

Title: Getting College Men Involved in the Fight Against Sexual Assault

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“It is men who rape and men who collectively have the power to end rape” (Benke, 1991, p. 4). Scholar Timothy Benke’s declarative statement shows that if we want to work toward ending rape in our society, then we must focus our energies on those who commit the vast majority of rapes: men. In studying male college students’ sexual behavior, Malamuth (1981) discovered that over one-third of his sample admitted that they would commit rape if they knew they would never get caught. Research also shows that about one out of every fifteen college men has admitted to committing or attempting rape (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Studies on the topic of sexual misconduct on college campuses indicate that an estimated 35 percent of college women experience sexual assault while on a date during their college years (Makepeace, 1986). Another study found that one out of every four college women has been the victim of sexual assault (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). The problem of sexual assault on college and university campuses has been, and continues to be, an epidemic.

Rape prevention education at colleges and universities has traditionally been targeted toward female students. Women are instructed on things they should and should not do to prevent rape. For example, women might be told to go to parties with friends who will look out for each other, that they should be mindful of how much they drink, and that they should not go home with someone they do not know. If Residence Life professionals and other college educators continue to only educate women on preventing rape, then no progress in eradicating sexual violence will ever be achieved. By continually focusing rape prevention efforts on women, student affairs professionals are forever leaving the responsibility of rape with women. The message becomes that they are the ones who have the power to prevent rape. Because it is men who are most often the perpetrators of rape, only they have the power to stop rape. In other

words, “exclusive emphasis on what women can do to prevent rape...supports the attitude that women are responsible for rape” (Earle, 1996, p. 3). While personal safety skills are valuable life lessons for everyone, rape will never end if we only educate women on how to protect themselves. I, like many of the scholars on the topic, stand firmly committed to the idea that in order to effectively work toward preventing rape, Residence Life professionals and other college educators must focus our energies on what men need to do to end sexual violence.

Most rape prevention sessions do not attract the men who need to be attending them. Often, college men may feel that sexual assault prevention programs do not pertain to them, or they might feel awkward about attending co-educational rape prevention programs out of fear that they will become the target of angry women who blame all men for sexual violence. College men might also feel uncomfortable discussing sexuality and other emotional issues in front of women. Studies are beginning to show that college men are more open to discussing issues surrounding sexual assault if they are in male-only sessions facilitated by other men. Men are more likely to feel less defensive and more open to asking questions on the topic of rape when they are in a single-sex environment (Earle, 1996). Moreover, having men-only workshops on sexual assault awareness is especially important because “so much of male role learning takes place in male groups (i.e., athletics, fraternities, etc.), so it makes sense that unlearning should take place in this setting” (Earle, 1996, p. 13). To that end, in all-male settings, traditional notions of masculinity and of what it means to be ‘a man’ can be challenged and discussed by those within the system. Men can begin the process of deconstructing the socialization process that gives them rigid definitions of how to be men. In a male-only setting, college men can discuss the pressures to have multiple partners, the fear of appearing too sensitive, and their confusion over perceived mixed messages they receive about sex. Men can

also explore the role that pornography plays in how they view sex and their sexual fantasies. And, in male-only settings, men may be more likely to speak about times when they may have used their power to coerce someone into having sex and are now left wondering as to whether or not sexual misconduct occurred.

Individuals working in Residence Life can do a number of things to help involve college men in the fight against sexual assault. Resident Assistants (RAs) and Residence Life professionals can lead male-only workshops. Good examples include Jackson Katz's (www.jacksonkatz.com) documentary *Tough Guise* which examines the role the media plays in the male socialization process and the effect it has on creating a culture of violence. Assistant Professor of Higher Education at the William and Mary School of Education, John Foubert, has established a workshop called *The Men's Program* (www.nomorerape.org) with a facilitation guide. "Based on research showing that male participants must consider rape from a personal perspective, with themselves as a victim, in order to fully empathize with rape survivors, 'The Men's Program' focuses on building victim empathy and on teaching men how to help women recover from a rape experience" (Foubert & Lavoy, 2000, p. 19). Also, a number of cities have anti-violence organizations, such as Atlanta's Men Stopping Violence (www.menstoppingviolence.org), that can bring speakers in to residence halls to discuss things men can do to commit to never acting violently against a partner.

Annually, November 25 is the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women. Residence Life staff can utilize this day to educate men on ways they can get involved in the effort to end violence against women. RAs can sit in the lobby of their buildings and ask residents to join in a white ribbon campaign where individuals sign a commitment that they will never act violently against women (www.whiteribbon.ca). In addition to this day, throughout the

year RAs can make bulletin boards about ways men can combat sexual violence, they can organize a group of male residents to march in Take Back the Night, and they can partner with fraternities to raise money for community-based rape crisis centers.

Those of us working in Residence Life must show college men that rape is an issue for everyone and that they are the ones who have the power to stop rape. We must work with college men to deconstruct narrow understandings what it means to be a 'man', and have open conversations about sexual coercion and the need to always get consent when engaging in sexual acts. We must get men to fight sexist language, jokes and attitudes, and be comfortable in supporting traditional women's causes without fearing the label of being gay. Without men actively fighting for this cause, rape will never end.

END

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