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Sexual Assault Prevention

The problem of sexual assault by men requires that men participate fully in solving it. This awareness, inspired by feminist understandings of men's violence (Kaufman 1987), has led to the development of sexual assault prevention programs for men, the formation of men's antiviolence and men stopping rape groups, the creation of media and social norms marketing campaigns directed toward men, and federal funding for men's programs. Among the earliest efforts to focus on men's responsibility were Berkowitz (1994) and Funk (1994) and, more recently, Kilmartin (2001).

These programs assume that: (1) men should accept responsibility for preventing sexual assault; (2) men are best viewed as prevention partners; and (3) small, interac-

tive, peer-led, all-male workshops are most effective. Typically in such programs, prevailing understandings and misperceptions of men's experience are critiqued and positive antirape values and healthy behavior are reinforced, including teaching men to intervene in other men's behavior (Berkowitz 2002).

The literature suggests that these programs can produce short-term changes in men's attitudes that are associated with rape proclivity (Lonsway 1996); that creating defensiveness or blame is not effective; and that most men are uncomfortable with their socialization to be sexual and with the sexism and inappropriate behavior of other men (Berkowitz 2002). Literature reviews and meta-analyses of rape prevention programs have concluded that men and women both benefit more from prevention programs when they are offered in single-sex audiences than in coeducational groups (see Berkowitz 2002). Thus, there are specific issues and concerns for each gender that are more effectively addressed separately when possible. If not, the gender differences that make such separation desirable must still be considered.

Some of the reasons men give for initially preferring all-male programs include: (1) men are more comfortable, less defensive, and more honest in all-male groups; (2) men are less likely to talk openly and participate in the presence of women; (3) mixed-gender discussions can become polarized; (4) single-gender groups reveal a diversity of opinions among men that may not be expressed if women are present; (5) men feel safe disagreeing or putting pressure on each other in all-male groups; and (6) focusing on risk reduction in mixed-gender groups can result in victim blaming.

In general, sexual assault prevention programs fall into one of four categories depending on the goal of the program and the predominant emphasis (Berkowitz 2002). *Victim empathy* programs try to foster men's empathy for the experience of a victim so that men will be less likely to cause hurt and harm to women. This approach falls short of

asking men to make changes in personal behavior and risks appealing to a male-helper mentality. A *consent model* teaches men definitions of consenting intimacy and guidelines to ensure that all intimacy is mutual, uncoerced, and consenting. It emphasizes a man's responsibility for ensuring that what they desire is mutual for both people at all times. *Bystander interventions* teach men how to intervene in the behavior of other men and are based on the assumption that men who commit sexual assault overidentify with traditional masculine values and roles and are especially sensitive to what other men think (Berkowitz, Burkhart, and Bourg 1994). The focus of bystander intervention programs is to provide the majority of men who are uncomfortable with these men's behavior with the permission and skills to intervene. Bystander interventions make men responsible for changing the larger environment of how men relate to each other and to women. Finally, *socialization-focused* programs explore the cultural and societal expectations of men that influence how men are taught to think and act in relation to women. A socialization-oriented discussion inevitably focuses on men's homophobia and how men are taught to devalue the feminine.

In practice, these approaches are interdependent and overlap. Considering them is helpful in adapting a program to the needs and characteristics of the specific audience. They can be thought of as occurring in a developmental sequence that moves from creating an awareness of the problem of sexual assault, to personal change, and to a commitment to impact the behavior of other men.

Recently, there have been efforts to augment and reinforce small group interventions through the use of media campaigns that portray men in positive, antirape roles (Men Can Stop Rape 2001) or through social norms marketing campaigns that provide data about the true norms for men's behavior (Bruce 2002).

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See also Batterer Intervention Programs

Further Reading:

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