48*(9), 585-594.
- Berkowitz, A.D. (1992). College men as perpetrators of acquaintance rape and sexual assault: A review of recent research. *Journal of American College Health, 40*, 175-181.
- Bird, S.R. (1996). Welcome to the men's club: Homosociality and the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. *Gender and Society, 10*(2), 120-132.
- Bohmer, C., & Parrot, A. (1993). *Sexual assault on campus: The problem and the solution*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Brenner, N.D., McMahon, P.M., Warren, C.W., & Douglas, K.A. (1999). Forced sexual intercourse and associated health-risk behaviors among female college students in the United States. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 67*, 252-259.
- Bullock, C.F. (2007). Framing domestic violence fatalities: Coverage by Utah newspapers. *Women's Studies in Communication, 30*(1), 35-63.
- Burgess, G.H. (2007). Assessment of a rape-supportive attitudes and beliefs in college men: Development, reliability and the validity of the rape attitudes and beliefs scale. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 23*(8), 973-994.
- Carlson, M. (2008). I'd rather go along and be considered a man: masculinity and bystander intervention. *Journal of Men's Studies, 16*(1), 3-17.
- Connell, R.W., & Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society, 19*, 829-859.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A.C. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Crooks, C.V., Goodall, G.R., Hughes, R., Jaffe, P.G., & Baker, L.L. (2007). Engaging men and boys in preventing violence against women: Applying a cognitive-behavioral model. *Violence Against Women, 13*(3), 217-239.
- DeKeseredy, W.S., & Schwartz, M.D. (2005). Masculinities and interpersonal violence. In M. S. Kimmel, J. Hearn, & R. W. Connell (Eds.), *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities* (pp. 353-366). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Fisher, B.S., Cullen, F.T., & Turner, M.G. (2000). *The sexual victimization of college women*. Washington D. C.: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Forbes, G.B., Adams-Curtis, L.E., Pakalka, A.H., & White, K.B. (2006). Dating aggression, sexual coercion, and aggression-supporting attitudes among college men as a function of participation in aggressive high school sports. *Violence Against Women, 12*(5), 441-455.
- Foubert, J.D. (2000). The longitudinal effects of a rape prevention program on fraternity men's attitudes, behavioral intent, and behavior. *Journal of American College Health, 48*, 158-163.
- Foubert, J.D. (2005). *The men's program: A peer education guide to rape prevention* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Foubert, J.D., & Cremedy, B.J. (2007). Reactions of men of color to a commonly used rape prevention program: Attitude and predicted behavior changes. *Sex Roles, 57*, 137-144
- Gage, E.A. (2008). Gender attitudes and sexual behaviors: Comparing center and marginal athletes and nonathletes in a collegiate setting. *Violence Against Women, 14*(9), 1014-1032.

- Gross, A.M., Winslett, A., Roberts, M., & Gohm, C.L. (2006). An examination of sexual violence against college women. *Violence Against Women, 12*(3), 288-300.
- Harari, H., Harari, O., & White, R.V. (1985). The reaction to rape by American male bystanders. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 125*(5), 633-658.
- Harvey, S.J. (1999). Hegemonic masculinity, friendship, and group formation in an athletic subculture. *Journal of Men's Studies, 8*(1), 91-108.
- Heppner, M.J., Good, G., Hillenbrand-Gunn, T., Hawkins, A., Hacquard, L., Nichols, R., et al. (1995). Examining sex differences in altering attitudes about rape: A test of the elaboration likelihood model. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 73*, 640-647.
- Holcomb, D., Sarvela, P., Sondag, K.A., & Holcomb, L. (1993). An evaluation of a mixed-gender date rape prevention workshop. *College Health, 41*, 159-164.
- Howard III, J.W., & Prividera, L.C. (2008). The fallen woman archetype: Media representations of Lynndie England, gender and the (ab)uses of U.S. female soldiers. *Women's Studies in Communication, 31*(3), 287-311.
- Johnson, J.D., & Russ, I. (1989). Effects of salience of consciousness-raising information on perceptions of acquaintance versus stranger rape. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 19*, 1182-1197.
- Katz, J. (2006). *The macho paradox: Why some men hurt women and how all men can help*. Naperville: Sourcebooks, Inc.
- Kilmartin, C., & Berkowitz, A.D. (2001). *Sexual assault in context: Teaching college men about gender*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kimmel, M.S. (1990). "Insult" or "injury": Sex, pornography, and sexism. In M.S. Kimmel (Ed.), *Men confront pornography* (pp. 305-319). New York: Crown Publishers.
- Kline, R.J. (1993). *The effects of a structured-group rape-prevention program on selected male personality correlates of abuse toward women*. Dissertation Abstracts International.
- Koss, M.P., Gidycz, C.A., & Wisniewski, N. (1987). The scope of rape: Incidents and prevalence of sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of higher education students. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 55*, 162-170.
- Lakoff, R. (1973). Language and woman's place. *Language in Society, 2*, 45-80.
- Littleton, H., & Henderson, C.E. (2009). If she is not a victim, does that mean she was not traumatized?: Evaluation of predictors of PTSD symptomatology among college rape victims. *Violence Against Women, 15*(2), 148-167.
- Loftland, J., & Loftland, L.H. (1995). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Lonsway, K.A. (1996). Preventing acquaintance rape through education: What do we know? *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 20*, 229-265.
- Lonsway, K.A., Klaw, E., Berg, D., Waldo, C., Kothari, C., Mazurek, C., et al. (1998). Beyond "No means no": Outcomes of an intensive program to train peer facilitators for campus acquaintance rape education. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 13*, 73-92.
- Maier, S.L. (2008). "I have heard horrible stories ...": Rape victim advocates' perceptions of the revictimization of rape victims by the police and medical system. *Violence Against Women, 14*(7), 786-808.
- Malamuth, N.M. (1981). Rape proclivity among males. *Journal of Social Issues, 374*(4), 138-157.
- Malamuth, N.M., & Check, J.V.P. (1984). Debriefing effectiveness following exposure to pornographic rape depictions. *Journal of Sex Research, 20*, 1-13.
- Mann, C.A., Hecht, M.L., & Valentine, K.B. (1988). Performance in a social context: Date rape versus date right. *Central States Speech Journal, 314*, 269-280.

- Murnen, S.K., Wright, C., & Kaluzny, G. (2002). If "boys will be boys," then girls will be victims?: A meta-analytic review of the research that relates masculine ideology to sexual aggression. *Sex Roles, 46*(11/12), 359-375.
- O'Donohue, W., Yeater, E.A., & Fanetti, M. (2003). Rape prevention with college males: The roles of rape myth acceptance, victim empathy, and outcome expectancies. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 18*(5), 514-531.
- Olson, L.N. (2004). The role of voice in the (re)construction of a battered woman's identity: An autoethnography of one woman's experience of abuse. *Women's Studies in Communication, 27*(1), 2-33.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Renzetti, C.M. (1999). The challenge to feminism posed by women's use of violence in intimate relationships. In S. Lamb (Ed.), *New versions of victims: Feminists struggle with the concept* (pp. 42-56). New York: New York University Press.
- Rich, M., & Rodriguez, J. (2007). A proactive performance approach to peer education: Considering the efficacy of a sexual assault intervention program. In L. Frey & K. Carragee (Eds.), *Communication activism: Media and performance activism* (Vol. 2) (pp. 315-344). New York: Hampton Press.
- Rich, M.D., Robinson, L., Ahrens, C., & Rodriguez, J.I. (2008). Proactive performance to prevent sexual assault: The role of masculinity in violence prevention. In L. Samovar, R. Porter & E. McDaniel (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (12th ed., pp. 413-419). Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Rodriguez, J., Rich, M., Hastings, R., & Page, J. (2006). Assessing the impact of Augusto Boal's "Proactive performance": An embodied approach for cultivating prosocial responses to sexual assault. *Text and Performance Quarterly, 26*(3), 229-252.
- Rogers, R. (2007). From hunting magic to shamanism: Interpretations of Native American rock art and the contemporary crisis in masculinity. *Women's Studies in Communication, 30*(1), 78-110.
- Rozee, P.D., & Koss, M.P. (2001). Rape: A century of resistance. *Psychology of Women, 25*, 295-311.
- Scheel, E.D., Johnson, E.J., Schneider, M., & Smith, B. (2001). Making rape education meaningful for men: The case for eliminating the emphasis on men as perpetrators, protectors, or victims. *Sociological Practice: A Journal of Clinical and Applied Sociology 3*(4), 257-278.
- Schewe, P.A. (2002). Guidelines for developing rape prevention and risk reduction interventions. In P.A. Schewe (Ed.), *Preventing violence in relationships: Interventions across the life span* (pp. 107-136). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Schewe, P.A., & O'Donohue, W. (1996). Rape prevention with high risk males: Short-term outcome of two interventions. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 25*, 455-471.
- Schwartz, M.D., & DeKeseredy, W.S. (1997). *Sexual assault on the college campus: The role of male peer support*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Simon, T. (1993). Complex issues for sexual assault peer education programs. *Journal of American College Health, 41*, 289-291.
- Smith, P., & Welchans, S. (2000). Peer education: Does focusing on male responsibility change sexual assault attitudes? *Violence Against Women, 6*(11), 1255-1268.
- Tewksbury, R., & Mustaine, E.E. (2001). Lifestyle factors associated with sexual assault of men: A routine activity theory analysis. *Journal of Men's Studies, 9*(2), 153-183.
- Thompson, E.H., & Cracco, E.J. (2008). Sexual aggression in bars: What college men can normalize. *Journal of Men's Studies, 16*(1), 82-96.

- Ullman, S.F. (2002). Rape avoidance: Self-protection strategies for women. In P.A. Schewe (Ed.), *Preventing violence in relationships: Interventions across the life span* (pp. 137-162). Washington DC: American Psychological Association.
- Winslett, A.H., & Gross, A.M. (2009). Sexual boundaries: An examination of the importance of talking before touching. *Violence Against Women, 14*(5), 542-562.
- Worthington, N. (2008). Encoding and decoding rape news: How progressive reporting inverts textual orientation. *Women's Studies in Communication, 31*(3), 344-367.
- Yeater, E.A., & O'Donohue, W. (1999). Sexual assault prevention programs: Current issues, future directions, and the potential efficacy of interventions with women. *Clinical Psychology Review, 19*(7), 739-771.

APPENDIX A  
SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAMS

Question #1

How would you feel if our university required all male students to attend a 1 day sexual assault prevention program? If this same course was voluntary instead of required, do you think men would attend? Why or why not? Follow up Question: How would you feel if our university required all male students to take a semester long sexual assault prevention course? If the same course was voluntary, instead of required, do you think men would attend? Why or why not?

Question #2

How would you feel if someone told you that preventing rape is primarily the responsibility of men? How would you respond to this individual?

Question #3

What role, if any, do you think men should take in the prevention of sexual assault? Why?

Question #4

How would you respond to a man who voluntarily selected to be a part of a sexual assault prevention program? Would you view this man as less masculine? Homosexual? Please explain.

Question #5

If you were going to participate in a sexual assault program would you rather do it in a mixed sex audience (men and women), or with only men in the audience? Please explain.

**MEN TO BOYS: THE MAKING OF MODERN IMMATURITY**

BY GARY CROSS. NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2008, 316 pp.

In *Men to Boys: the Making of Modern Immaturity*, Gary Cross, a social historian, argues that men in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have essentially stunted their maturity by sustaining their adolescence. As he puts it, his book is,

... a story about the broadening in space and time of the peer culture of youth. At the beginning of the century, it was limited to street corners and the occasional visit to the nickelodeon or amusement park. By midcentury it had spread out and become more pervasive with the transistor radio, rock music, and the drive-ins; today, with Internet social-networking serves likes MySpace and Facebook, it is far more pervasive, far more accessible—anytime, almost anywhere. (p. 255)

Although Cross's study begins at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he also reflects upon the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> as a time when gender roles became less defined and men as well as women became more conscious of how society affected their relationships because of restrictive expectations for what constituted masculine or feminine behavior. As a social historian, Cross does a magnificent job analyzing the patterns in popular culture which reflect the ways Americans met the challenges of gender reconstructions. He calls upon his broad and deep knowledge of films, television series, activists' movements, significant cultural figures (e.g., Hugh Hefner), leisure activities, etc. over the span of three generations. While his focus is on cultural evidence, Cross does not hesitate to insert personal anecdotes from the lives of his father, himself, and his son. Clearly, however, his argument rests on the social influences that shaped the thinking of actions of men over the past century. He does state at the start that the "Major themes of this book are taken from the experiences of white American men . . ." and that he is not arguing that these themes apply to all male Americans; however, Cross fails to qualify his conclusions by too often over-generalizing them. While he refers to the "rebellion of boomer African American males in the late 1960s" (p. 21), such references do little to complicate his findings about males. If there is one thing we in Gender Studies have learned, it is that we need to avoid simplifying our insights by not minimizing how race, class, sexual orientation, sexual identity, and ethnicity affect gender. To see how one might avoid such oversimplification, one might look at Michael Kimmel's *Guyland* (New York: Harpers Collins, 2008), in which he comes to similar conclusions as Cross does; but Kimmel, as a sociologist, provides substantial interviews of 400 young men between the ages of 16-26 which then lead to his generalizations. His in-

---

Permission to reprint a book review may be obtained from the book review's author.

*The Journal of Men's Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Fall 2010, 289-290.

ISSN/1060-8265 • e-ISSN/1933-0251 • The Men's Studies Press • <http://www.mensstudies.com>

interviewees provide a mix of races, sexual orientations, and ethnicities which allows Kimmel to make more nuance generalizations.

Nevertheless, Cross's book is worth the read in that his analyses convincingly reveals how popular culture mirrors and shapes the ways men and women have internalized gender concepts over the past century. It is hard to disagree with his intent to "show the comedy and tragedy as well as the confusions and struggles of boy-men and how why they emerged in recent years" (p. 20). As others (e.g., David Gilmore, Ray Raphael) have argued, Cross believes that modernity has dissolved clear markers of maturity so that young males do not have clear rites of passage. But, he does not believe this absence necessarily leads to a pessimistic conclusion. He offers several ways we might rethink male maturity, including: recognizing new ways by which to mark male maturity; celebrating rather than denying generational differences; becoming more conscious of the unsubstantial nature of contemporary cynicism and thrill options; and recognizing how outdated notions of masculinity (e.g., father-provider, power figures) prevent men from growing emotionally and psychologically. In other words, men need to spend time not focusing so much on "how to be masculine—rather, their masculinity lies in figuring out how to be human" (p. 258).

**OZZIE MAYERS**

College of St. Benedict/St. John's University  
English Department/Gender and Women's Studies  
St. Joseph, MN 56374

Copyright of Journal of Men's Studies is the property of Men's Studies Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.