

# Rape-Prevention Programs Proliferate, but 'It's Hard to Know' Whether They Work

Photograph By Michael Okoniewski

Fraternity members at Binghamton U. listen to speakers at 20:1, the university's sexual-violence-prevention program. It is named for the approximate number of women sexually assaulted every hour in the United States.

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By Piper Fogg

Imagine that you are a male police officer walking down a dark alley. Two drunken men surprise you, take your gun, and then sexually assault you.

This is the scenario groups of young men are asked to visualize during a presentation at Binghamton University. Part of a sexual-assault-prevention program designed for college fraternities, the exercise is meant to sensitize men to the way a female rape victim might feel.

The program, a combination of popular prevention strategies, attempts to help men understand sexual consent and explains bystander behavior— how third parties can intervene to stop potential assaults.

In an ideal world, such programs would help do away with rape, or any unwanted sexual contact, on college campuses. But most prevention programs have not been proven to reduce incidents of sexual assault at all.

One complication, say experts in the field, is that, as awareness of sexual assault at a given college grows, so, too, does the number of reported assaults, because people feel more comfortable coming forward. Studies estimate that as many as one in four college women is a victim of rape or attempted rape.

"It's hard to know whether a program works or not," says Dara Raboy-Picciano, creator of Binghamton's program.

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Fraternity leaders (above) are the facilitators in Binghamton U.'s sexual-assault-prevention program, which draws emotional responses (right) from participants. Peer participation is key, say researchers.

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Still, spurred by rape-education advocates, concerned parents, and scandal-wary administrators, these programs continue to spread. Concerns about lawsuits have also prompted colleges to bolster their prevention strategies. While court rulings on colleges' liability in sexual-assault cases have been inconsistent, litigation can be very expensive, says Karen-Ann Broe, a lawyer at United Educators Insurance, a risk-management and insurance company that serves many colleges. "We strongly recommend that colleges and universities have some type of prevention program geared toward their students," she says.

So does the U.S. government. The Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women gives grants to colleges to develop or strengthen various resources, including policies related to prevention, victim counseling, and training for administrators and the campus police in identifying and responding to sexual assaults.

Some colleges try to reach all their incoming freshmen during orientation, or work the training into their curricula, while others aim to reach a few hundred students a year. On some campuses, well-financed women's centers funnel thousands of dollars into the effort, while other colleges have found ways to educate a good chunk of students without a real budget, relying on student volunteers and fund raising.

The challenge for colleges is that even the best prevention strategies lack guarantees. "There is no magic bullet," says Paul Schewe, a psychologist at the University of Illinois at Chicago and director of the Interdisciplinary Center for Research on Violence. The field is relatively new to academe, and not all experts agree on the best approaches. In fact, one professional squabble became so ugly that two prominent prevention experts do not talk to each other anymore.

Still, researchers on sexual-violence prevention say that studies show that some programs may help change not only attitudes, but also behaviors.

### **'Not a Fun Program'**

John D. Foubert, an associate professor of education at Oklahoma State University, says that in a field where proof is often elusive, the Men's Program has been shown to work.

The program, which Mr. Foubert created in the late 1990s, consists of an hourlong workshop on sexual assault. The cornerstone of the program is a video that dramatizes the rape of the male

police officer, which is both graphic and disturbing. And according to his research, Mr. Foubert says, the video increases men's aversion to rape while casting them not as potential abusers but as "potential helpers" who can help prevent assaults.

On its Web site, Mr. Foubert's organization highlights statistics from studies he has conducted on the program's effectiveness. It says that not only does the program improve men's understanding of how to help a woman recover from rape, but it also lowers "the likelihood of raping for an entire academic year—longer than any other program evaluated in the research literature." Furthermore, Mr. Foubert concluded that 75 percent of "high risk" men who attend his program report lower likelihood of raping after the program concludes.

In 2007, Mr. Foubert and two co-authors published a study showing that 10 percent of freshman members of a college fraternity who did not see his program committed acts of sexual assault during the academic year, compared with 6 percent of those who saw the program.

Mr. Foubert's nonprofit organization, One in Four—named after the college rape statistic—packs recent college graduates into an RV to tour the country presenting his program. So far about 35 colleges have created chapters of One in Four on their campuses. The University of Pennsylvania, which started a chapter four years ago, has 26 male peer educators trained in the Men's Program. "It works well," says Jessica A. Mertz, a violence-prevention educator at Penn. "Students like to hear from their peers."

Ms. Mertz has found that students tend to feel less defensive when listening to someone they have seen at parties or in class. "There's a history of sexual-violence education where men are used to feeling blamed," she says.

At the University of Virginia, Declan T. Tansey, a senior who is president of the One in Four chapter there, estimates that the group attracts several hundred men a year to view the program, all on a voluntary basis. "Ours is not a fun program," says Tansey. "It usually strikes a nerve with people."

One in Four's Web site features gushing endorsements from educators. But Mr. Foubert's descriptions of the program's success have irked some of his peers. Among them is Alan Berkowitz, a professor-turned-consultant who developed another popular prevention strategy—training bystanders to help prevent assaults.

Mr. Berkowitz says that Mr. Foubert has focused too much on promoting his program, and that some colleges may have overlooked other effective strategies. The two men have written dueling essays about whether Mr. Foubert accurately describes the successes of his program.

While some rape-prevention strategies were created specifically for men, others were designed to empower women. The latter include "risk reduction" programs that have been shown to decrease the likelihood of being assaulted. Such programs teach women, for example, to keep an eye on their drink to prevent someone from drugging it; to attend parties in groups; and to set boundaries in sexual situations. Self-defense training can be another component.

But the majority of programs are for both genders, according to a recent review written by a panel of sexual-assault-prevention experts, including Mr. Berkowitz and Mr. Schewe. Most rely on a lecture format, but many use videos, interactive skits, role-playing, and rape survivor stories. And according to *Rape Prevention and Risk Reduction: Review of the Research Literature for Practitioners*, mixed-gender programs have been shown to produce positive changes in attitudes about rape, although they have generally not been successful over the long term.

Several companies have gotten into the game, too. Colleges can book a performance of *Sex Signals*, a two-person play designed to educate students using a mix of improvisational comedy and audience participation. NFormed.on.sexual.assault, which bills itself as a "not for too much profit" company, offers online video training to colleges at a cost of up to \$6.95 per student.

### **An Array of Options**

One problem colleges face in choosing from a dizzying array of options is that many programs have not been scientifically evaluated. "It takes money and time and energy to evaluate programs," says Christine A. Gidycz, a professor of psychology at Ohio University, who has run studies on her own risk-reduction program for women.

Even the evaluated programs have their limits. For example, there are few if any published studies that have documented behavioral changes that last longer than the length of an academic year. Most studies do not measure men's actual sexual aggression but instead measure things like intentions and attitudes, which haven't been proven to predict behavior. And programs are often evaluated by the creators themselves.

Another question surrounding prevention programs is whether they can deter those most likely to commit rapes. The majority of rapists, almost all of whom are male, are never reported or prosecuted, according to David Lisak, a clinical psychologist at the University of Massachusetts at Boston who has spent more than two decades studying rapists. These "undetected rapists," as he called them in a 2002 paper, hold rigid beliefs about gender roles and objectify women. They are usually hypermasculine, equating aggression, sexual prowess, and violence with their own adequacy. They tend to use alcohol deliberately to make their victims more vulnerable to attack.

Their behavior, says Lisak, often emerges from sexually violent subcultures, such as those whose members consider violent pornography entertainment. Such men, he and other experts say, do not change.

Despite those challenges, experts say that colleges can learn important lessons from studies and from those who work to prevent assault. At the University of New Hampshire, for example, Sharyn J. Potter has found that if students think the prevention materials are phony, they will ignore the message. That is why Ms. Potter, a sociologist there, used a design firm that specializes in youth culture when she created a poster campaign to prevent sexual violence.

Her team made sure that the actors who appeared on the posters dressed and talked like New Hampshire students (some students, too, appeared in the campaign). The posters, which are part of a larger sexual-violence-prevention effort on the campus called "Bring in the Bystander,"

encourage people to intervene in potentially risky situations, such as a man telling his friends that he plans to get a girl so drunk that "she can't say no." The posters were vetted by freshmen whom Ms. Potter plied with pizza, candy, and cash. "The students are brutally honest," she says.

In a 2005 study, students whose dorms were plastered with the posters for two weeks showed an increased knowledge of what it meant to be a bystander and could list concrete ways to intervene. Once the campaign went campuswide, a 2006 study of 372 students showed that those who had seen the posters were significantly more willing to get involved as bystanders, and were more likely to report actually having done so.

The larger bystander project at New Hampshire has also led to improvements on the campus, says Victoria L. Banyard, a psychologist who both helped create the program and has evaluated it. The in-person program, which consists of either one 90-minute session or three 90-minute sessions, encourages students to act when they witness potentially risky behavior, such as a group of men at a party leading a drunk woman into a bedroom. Students brainstorm how they might help someone, such as by creating a distraction or pulling a friend aside.

In a study of 389 undergraduates conducted between 2002 and 2005, students who participated in the program reported more confidence in their ability to intervene, and reported doing "more active-bystander behaviors" in a two-month period compared with those who did not participate in the program.

Richard W. Peyser, a junior who is student-body vice president at New Hampshire, remembers reading the posters in the bathroom last year. "It hit home," he says. "There is one I can remember specifically," he says, describing a poster about cellphone stalking, in which someone was overwhelmed by unwanted text messages. Mr. Peyser helped insert a clause in the student handbook about electronic stalking. He thinks the poster was timely. "It takes your attention for just a second," he says, "but that second might make a difference."

### **Changing the Script**

As a longtime rape educator, Dorothy J. Edwards knows the limitations of prevention programs firsthand. Fed up with the same old rape skit, she decided to throw out the script four years ago. That's when she came up the Green Dot model.

The program asks people to imagine that every positive action countering sexual violence is a green dot on a map, wiping out red dots of aggression. The strategy is to educate socially influential people in the techniques of bystander intervention, who in turn influence others to join in, creating a sort of viral enthusiasm for the cause. Ms. Edwards, who directs the Violence Intervention and Prevention Center at the University of Kentucky, uses the term "power-based violence," figuring the new term will attract more men, who might otherwise dismiss a phrase like rape prevention as something only women need worry about.

So far this semester 2,500 people have finished the training, and close to 50 percent are men. A recent study showed that freshmen who took part in the training increased their understanding of bystander behavior and reported they were more likely than before to intervene in various scenarios.

Ms. Edwards credits the interest in the program to the staff members and volunteers who promote the training. The center's assistant director recently had 30 coffees over three weeks with individual students, to encourage them to take the Green Dot training. So far, the model has spread to about 20 states, with several dozen universities. "It was time to experiment with something new," says Ms. Edwards.

Experts suggest that colleges that want to design their own program should first consult a social scientist familiar with sexual-assault prevention. Ms. Gidycz, the Ohio University psychologist, says a good goal would be to have every student at a college exposed to some kind of training, though Ms. Edwards believes that voluntary programs are more likely to stick with students.

Ownership is crucial, according to Ms. Raboy-Picciano, who created Binghamton's program. The fraternity leaders who work as presenters of the program, called 20:1, are very protective of it. They help write the scripts and hand-pick their successors. And even though they don't receive any academic credit or compensation, the volunteers tend to stay on for two years, double the requested commitment. "There's this energy created that keeps everyone close," says Ian Bell, who graduated in 2007 and helped found 20:1. He says he and his fellow presenters met weekly and bonded over a mutual desire to work for social change.

Another guideline, says Ms. Gidycz, is that the more exposure a student has to the prevention material, the greater the impact. And programs with an active component, such as audience participation or role-playing, seem to be more effective than passive programs. "You have to train, train, train your facilitators," says Ms. Gidycz. "You can't just open up a manual."

Daniel Esparza, who directs campus programs for the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, helps colleges comply with the Office on Violence Against Women's grant rules. He has found that the most important thing in prevention is to have a coordinated community response. That means that student-affairs staff members must communicate with people at women's centers or rape-crisis centers, train both campus and local police officers, and educate as many people as possible about available support resources.

Experts believe that with more attention on prevention, colleges will continue to learn what works. Ms. Edwards, of Kentucky, echoes some of her peers when she says it doesn't matter to her which strategy comes out on top, as long as the goals are met. "I couldn't care less about Green Dot," she says. "I want to end rape."