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Sexual Assault: A Men's Issue, but a Men's Solution?

Sexual assault occurs on college campuses. It is an issue that is the responsibility of administrations at universities, but interventions do not always target the root cause of issues.

Although I came to college with no intention of joining a Greek Life organization, by the second semester of my junior year, I was the president of a chapter. I saw joining a fraternity as a way to create change on campus, to use a platform from an area that was traditionally seen as harmful, to do good from the inside. While I am proud of the activism that I have done through my chapter, I still had questions about the overall implications of male-dominated organizations and the role they play in issues, such as sexual assault, that are for a large part, enacted by men upon women. This paper does not seek to find a perfect solution to ending sexual assault, but I found it important to search for answers that might help prevent future students from becoming survivors.

Rape and sexual assault are not the same thing. Although rape is a severe form of sexual assault, not all sexual assault can be defined as rape. Specifically, rape is defined as “penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim” (“Sexual Assault”). Sexual assault is defined as “The term sexual assault refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim” (“Sexual Assault”).

With my research, I chose to include both survivors of rape, but also all forms of sexual assault. I would have ostracized the experiences of a large number of survivors, decreased the

data available to me, and potentially see an incomplete part of the puzzle while searching for answers. The definition of sexual assault varies from person to person, especially with individual experiences. What one survivor deems an assault, might not be seen as severe by another individual.

Consent and sexual assault go hand in hand. Without one, you have the other. The term “affirmative consent” has its origins from Antioch College in 1991. Students defined it as “affirmative, conscious, and voluntary”, going so far as to state that “Lack of protest or resistance does not mean consent, nor does silence” (Metz et al. 53). Additional parameters required for consent include ongoing continuance, right to revocation, and the idea that previous relations have no impact upon current consent. A concrete understanding of what consent entails is fundamental for the study and prevention of sexual assault.

Sexual assault is one of the most under-reported crimes, with an estimated 90% of survivors not reporting their assault (“About Sexual Assault”). Current data on the incidence paints a drastic picture. 20-25% of undergraduate women are survivors. Women ages 18-24 are three times more likely to be a survivor than women of any age. 6.8% of males experience assault via physical force, violence, or other means of incapacitation. 3.5-5% of college women will experience an attempted or completed rape during their college careers (Vandevier and Rager Dupalo 593). 46% of bisexual women and 13% of lesbian women are survivors (“Statistics”).

6.8% of undergraduate men are survivors (“Campus Sexual Assault”). However, a study by Vandiver and Rager Dupalo found that 12-16% of college men reported being coerced to have sexual relations, with 1-7% of men reporting physical force as means of coercion (595). Males ages 18-24 are 78% more likely to be survivors if attending college, compared to 20%

increased risk for women (“Campus Sexual Violence”). Queer men are ten times more likely to be survivors compared to heterosexual men (“Statistics”).

Rape, sexual assault, and violence are illegal simply due to their status as a form of assault. They are unique in their ties to university policy and procedure. Federal legislation like Title IX are put in place to help protect survivors. According to the University of Cincinnati’s Equity, Inclusion, and Impact, Title IX is a “federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in the university’s programs and activities. Sexual harassment, including sexual violence, and retaliation are forms of discrimination prohibited by Title IX” (“Title IX”). Private universities are not required to follow Title IX guidelines if they do not receive any federal funding (“Exemptions from Title IX”). However, this does not give their students and staff a free pass. They still must follow the law; therefore, any acts of sexual violence are still subject to criminal proceedings if they are reported to authorities.

Administration and staff at universities have a responsibility to keep their students safe. Bohmer and Parrot state “education efforts must be put in place”, “not only educating students, but also training for faculty and staff” (182). Expanding on this, they add, “administrators need to acknowledge that acquaintance rapes and sexual assaults happen”, recommending that universities distribute policy during orientation, following up with ongoing reminders (182). They argue that if students do not know that the policy exists or what it entails, they will be less likely to report (186). Hirsch and Kahn argue an extremely unique claim in their 2020 book, *Sexual Citizens*. They write that we should focus beyond just campus administrators, “it’s the state and federal elected officials who have failed our young people by allowing so many of them to come of age without receiving comprehensive sex education.” (266).

Why is sexual assault important for activism? Why focus on it over other crimes like theft, battery, corruption? Without working to solve the root cause of sexual assault and why it happens, it will continue to occur. If a perpetrator doesn't realize what consent requires, they won't change their actions. A study by Abbey, McAuslan, and Ross found that 71% of perpetrators committed multiple assaults (188). This shows that our interventions should target potential harmful actions, stopping individuals from assaulting. This would stop a greater number of individuals from becoming survivors by limiting the impact of one person causing harm.

Sexual assault is frequently seen as a women's issue. One of the largest and most convincing reasons that it affects women at a much greater rate (Jimenez). This follows an in-group, out-group bias. If sexual assault is not affecting men as frequently, and it is acknowledged less due to differing stigma related to male survivors coming forward, they don't realize the prevalence is as severe. In heterosexual relationships, or in male-female violence, the woman is far more likely to be the victim of violence. This plays into the gendered power dynamics already existing within our society. Furthermore, the misconception that men can't be assaulted, ostracizes the entire gender from the identity of being a survivor.

If sexual assault is a women's issue, is it also a men's issue? Violence doesn't discriminate, so the issue isn't exclusively male or female. Even if it was, that would exclude the experiences of survivors who are non-binary and gender non-conforming. Sexual assault is a men's issue because men know survivors regardless of their gender, men can be survivors themselves, and sexual violence affects how women view men ("Why is Sexual Assault"). Men can be perpetrators, and men can also help stop sexual assault. Hegemonic masculinity, which helps to maintain male positions in society is defined as "idealized, dominant, heterosexual,

constructed in relation to women, marriage” (Chant and Gutmann 278). These ideals are completely linked to mentalities that discredit the harm that sexual violence enacts.

Getting into specifics, undergraduate male students are 78% more likely to be survivors of sexual violence compared to men of the same age who are not enrolled in school (“Campus Sexual Violence Statistics”). Queer men are ten times more likely to be a survivor over their heterosexual counterparts (“Statistics”). Men face different stigmas and barriers when coming forward. They may not realize or identify their experiences as sexual assault. 12-16% of college men report being coerced into sexual encounters, with 1-7% of college men reported the use of physical violence as a factor (Vandevier and Rager Dupalo 595). These men didn’t consent to what happened to them, but that doesn’t mean that they acknowledge what happened to them as assault even if they know it was wrong.

All-male organizations on campuses, like sports teams, gendered residence halls, and/or fraternities can create a sounding chamber of thoughts and opinions heightened by hypermasculinity, group secrecy, sexual objectification, and excessive alcohol intake (Franklin et al. 1459). This creates a perfect storm for group-think mentality, where harmful ideas are supported and not disproved. Factors supporting this incidence include gender role ideology, male peer social support, and absence of deterrence (Franklin et al. 1461). Certain issues and factors linked to sexual violence impact men at a higher rate than women, for example, alcoholism and violence itself (Chant and Guttman 274). If we want to work to decrease the incidence of causative factors, we should work with the groups facing these issues the most. According to Hirsh and Kahn, “fraternity members were more likely to be assaulted than men who were not part of fraternities” (185).

Male survivors face different barriers and stigmas when coming forward. Frequent claims include that “it is impossible for men to have unwanted sexual experiences with women”, “men always want to have sex”, “men are too strong to be raped”, that “if a man doesn’t want sex it mean’s that he isn’t straight”, or that a man’s physical response to an encounter (for example, an erection) indicates consent (Vandevier and Rager Dupalo 595). These are all false. Male survivors who were assaulted at the hands of older women are seen as “mature for their age” and their experiences are not seen as severe as those of female survivors who went through similar events.

My intent with bringing up these issues is not to discredit the testimonies of female survivors, but to acknowledge systemic issues in believing the stories of all survivors, to support them and show how myths and misconceptions lead to underreporting and allow for repeated abuse. These myths say that what happens to men and boys isn’t rape. Following that idea, if something isn’t rape, it isn’t wrong. Education disproving these ideas can help to break the cycle of violence, enable survivors to come forward, and prevent more individuals from becoming survivors.

If we have acknowledged that sexual assault and sexual violence is an issue for individuals of all genders, why does it matter that we view it as a gendered issue? Interventions for sexual assault and consent may be more effective when targeting specific demographics. LGBTQ individuals are targeted at a much higher rate of sexual violence than heterosexual individuals, so interventions for the queer community need to include specific considerations. Although heterosexual relationships and standardized sexual education in public schools focus on the typical “penis-in-vagina” form of sexual intercourse, the definition of “having sex” is much broader than just that. Going further, consent is required for sexual acts that might not even

include physical contact, like mutual masturbation. If someone does not consent to action, they are still experienced something they were not okay with. This is another reason why I found it so important to include an expanded definition of sexual assault rather than limiting my research to just rape.

When gendered organizations like fraternities, sports teams, and gendered residence halls are so tightly linked to sexual assault, the interventions must consider and work to include these arenas while searching for solutions. These organizations and groups are pillars of society's power. Male dominated areas- even more so when they are straight, cis-gender, white, Christian, and upper-class men- uphold the traditionally powerful archetypes in society. The groups that hold the power stick together, which can lead to a lack of accountability. "There is a nucleus of fraternity and sorority members who are not heavy drinkers and do not approve of the extensive abuse around them" writes Schwarz and Dekeserdy, "These people might be recruited to develop techniques" (155-156).

There is a difficult line to see, and one important not to cross when working in sexual assault intervention and activism. We don't want to take away the metaphorical microphone away from survivors, but also, we don't want survivors to bear the entire weight of finding and implementing solutions of their own. If bringing in individuals who are not survivors, be they men, women, or any gender, it is important to listen to survivors. We also do not want to uphold the traditional patriarchal values of men needing to protect women from other, more violent, men. Men and allies are needed and wanted to help stop sexual assault and violence, but they shouldn't be the only ones working towards a safer future.

We've acknowledged that rape and sexual assault are issues, prevalent issues, on college campuses. But without understanding why and how sexual violence occurs, we can't start

creating permanent solutions. We must tackle the causes rather than limiting their impact(s). Some of the largest factors for why sexual violence occurs include myths and misperceptions, power and current dynamics within our society, and causative factors (Abbey et al. 183).

Specifically, in instances of male assault on female survivors, the power that men hold over women as a whole in society, not just individuals, impacts the justification and entitlement of sexual violence. Methods of coercion include riffing (or talking their way into a situation), working out a yes (continued pressure after receiving a no, like getting another drink for someone), rape baiting (identifying individuals less likely to not give in, like younger students), and changing the definition of consent to approve what they did (Metz et al. 55). According to Pascoe and Holladner, sexual assault is only possible through cultural values and behaviors that rationalize violence (Metz et al. 53).

Rape myths are widespread ideas and beliefs that blame survivors, absolve rapists, minimize the experience of survivors, and justify harmful actions. These are one of the strongest reasons that sexual assault continues to occur, especially within college campuses. Examples include that sexual assault isn't sexual assault if alcohol has been involved, that it sexual assault hasn't occurred if the individuals if the individuals were in a relationship at the time of the incident or previously had consensual relations, that accusations are used for revenge, that what the survivor was wearing was the cause, or that sexual assault happens because of male sex drive (Vandevier and Rager Dupalo 596). These are all false.

25-35% of college students support rape myths. Men are more likely than women, and the study "Factors that Affect College Students' Perceptions of Rape" found a positive correlation w/sexual violence and aggression. (Vandevier and Rager Dupalo 594). Factors affecting the belief of survivors' account(s) include the sex of the survivor, relationships between

parties, previous consensual experience, appearance and behavior prior to the assault, and physical evidence of the attack.

Causative factors are reasons that lead or are related to sexual assault. These include but are not limited to dating and sexual experiences, rape support beliefs or myths, alcohol consumption, and misperception of intent. When looking at survivors, 84% of individuals knew the person who assaulted them (Abbey et al. 168). Men who commit sexual assault more strongly endorse traditional gender roles, adversarial beliefs, and violence towards women. 74% of men and 55% of women reported alcohol consumption prior to the assault (168). Alcohol can lead to decreased inhibition, misperception (171), which makes it important to educate that individuals who are not sober cannot consent to sexual activity. On the topic of misperception, two-thirds of college students reported experiencing their now platonic feelings as being interpreted as something more (172). Individuals may choose to not ask for consent on the chance that it is not there.

Solutions differ by gender, just as the causes differ. There will never be a one-size-fits-all solution to sexual assault and violence. Every survivor's experience is vastly different and individualized. A self-defense class won't stop someone's drink from being spiked. Walking home in a group won't stop a survivor's partner from not asking for consent. We need to target sexual assault solutions from multiple directions to help prevent more people from becoming survivors. The Daily Campus said it best, sexual assault is an "everyone issue, but some solutions are more effective when targeting one group" (Jimenez).

Initiatives and trainings that target women focus on self-defense, staying in a group, watching your drink, and other similar interventions. While not a sure rule, these interventions attempt to prevent an individual from a successful assault. They don't necessarily prevent

perpetrators from attempting again, they don't stop the root cause. As Chant and Gutmann argue, "women-only interventions are not sufficient enough to change patriarchal structures" (270). Going further, identifying problems does not necessarily equate to finding solutions. It is not enough to recognize that men can cause violence. Bohmer and Parrot strongly write "usually in rape education programs for women, the implicit or explicit message is that women should make themselves safe by changing their own behavior and monitoring that of the men they date. This implies that it is a woman's responsibility to stop or avoid rape, and that she is responsible not only for her own behavior, but for the behavior of men. This is morally and legally wrong." (202). Similarly, Schwartz and Dekeseredy state "sexual assault will not stop because women take better precautions. It will stop when men stop assaulting." (147).

Many male-targeted solutions address potential perpetrators, victims, or include bystander training. These don't alter current gender role power dynamics that already exist. Chant and Gutmann argue, that if you don't include men, they might feel as though the cards are already stacked against them. Including men also spreads the workload of those trying to prevent sexual assault. Montreat College recommends specific interventions targeted at men, including, education about consent, how to support survivors (listen, be patient, assist in finding professional help, and not avenging the survivor), being aware of harmful language, speaking up against attitudes or behaviors, and intervening in situations ("Why is Sexual Violence").

As I've stated, no solution is 100% effective in stopping sexual assault. Activists and survivors have to balance immediate, in the moment solutions, like self-defense training and consent education, with long-term goals. We can't overthrow the patriarchy and its ideals in a single day. Short-term, individual solutions don't fix the root cause of sexual violence, but that doesn't mean that they can't save someone's life. Interventions have to be seen as a success if

they even save one person from becoming a survivor. These trainings, interventions, and solutions need to be required on college campuses. To be frank, students will not seek out this information on their own. Perpetrators don't see what they are doing as wrong, and many individuals don't see themselves as at risk of violence. But this isn't the case.

Anyone can be a victim of sexual violence. 84% of assaults occurred between people who knew each other, and 66% of assaults occurred in either the survivor or assailant's home (Abbey et al. 180). 50% of assaults on college campuses occur from August to November ("Campus Sexual Violence"). This means that education and interventions can't wait until the spring semester to be shared with students. Frequently events like Take Back the Night, or Denim Day take place in April, which is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. However, these would hold a much greater impact if held during Welcome Week, New Student Orientation, or Residence-Hall Move-In.

In conclusion, sexual assault is an issue that affects individuals of all genders, but gender does play a role in who is targeted. The solutions need to address all causes of sexual assault, not just prevention of survivors, but also prevention of perpetrators. Education on what is consent, what is sexual assault, and how society's power dynamics play into them are all critical to work to find solutions. University students reside in a bubble, and the incidence of sexual violence are drastically different than those of their non-college counterparts. Survivors and activists need all the help that they can get to work to stop sexual assault, and one of the most underutilized demographics in causing that change is the undergraduate male. No solution is going to completely fix the issue, but tackling it from as many angles as possible is the best bet to prevent more individuals, especially students, from becoming survivors, including from working to educate college men, those in male-dominant and exclusive organizations on how they can help.

Something I struggled with this research was if it is enough for men and other individuals to recognize sexual assault as an issue, and want to prevent it, if the reason for them caring is for the wrong reasons. I repeatedly found statistics and arguments that men view rape as a men's issue due to the long standing patriarchal structures and ideals of "men needing to protect women", of "needing to stop one's self from being accused of assault", or to "avoid the accusations of others". This is incredibly prevalent in male-dominated organizations was that they need to protect each other, as a brotherhood or family. That an attack or accusation against one of them is a threat to all of them. I don't have a good answer.

On one hand, survivors and activists need help. Movements like It's on Us and MeToo have made big strides in the support of survivors, but there is still so much further to go. We need people to recognize that sexual assault does happen. One article told the story of a fraternity using their pledges as designated drivers at parties. While this did help students who were under the influence get home safe, it not only helped uphold the patriarchal standards of "men protecting women" but it also falls under hazing, which in no way is a good thing. This isn't the most drastic example of the right thing for the wrong reasons, but the intentions behind the actions are less than pure. At what point, if ever, do you have to be happy with the results of increased safety on college campuses?

I question this often while looking at my own journey. I joined a fraternity because I wanted to make change on campus. I do think that many college campuses would be better, safer places without Greek life organizations. However, I don't see this as a feasible outcome, and when I knew that I needed a platform for my activism, I chose to join a chapter. As president of my fraternity, I have been able to have an impact. I've distributed cup/can protection to prevent roofied drinks. I've hosted educational events on bystander intervention, believing survivors, and

being an ally to marginalized communities, but I am still doing this through the means of a historically patriarchal organization. It's a balancing act. I've attached resources created by my fraternity in an appendix of this essay, and I hope that you learn something from them.

Additional topics that arose in my research but I encountered difficulty finding data were “the effectiveness of male-focused interventions”, “changes in campus sexual assault with increased social media and online dating presence”, and “differences in outcome with education on consequences of assault vs education on the impact that survivors experience”.

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Bystander Intervention: *Tips & Tricks*

E O P
W e e k
F a l l
2 0 2 1

How to Safely Intervene to Stop Sexual Assault

- Use Humor
- Call for Help/Authorities
- Cause a distraction
- Get others Involved
- Show Support
- Use Code Words

Statistics and Facts on Sexual Assault

- 20-25% of undergraduate women are victims/survivors of sexual violence
- 90% or more survivors do not report their assault
- Sexual violence is the most underreported crime
- Regardless of the situation, the survivor is never at fault
- Consent must be given freely, specific, informed, voluntary, unambiguous, and sober.



With Questions, Ideas, or to Join, contact:

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Resources On Campus

Title IX Office: located at 308 USquare, the Title IX office helps in cases of sexual harassment, violence, discrimination, and retaliation. Email: titleix@uc.edu

It's On Us UC: this student led organization has the intention to prevent sexual assault on UC's campus, raise awareness, and create a community of support for survivors. IG: [@itsonusuc](https://www.instagram.com/itsonusuc)

Women Helping Women: located at 559 Steger, WHW offers confidential services for survivors of sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking. Call/text: 513-431-3807



Drink Safety

RECOGNIZE A SPIKED DRINK

-Foggy appearance, excessive bubbles, sinking ice, or a change in color

BARRIER METHODS

-Cup Condoms, Nightcaps, and Stoptopps all prevent something being slipped into your drink

-Never Leave Your Drink Unattended

-Pour Your Own Drinks

