

# IT'S ON US ENGAGING MEN: NATIONAL CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULT ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS RESEARCH REPORT

## Authors:

SILVIA ZENTENO, Senior Director of Education and Research, It's On Us  
MALLORY STEWART ROBISON, Director of Data, Civic Nation

## Contributors:

RUAIRÍ ÓCEARÚIL, Data Analyst, Civic Nation  
KATE TULLY, Intern, It's On Us

## Research Partner:

CHRIS HAUCK, HauckEye



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Overview of Research Project</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Sample</b>	<b>7</b>
Table 1: Participant Demographics	7
<b>Conducting the Interviews</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>ANALYSIS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Proximity to the Problem</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Impact of Prevention by Institutions</b>	<b>11</b>
Annual Training	11
The Effect of the Pandemic	12
Existing Resources	13
Definitions of Consent	14
Consequences	14
Perceived Urgency	15
School Type	16
<b>Social life</b>	<b>17</b>
Party Atmosphere	17
Greek life	18
Male-Only Circles of Influence	19
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Appendix A: About It's On Us &amp; Civic Nation</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix B: About Hauckeye</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Appendix C: Research Project Goals</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendix D: Screener Questions</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendix E: Interview Questions</b>	<b>26</b>

# ABSTRACT

There is an urgent need in higher education to research prevention education programming that educates and empowers young men to be a part of the solution to sexual violence on college campuses. It's On Us partnered with HauckEye to conduct a first-of-its-kind qualitative study exploring the attitudes and perceptions of male-identifying students and their likelihood to get involved in the prevention of gender-based violence on campus. The Research Project collected information on the types of prevention programming schools are conducting, as well as their effectiveness, reach, and possible gaps by using an exploratory qualitative method in order to better understand the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of young college men. This research method was chosen for its ability to explain behavior that cannot be easily quantified by allowing participants to detail their experiences and feelings.

The study has several key conclusions. The interviews revealed that study participants aren't aware of the extent of sexual violence on campus and/or do not see how it affects them. Participants highlighted that current training programs are ineffective, boring, and disconnected from their campus experience. Building awareness of campus sexual assault among young men requires more than just training: they need non-male friends and role models in order to see non-male peers as people, rather than objects. Finally, the men in the study viewed themselves as "good people" and expressed a desire to help others, but they just don't know how. This underscores the need for comprehensive training to give young men the tools necessary to be an active bystander.

In order to build the most effective programming, It's On Us campus administrators should implement creative training methods and consider providing certifications to give students a sense of accomplishment. Additionally, training sessions should be held in person whenever possible to increase comprehension. Programming should focus on combating assumptions about campus sexual violence, such as the stereotype that sexual violence only happens at fraternities. Finally, building campus connections is key to effective prevention. Ensuring that men, women, and gender non-conforming students are fully integrated on campus helps establish that non-male identifying students are seen as more than objects.

It's On Us intends to build on this research and conduct a large-scale quantitative survey. It is urgent to conduct further research and subsequently continue to develop prevention education programming that educates and empowers young men to be a part of the solution.

Founded in 2014 as a White House initiative by President Obama and then-Vice President Biden, It's On Us is now an initiative of [Civic Nation](#), a nonprofit ecosystem for high-impact organizing and education initiatives working to build a more inclusive, equitable America. It's On Us's mission is to build the movement to combat campus sexual assault by engaging all students, with an emphasis on young men, in prevention education, and activating the largest student organizing program of its kind. For more information on It's On Us, please visit [itsonus.org](https://itsonus.org).

# BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

## Background

1 in 5 women, 1 in 13 men<sup>1</sup>, and 1 in 4 trans<sup>2</sup> or gender nonconforming students are sexually assaulted during their college experience. Sexual violence can affect a student's physical and mental health and can have negative impacts on a student's ability to learn, socialize, and develop professionally. Moreover, sexual violence is the most underreported crime. Under 10% of college survivors report their assault to their college, university, or law enforcement<sup>3</sup>. With high prevalence rates and low reporting rates, comprehensive prevention programs that change the culture on college and university campuses around the country are extremely important.

Sexual violence is prevalent throughout the country; however, college-age students between the ages of 18–24 are at risk of sexual assault at a rate three times higher than other at-risk groups<sup>4</sup>. Congress passed the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (Campus SaVE) in 2014 in response to high sexual assault prevalence rates. Under Campus SaVE, institutions are required to annually provide every enrolled student with the following: primary prevention programming; consent education programming; training on safe and positive options for bystander intervention; information on recognizing the warning signs of abusive behavior; and, risk reduction education<sup>5</sup>.

Schools are also often unwilling to do hard work to confront the socio-cultural gender inequities that exist on their campuses that contribute to campus rape culture<sup>6</sup>. Confronting campus rape culture would require institutions to hold the two student populations most at risk for perpetration of sexual assault – male athletes and men in fraternities – accountable, but doing so would likely risk their financial bottom line<sup>7</sup>. As a result, institutions often place the burden of sexual assault prevention on those most at risk for being victimized (i.e. young women) through the implementation of rape-avoidance programs, rather than deploying programs that educate and empower those students often in the best position to prevent sexual assault from happening, namely young men. Other institutions purchase expensive, cookie-cutter online prevention education programs from for-profit companies that students must complete before registering for classes, despite these programs having no independently

1 Mellins, C. A., Walsh, K., Sarvet, A. L., Wall, M., Gilbert, L., Santelli, J. S., Thompson, M., Wilson, P. A., Khan, S., Benson, S., Bah, K., Kaufman, K. A., Reardon, L., & Hirsch, J. S. (2017). Sexual assault incidents among college undergraduates: Prevalence and factors associated with risk. PLOS ONE, 12(11). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0186471>

2 Coulter, R. W., & Rankin, S. R. (2017). College sexual assault and campus climate for sexual- and gender-minority undergraduate students. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 35(5–6), 1351–1366. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517696870>

3 Fisher, B., Cullen, F., & Turner, M. (2000). The sexual victimization of college women (NCJ 182369). Retrieved from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/182369.pdf>

4 Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2014). Rape and Sexual Victimization Among College-Aged Females, 1995–2013.

5 Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (Campus SaVE) H.R. 812, 113th Cong. (2013) <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-bill/812/text>

6 American Bar Association. (2017, Aug. 13). Experts see flaws in how colleges handle sexual assault allegations. ABA News. [https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2017/08/experts\\_see\\_flawsin/](https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2017/08/experts_see_flawsin/)

7 Foubert, J. D., Clark-Taylor, A., & Wall, A. F. (2020). Is Campus Rape Primarily a Serial or One-Time Problem? Evidence From a Multicampus Study. Violence Against Women, 26(3–4), 296–311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801219833820>

verified evidence base to demonstrate their efficacy in reducing sexual assault. While both approaches allow the institution to technically comply with Campus SaVE, neither approach engages young men in meaningful conversations about what sexual assault looks like, what it means to get consent, and how to step in and say something if you think someone is at risk for committing sexual assault.

The vast majority of sexual assaults on campus – more than 90% – are committed by only 5-6% of the male student population and are mainly committed by repeat offenders. This means most college men are not committing acts of sexual violence. However, these non-violent young men have historically been left out of conversations about sexual assault prevention<sup>8</sup>.

If equipped with the right knowledge and skills, college men are often in the best position to identify a peer's sexually violent behavior and stop it. Whether the person is their roommate, fraternity brother, teammate, or a stranger at a bar, young men can – and should – have the skills to step in as active bystanders and hold their peers accountable for their actions.

## Overview of Research Project

It's On Us recognized that, to date, no major study has been completed to evaluate what sexual assault prevention programs are in place at colleges and universities nationwide, their level of student participation, attitudes towards prevention programs, and student actions and attitudes following their participation in prevention programming. This project is the first of its kind to explore the attitudes and perceptions of male-identifying students and their likelihood to get involved in the prevention of gender-based violence on a campus.

It's On Us conducted the National Campus Sexual Assault Attitudes and Behaviors Research Project (Research Project) to review the effectiveness of sexual violence prevention training on undergraduate campuses across the country among male-identifying men. The goal of the Research Project was to better inform the field of gender-based violence on what is needed in future prevention programming to more effectively combat sexual violence by engaging students who have been traditionally less likely to be involved (see Appendix C for Research Project Goals). This report is available publicly and for free to ensure the data is accessible to all organizations in the field and to any students advocating for additional prevention programming.

<sup>8</sup> John D. Foubert, Angela Clark-Taylor, and Andrew F. Wall. (2019) Is Campus Rape Primarily a Serial or One-Time Problem? Evidence From a Multicampus Study.

# METHODOLOGY

This research used an exploratory quantitative method in order to reach current men in college and have candid conversations about their attitudes toward sexual violence on campus.

**This data collection method was chosen because of the sensitivity of the topic and the need for more in-depth information from responses than numbers.**

Students were recruited to participate in this study by an external firm and were intentionally screened to have a variety of demographic backgrounds and college types, the breakdown of which can be found in Table 1. Interviews were an hour long and conducted by Chris Hauck of HauckEye. More information about HauckEye can be found in Appendix B.

This qualitative study used an exploratory approach, which differs from a confirmatory approach because of the ability to ask open-ended questions to find out what's there, not to confirm any prior research or hypothesis. To quote activist Rafia Zakaria, "numbers never lie, but they do omit".<sup>9</sup> This is a "depth" rather than a "breadth" method of discovery that allows the research to dig below the surface more than a simple survey would because participants are engaging in free-flowing conversation rather than responding to a set of questions with only a few answers from which to choose.

A benefit of qualitative research is its ability to explain behavior that cannot be easily quantified by allowing participants to detail their experiences and feelings<sup>10</sup>. This is particularly useful when discussing a sensitive topic such as sexual assault prevention. The research team decided to start with qualitative research given the complex nature of this topic in order to gather raw, honest, and detailed accounts of experiences from young men. It is important to note that the goal of qualitative research is not to measure frequency, but to explore phenomena<sup>11</sup>. For this reason, no counts are included of how many participants said or agreed with any statement.

<sup>9</sup> Cookson, T. P. (2020, May 07). Qualitative data is key to ensuring no one gets left behind by the coronavirus response. UN Women News. <https://data.unwomen.org/features/qualitative-data-key-ensuring-no-one-gets-left-behind-coronavirus-response>

<sup>10</sup> Tenny, S., Brannan, G. D., Brannan, J. M., & Sharts-Hopko, N. C. (2022). Qualitative Study. In StatPearls. StatPearls Publishing. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29262162/>

<sup>11</sup> Agius, S. (2013). Qualitative research: Its value and applicability. *The Psychiatrist*, 37(6), 204–206. <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:14559934>

## Sample

Participants were recruited through telephone contact and ads through an independent recruiting agency using screener questions (see Appendix D for Screener Questions) to engage a diverse group of students across the country.

Participants recruited were young men who represent a series of key target segments including type of institution and region of the United States. A full demographic breakdown can be found in Table 1.

— TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

REPRESENTATION	N=
Public	10
Private	10
Elite	2
Non-Elite	18
HBCU	1
Community College	1
Black	5
Asian	4
Hispanic	1
Native	1
Mixed Race	2
White	7
Bisexual	2
Gay	2
In a fraternity	7
Not in a fraternity	13

## Conducting the Interviews

It's On Us partnered with consulting and insights firm HauckEye to conduct in-depth, one-on-one interviews with college men. HauckEye's priority in this project was to explore the attitudes and behaviors among young men in a representative manner to understand those attitudes in key target markets. HauckEye worked with the men to develop a deep understanding from observation in order to provide meaningful recommendations on how to best understand the right language to engage and convince young men to protect survivors of sexual violence on campus.

The main component of this research was qualitative to better understand the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of young college men. In this qualitative effort, HauckEye conducted a series of 20 online, 60-minute Zoom interviews with young men from a variety of different college settings about their experiences, attitudes, and behaviors regarding sexual violence at their colleges and universities. Each interview explored their in-depth motivating factors for or against getting involved and being a part of survivor advocacy groups on campus.

The interviews followed the below best practices:

- Include messaging that is customized to engage men and increase general participation in It's On Us's mission
- Be brief (less than 1 hour)
- Include male-identifying college students who are representative of the national college student population

Each interview consisted of a free-flowing conversation guided by the same list of questions (see Appendix E).

### Interview Timeline

**Recruit participants:** \_\_\_\_\_ Mar 10 – Apr 11, 2022

**Conduct in-depth interviews:** \_\_\_\_\_ Apr 11-17, 2022

**Initial reporting:** \_\_\_\_\_ Apr 25, 2022



# ANALYSIS

The qualitative data was analyzed by identifying repeated themes and topics from each interview. The open-ended responses were interpreted to find words, descriptions, concepts, or ideas that respondents had in common on this topic.

The Research Project found key results in three main areas: proximity to the issue of campus sexual violence, impact of prevention by institutions, and campus social life. A core finding of this study is that the participants aren't aware of the extent of sexual violence on campus or its relevance to them. While some schools have had high-profile incidents, several participants thought it was an isolated issue. The issue is sometimes seen as solely a Greek life problem; however, this framing means that many respondents did not think the issue affected them or their school. The lack of awareness among study participants is, in part, because current sexual assault trainings are inadequate. The vast majority of participants reported that the prevention training they received, often online-only, was boring and ineffective. Positive prevention education experiences were in-person and included an interactive component, such as a certification. One student spoke highly of a comedian who came to campus and did a stand-up set about her own assault.

Building awareness among young men requires more than just training; they need non-male friends and role models. The respondents most attuned to the issue of sexual violence had strong friendships with women on campus. Co-ed sports teams, for example, foster an equitable and inclusive environment on campus between participants across the gender spectrum, leading to less objectification. By contrast, respondents reported that male-only groups like fraternities incubate toxic masculinity.

This study found that most participants view themselves as moral young men who want to help but don't know how. The men expressed a desire to help but didn't feel they had the right tools to intervene. They expressed interest in training that would teach them how to intervene and deescalate situations involving sexual violence. This demonstrates the need and appetite for a significant change in campus sexual assault prevention education.



**What are the  
perceptions of  
male-identifying  
college students?**

## Proximity to the Problem

Most study participants reported that they were unlikely to get involved unless something happened to them or someone they care about personally. Respondents had different attitudes and behaviors around campus sexual assault when they had the powerful influence of women in their lives. Men in the study were overwhelmingly more likely to be empathetic and act as an active bystander to stop an act of sexual assault if:

- They have a family member who is a survivor
- They have strong women as role models or friends
- They have a friend or a friend of a friend who is a survivor

Powerful female influences mentioned in the interviews included: close female friends, sisters, girlfriends, mothers, and teammates (i.e. co-ed sports).

**“It just has to hit closer to home for men. There wouldn’t be any problem getting men who had sisters who were victims...they wouldn’t need any incentive to join. It’s more about what’s within young men.”**

—Brigham Young University Student

This research also found that it is important to help students, especially male-identifying students, see a connection to this topic in their own lives. Respondents who are in their final year of school are less likely to attend and participate in sexual assault prevention on their own. They are much more focused on finishing their academics and planning their next steps.

While men in the study are less engaged in this issue, the topics of sexual assault or harassment angers men who see themselves as “good.” They are not tolerant of the perpetrators of this violence and many participants noted that they assume those who commit sexual assault must not have much confidence in themselves. This assumption is confirmed by studies that have found that there is often a link between cognitive distortions and low self-esteem to committing sexual violence<sup>12</sup>.

This study contributes to the abundant research that exists showing that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual (LGBTQIA+) identifying students of color are at a higher risk of becoming a survivor of sexual violence<sup>13</sup>. This study also found that men of color and LGBTQIA+ identifying men are less likely to tolerate poor behavior (such as hazing or harassment) at fraternity parties or elsewhere.

<sup>12</sup> Pervan, Susan & Hunter, Mick. (2007). Cognitive Distortions and Social Self-Esteem in Sexual Offenders. Applied Psychology in Criminal Justice. 3. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255664875\\_Cognitive\\_Distortions\\_and\\_Social\\_Self-Esteem\\_in\\_Sexual\\_Offenders](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255664875_Cognitive_Distortions_and_Social_Self-Esteem_in_Sexual_Offenders)

<sup>13</sup> LGBTQ Violence in Communities of Color FAQ Collection. Women of Color Network (WOCN, Inc.). <https://wocninc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/LGBTQFAQ.pdf>

# Impact of Prevention by Institutions

A core goal of this research was to understand what prevention education young men have received and its efficacy. Men in this study overwhelmingly felt that they are not receiving enough prevention education and training on circumstances when they should intervene and how to do so.

**“The topic deserves my respect, but the way they teach it... it’s just easy to dismiss. It’s not something a lot of people take seriously.”**

—Northwestern University Student

According to the participants, the trainings they are receiving from their institutions are not as effective as they should be. Mandated trainings were viewed by many participants as simply something they had to do as part of their enrollment. Several men reported tuning out the trainings, either because they felt they were “good guys” who didn’t need it, or because the trainings were cheesy and not engaging.

**“I didn’t really care. I barely listened and still passed.”**

—Michigan State University Student

## ANNUAL TRAINING

Many participants reported that the annual training they received on sexual assault happened online. Although most study participants mentioned receiving at least one training on gender-based violence in their time in college, the men interviewed overwhelmingly found that they are not given enough information on ways to identify risky situations in their campus communities.

**“The most direct thing they have students do is a training module about sexual assault and Title IX. I kind of get the impression that it’s contractual and really just obligatory.”**

—George Washington University Student

The online training module mentioned most often in interviews was from the Everfi platform. Students found this training to be one-size-fits-all, and, therefore, less relevant to them. They also mentioned examples from this platform were not realistic of campus life.

**“Every two years, the [university] has us do these online modules. Just to fill them out. They just recycle the same stuff, and it’s online and you just half-ass it because you want to get it over with and it seems like it’s common sense to just not assault someone.”**

—Northwestern University Student

The interviews found that men at colleges or universities hear about sexual assault prevention in the following ways: incoming freshman orientation, on their class syllabus, in a school's Code of Conduct, in a Green Dot (or other active bystander) training, through Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) events, or through other campus wide events.

**“They need to do a better job addressing consent....we have like frogcamp, an orientation which is a notoriously long process, maybe if they could incorporate [sexual assault training] into it.”**

—Texas Christian University Student

Men are more likely to be engaged in and attend prevention training at their school if the speaker is relevant to them. For example, engagement increases if the facilitator or speaker is an influential member of their campus community or a peer they look up to, or if an entertaining speaker or influencer provides the information. Ohio State University invited a comedian to come to campus to do a stand-up routine for students about mental health and sexual assault, and the Ohio State University student surveyed in this research reported that the event was well attended and engaging.

**“For junior year we did a spring show where we partnered with a mental health matters club and we brought in a comedian... who does a lot about response to rape...So we had her headline at our show. It just seemed like a good message to get out. Consent matters.”**

—Ohio State University Student

The Research Project also found that unless a young man knew a survivor of sexual assault, survivor-facilitated trainings were less impactful, as the young men could not connect the survivor's story to their own experiences.

Study participants reported that trainings are often provided specifically to athletic teams or Greek systems. Fraternities are seen to be most likely to have regular trainings. Some men believed this could be because they are also the most likely to commit sexual assault on their campus. This research found that targeting trainings to specific communities is effective, as it feels relevant to students; however, these specific trainings should not be limited to Greek and athletic groups.

## THE EFFECT OF THE PANDEMIC

Existing research shows that when students attend online classes, it is harder to pay attention<sup>14</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in online teaching and training becoming even more normalized than before. Men found that their schools began to only provide prevention training online without the option of live teaching. Some included a questionnaire at the end,

14 Cellini, S. R., & Grueso, H. (2021). Student Learning in Online College Programs. AERA Open. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211008105>

but no one mentioned it being graded. For the most part, students only have to watch the online training to pass.

**“The online Everfi course definitely dragged on. It’s a 4 hour course and not very effective training because you can tune it out. It’s just too long. And it needs to be required and in-person. Maybe as part of the freshman seminar class.”**

—University of Delaware Student

## EXISTING RESOURCES

Several men noted that while their schools increased prevention education after publicized incidents, they still lack consistent resources. The campus resources mentioned most often throughout interviews include: hotlines, counseling centers, Title IX Offices, escort services back to campus, security poles, cameras (such as electronic surveillance), and alert systems (such as blue lights<sup>15</sup>).

**“The university’s inaction leads to a larger culture of ambivalence.”**

—Northwestern University Student

Several students reported that they felt prevention education was not relevant to them because they are not a perpetrator of assault. Most of the students believed that by the time they get to college, they should have the moral fiber not to commit sexual assault.

**“If they’re too dark inside then...they can hear content but if it’s not aligned with their values then it’s not going to resonate. You are not going to change someone’s mind or...moral compass.”**

—UC Berkeley Student

Some men in the study perceived that almost everyone knows to remove a potential victim from a harmful situation if they see one and to try to diffuse it. Some men mentioned seeing their role on their campus as a protector. One said, “I would rather ask and be embarrassed than be wrong.” However, men in the study largely felt that they are not given the tools to identify these situations. If given the right tools and training, male-identifying students would intervene in campus sexual assault.

<sup>15</sup> University of Maryland Division of Information Technology. (2022). Blue Light PERT Emergency Phones. University of Maryland IT Service Desk [https://itsupport.umd.edu/itsupport/?id=kb\\_article\\_view&sysparm\\_article=KB0012401&sys\\_kb\\_id=22768dd8db1f34d06be1146139961947&spa=1](https://itsupport.umd.edu/itsupport/?id=kb_article_view&sysparm_article=KB0012401&sys_kb_id=22768dd8db1f34d06be1146139961947&spa=1)

## DEFINITIONS OF CONSENT

Most men saw the definition of consent to be black and white – it is either provided or not. However, they also overwhelmingly believed that the nuance occurs when the people involved are not sober.

**“You have to ask to confirm consent. It should never be vague. We get to ask now. You can never assume it.”**

–Tuskegee University Student

Although conversations around consent and sex happen less often at religious institutions, respondents mentioned that the consequences for breaking policies are applied more strictly at religious institutions than at non-religious institutions.

**“We believe in not having premarital sex at all... if its already bad to have sex in a relationship where you’re not married than its even worse if its non-consensual, so there’s a really strong response there.”**

–Brigham Young University Student

## CONSEQUENCES

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that university policies varied widely when it came to enforcement and severity of consequences when sexual assaults were reported. For example, there were significantly different consequences at Brigham Young University (BYU), a religious institution, as compared to Northwestern University, a secular institution. Both schools have a large population of students and are private institutions. However, if an individual is found responsible for committing sexual violence at BYU, that person is immediately expelled from the school and the community; meanwhile, if a student is found responsible for committing sexual assault at Northwestern, expulsion is not a guarantee. This is because all sex outside of marriage is prohibited at BYU. The differences affected one participant’s perceptions of consequences.

**“On campus, Northwestern does not have a good reputation with sexual assault or holding fraternities accountable for their actions.”**

–Northwestern University Student

Students expressed that their institutions’ policies on sexual assault are taken less seriously if there are no consequences to committing sexual violence for either the perpetrator or enabling bystanders. The students believed that although some schools can be good at imposing consequences on the perpetrator of a sexual assault, they are still unlikely to impose consequences on the bystanders who supported the perpetrator.

**“It’s hard to measure [the prevalence]...because It’s all confidential, but there’s a significant public outcry of people saying that [the administrative response] is not effective enough.”**

—George Washington University Student

## PERCEIVED URGENCY

Assumptions about sexual assault are almost as important as the reality. Some men in the study saw sexual assault as a critical issue to address on their campus while others saw it as less important. Respondents at smaller schools believed sexual violence was a bigger issue at larger schools with Greek life. For example, the student from University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV), a commuter campus, did not see this to be a major issue on their campus but perceived it to be at larger southern universities where the Greek system is a bigger deal. In reality, existing data shows us that sexual assault is present at all colleges and universities at equally high rates<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, at schools with smaller populations, or schools within other towns or communities, “townies” (people who live near campus but do not attend the school) are often seen by respondents as more dangerous than other students, despite research that indicates 85% of survivors know their perpetrator prior to a sexual assault taking place<sup>17</sup>.

Some students reflected on whether the responsibility of a school is to teach them about sexual violence prevention or to protect them from assault. This included what the responsibility of their institution is to communicate crimes to students and whether open communication about incidents makes the campus safer and/or increases trust.

**“Around Halloween, a student went missing and was found dead in the river. They added a bunch of cameras, but before, it was probably not as safe [on campus]. We’re in a safe area, but there weren’t a lot of safety measures.”**

—Michigan State University Student

The interviews showed that some schools tend to cover up sexual assaults to protect their reputations instead of addressing incidents openly and transparently with the student body so it doesn’t happen again.

**“I’ve heard of stuff that was swept under the rug like in Greek life and with the fraternity presidents.”**

—Purdue University Student

Schools also often conduct remedial training without discussing the specific situation that caused it and use national data to talk about the issue in place of local campus data. Men in this study saw this as an attempt to cover up incidents of sexual assault

<sup>16</sup> Cantor, D. et al. (2020). Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct. Association of American Universities. <https://www.aau.edu/key-issues/campus-climate-and-safety/aau-campus-climate-survey-2019>

<sup>17</sup> Most Victims Know Their Attacker. (2008, Sept. 30). National Institute of Justice. Nij.ojp.gov: <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/most-victims-know-their-attacker>

and felt it only reduced trust in their institutions.

**“They didn’t mention the situation that started all this. Lots of legal speak. That really bothered me. The specific reason was not addressed by the official doing the training. Kept referring to it as ‘the incident.’ Like he couldn’t say the word.”**  
—Northwestern University Student

Existing research documents the profound negative impact of institutional betrayal within experiences of interpersonal trauma like sexual assault<sup>18</sup>. It is notable that male-identifying non-survivors also feel the same way, according to these in-depth interviews.

**“Someone painted ‘Northwestern offered me money to be quiet about sexual assault.’ [on a campus spirit rock]. All sorts of people saw it, passersby, tour groups, parents, nothing happened at the end of the day. They [Northwestern] can afford to do nothing.”**  
—Northwestern University Student

## SCHOOL TYPE

There were no major differences in the experience of young men in the study on public versus private colleges. Some schools, however, have a high enough profile that they receive large numbers of applicants despite public incidents of sexual violence.

**“I feel like Northwestern is just really ambivalent... They just like to turn a blind eye towards things because they can. There’s a lot of student outrage on campus... they can afford to not give a crap about student concerns.”**  
—Northwestern University Student

There was a pattern of believing that the size of a college or university campus influences the anonymity of repeat offenders on a campus. The men interviewed also believed it is much harder to stay anonymous on a small campus than it is on a larger campus.

**“It’s [sexual assault] not really a big concern on campus. I haven’t seen anything... Maybe it is [not an issue here] because it’s a community college. It could also be because it’s an older demographic, especially the night time class takers. They may be out of the period that assault is prompted. Also not the same party atmosphere.”**  
—Northwestern University Student

<sup>18</sup> Smith, C. P., & Freyd, J. J. (2013). Dangerous safe havens: Institutional betrayal exacerbates sexual trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 26*(1), 119-124.



While only one Historically Black University (HBCU), Tuskegee University, was part of this study, the interview highlighted the unique experience of HBCU students. Tuskegee University was founded by a former slave and played a profound role in the civil rights movement. The student from this university reported great pride in the history of the institution and its reputation. The respondent felt that, as an HBCU, Tuskegee has a reputation to uphold and it is important to raise people who are going to be “good men.” The participant noted that students self-police one another as much, if not more, than the school does itself because they really believe being a safe place is a point of pride.

**“It’s the community. We have a certain respect for each other...we don’t want there to be a reputation for our school being about sexual assault... We want to protect the reputation of the school and protect each other.”**

—Tuskegee University Student

## Social life

Most men were frustrated with the fact that toxic masculinity is a regular socio-cultural aspect of our society. Most did not name toxic masculinity specifically, but they discussed characteristics that are a result of toxic masculinity, such as objectifying women at parties or around campus.

**“It makes me angry - why is this being normalized? At the same time, this [toxic masculinity] is something we [Americans] have done for years and years and years. It’s very ingrained in our society. It’s okay for men to treat women this way. Sexual violence, even if we don’t talk about it much, it is still a big part of living in the United States.”**

—Colorado College Student

## PARTY ATMOSPHERE

School size, academic rigor, and party culture impacted male student perceptions of campus rape culture. A student at Texas Christian University reported that the campus is known for high alcohol and drug use, thereby contributing to a less safe environment. By contrast, a student at University of California, Berkley stated that most people live in small apartments, leading to tamer parties. Other students described a “work hard/play hard” attitude that can lead to excess drinking on weekends.

Moreover, there is also a link between financial vulnerability and sexual exploitation<sup>19</sup>. For example, if a student is on a budget, it makes more sense financially to go to a house party where drinks may be free – particularly for women. Financial differences also have an effect

<sup>19</sup> Sharyn Potter, Rebecca Howard, Sharon Murphy & Mary M. Moynihan (2018) Long-term impacts of college sexual assaults on women survivors’ educational and career attainments, *Journal of American College Health*, 66:6, 496-507, DOI: 10.1080/07448481.2018.1440574

on the culture and pride in a university. At community colleges or commuter campuses, transportation can be another large cost to students. Being able to participate in social events and parties on or around campus can become very expensive because they do not live there. The respondents at community colleges mentioned experiencing less of a party atmosphere and related more to commuter schools in that the students are often older and have little connection to each other. When students feel less connected to their school and peers, they are less likely to intervene when they see a risky situation happening in their community.

Most students interviewed believed that as long as it is illegal to drink, young people will continue to do so to excess. This also increases the likelihood that they will try to hide underage alcohol consumption or anything that occurs while drinking illegally, including a sexual assault.

**“Everfi doesn’t address whether you both are too drunk. It needs to address sexual assault in conjunction with responsible alcohol consumption too.”**

—Texas Christian University Student

## GREEK LIFE

Many men perceive the toxic cycle of masculinity to be created and upheld by the Greek system. Fraternities and sororities are seen to contribute to the development of toxic masculinity traits through traditions like recruiting by hazing.

Existing research shows that sorority women are four times more likely to be victims of sexual violence than women who are not in sororities<sup>20</sup>. Members of fraternities are three times more likely than non-members to commit violence while drinking<sup>21</sup>, and when gang rape occurs on college campuses, it is often linked with fraternity members.<sup>18</sup> Research also shows that fraternity men are more likely to be reported as perpetrators than men who are not in fraternities<sup>22</sup> and that fraternity men who support traditional gender roles and hyper-masculine behaviors exhibit more sexual aggression<sup>23</sup>.

**“The situation was that these women spoke out about being drugged and sexually assaulted at these fraternity parties. The punishment was just a social ban. The fraternities didn’t abide by that. These two girls had these horrible things done to them and that was the punishment? A social ban? I remember just hearing... a lot about how there were a lot of protests outside of the fraternity houses and the members just felt very threatened. Like you feel threatened? These are the things that your fraternity is doing to other members on campus. They [the protestors] are allowed to be mad.”**

—Tuskegee University Student

20 Einolf, C. & Minow, J. (2009). Sorority Membership and Risk for Campus Sexual Assault. Violence Against Women. [http://works.bepress.com/christopher\\_einolf/](http://works.bepress.com/christopher_einolf/)

21 Garrett, D.M. (2002). The Value of the Greek System: Should Fraternities and Sororities Have a Place on Campus? University of Virginia Archives. <https://www.uvm.edu/~vtconn/v19/garrett.html>

22 Sexual Assault Statistics. (2012, March). Campus Safety Magazine. <http://www.campusafetymagazine.com/Channel/Public-Safety/articles/2012/03/Sexual-Assault-Statistics-and-Myths.aspx>

23 Bannon, R & Brosi, Matthew & Foubert, John. (2013). Sorority Women’s and Fraternity Men’s Rape Myth Acceptance and Bystander Intervention Attitudes. Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice. 50. 72-87. 10.1515/jsarp-2013-0005. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236165196\\_Sorority\\_Women’s\\_and\\_Fraternity\\_Men’s\\_Rape\\_Myth\\_Acceptance\\_and\\_Bystander\\_Intervention\\_Attitudes](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236165196_Sorority_Women’s_and_Fraternity_Men’s_Rape_Myth_Acceptance_and_Bystander_Intervention_Attitudes)

Fraternity men in this study saw their organizations as very protective of their reputations as a “safe frat.” Some believe sexual assault is a bad look on their organization, which can lead to either higher consequences for offenders or lower reporting.

**“Our reputation is very very important. It’s everything. We don’t want to have uncomfortable situations. We value all these women that we hang out with. I deliver our pledge education very sternly. It’s addressed at the first meeting. No poor sexual behavior will ever be tolerated.”**

—Texas Christian University Student

## MALE-ONLY CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE

Many students reported that school athletic teams that do not have non-male team members, such as men’s football and basketball teams, act similarly to fraternities. For example, at the University of California, Berkeley, male-only athletic teams have their own houses, similar to a fraternity. Unfortunately, on average, athletes are more likely than other students on campus to identify with hypermasculinity and to accept “rape myths” to justify sexual assaults<sup>24</sup>. Evidence also suggests they’re more likely to be confused about consent and admit to having committed acts of sexual aggression<sup>25</sup>.

By contrast, respondents with more interaction with non-male-identifying students, such as through co-ed sports teams, felt they understood the issue of sexual violence better. Friendly interaction with non-male-identifying students made them see their peers as more than objects.

**“Through the track team... I have a big group of sisters who I feel like I have a responsibility to....It’s also about becoming more empathetic through spending time with them. If you’re only surrounded by other guys, then you have a different frame of empathy which is built on this conquering mindset.”**

—University of California, Berkeley Student

<sup>24</sup> Young, B.-R., Desmarais, S. L., Baldwin, J. A., & Chandler, R. (2017). Sexual Coercion Practices Among Undergraduate Male Recreational Athletes, Intercollegiate Athletes, and Non-Athletes. *Violence Against Women*, 23(7), 795–812. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801216651339>

<sup>25</sup> McCray, K. L. (2015). Intercollegiate Athletes and Sexual Violence: A Review of Literature and Recommendations for Future Study. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 16(4), 438–443. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838014537907>

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this research was to understand the perspectives of young college men regarding sexual assault and the role the men can play in protecting and advocating for victims. Using an exploratory qualitative method allowed It's On Us to achieve this through candid conversations with the study participants. While this research covered a variety of sensitive topics, one of the most uplifting findings was that young men in the study want to do the right thing and view themselves as moral, upstanding people. However, they do not feel like they can be a part of the movement to end campus sexual assault, and, therefore, it is critical to invite them into the discussion and movement.

The findings of this study demonstrate the need for more creative and interactive training methods to engage men on campuses. Strategies that administrators can use range from inviting a comedian, musician, or other influential, relatable young man to talk about sexual assault prevention in-person. This could also include trainings that are made for a specific student population, such as a men's athletic team. It's On Us emphasizes that this must be done in partnership with trauma-informed victim services organizations. Several respondents also reported that certifications for completing training helped them feel more involved. According to this study, the most engaging trainings for men include more interaction and discussion in one-on-one or smaller group settings. Trainings are also more successful when they are in-person versus online. Participants reported that online trainings were unengaging and ineffective. Several said that they barely paid attention and passed the requirements easily. Whenever possible, it is important to hold trainings in-person to increase comprehension.

Combating assumptions is key to helping men realize the extent of the problem and need for intervention. Study participants at smaller universities, commuter campuses, and religious schools did not perceive sexual violence as a major issue on their campus. Some also saw violence as solely a fraternity or large campus problem; however, incidence rates do not reflect this. Most men in the study cared about the reputation of their school and of the groups in which they participate; therefore, it is helpful to explain the importance of sexual assault awareness and intervention in reducing campus crime and improving the way a school or subcommunity within their institution is perceived.

Finally, building relationships between male-and-non-male-identifying students is key to preventing objectification. Men with strong ties to women and other non-male-identifying people in their life felt more responsibility toward others and anger at other men who perpetrate violence. Ensuring that men, women, and gender nonconforming students are fully integrated on campus helps ensure that non-male identifying students are seen as more than objects. A key way to implement this would be to encourage co-ed clubs, such as intramural sports, and decrease the number of single-sex activities on campus.

It is urgent to conduct further research into the topic of young men's attitudes towards and experiences with sexual assault and its prevention on college campuses, and subsequently to continue developing prevention education programming that educates and empowers men to be a part of the solution. It's On Us intends to build on this research and conduct a large-scale quantitative survey.

# APPENDIX

# APPENDIX A: ABOUT IT'S ON US & CIVIC NATION

**It's On Us** is building the movement to combat campus sexual assault by engaging all students, including young men, through grassroots organizing, prevention education programs, and large-scale culture change campaigns. Founded as an initiative of the Obama-Biden White House, It's On Us is the largest student organizing program of its kind. IOU chapters have led more than 10,000+ educational programs on more than 500 college campuses in all 50 States. It's On Us is committed to shifting the culture around campus sexual assault through partnerships with media and brands that engage with millions of college students every day.

**Civic Nation** is a nonprofit ecosystem for high-impact organizing and education initiatives working to build a more inclusive and equitable America. Civic Nation shifts culture, systems and policy by bringing together individuals, grassroots organizers, industry leaders and influencers to tackle some of our nation's most pressing social challenges. Our initiatives take on the biggest issues of our time — strengthening democracy, fostering civic engagement and voter participation, fighting for gender equity, and more. Civic Nation is home to six initiatives: It's On Us, ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, End Rape On Campus, United State of Women, We the Action and When We All Vote.

# APPENDIX B: ABOUT HAUCKEYE

HauckEye conducts qualitative and quantitative primary marketing research projects for clients. In a marketing research industry where so much work has moved to quick and cheap tools disconnected from the customer experience, HauckEye moves toward deeper and more personal interactions designed to explore consumer behavior in rich, meaningful ways.

Their focus is on larger scale, meaningful projects to develop significant learnings while making a big impact in multiple fields of work and deliver real actionable insights.

HauckEye is dedicated to meeting the needs of its clients with projects that provide direction and knowledge. Their focus on research design, methodology and sound research practice made them an ideal consultant to conduct a study among young male college students designed to understand attitudes and behavior related to combating sexual assault and to track performance over time.

# APPENDIX C: RESEARCH PROJECT GOALS

---

- To understand the perspectives of young college men regarding sexual assault and the role the men can play in protecting and advocating for victims.

---

- Discuss the participation of undergraduate male-identifying students in available prevention programming on college campuses around the country.

---

- To examine if male-identifying students on campus have been involved in the creation of prevention trainings required by their institutions.

---

- To examine if the trainings provided at institutions are relevant to all culturally specific communities.

---

- To understand if male-identifying students know how to intervene to deescalate a risky situation. If they do, where did they learn this and have they done it before? If not, what is their response? Would they intervene more often if they had the training to do so indirectly?

---

- To discuss what it feels like to be part of their campus's climate and if this influences their ability to feel safe on campus. What do young men wish their school's prevention training would include more of?

---



# APPENDIX D: SCREENER QUESTIONS

<b> Screener Questions:</b>	
What gender do you identify with....?	
Would you consider yourself to be a College student?	
At what school or institution are you currently enrolled....?	
Are you of Spanish, Latino or Hispanic origin or descent?	
Which of the following describes your racial or ethnic identity? Please select all that apply....	
	Native American
	Asian or Pacific Islander
	Black or African American
	White or Caucasian
	Middle Eastern
	Two or more races
With what sexuality do you most identify with....?	
	Heterosexual or Straight
	Homosexual or Gay
	Bisexual
	Prefer not to answer

# APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about your school?
2. What is your social life like?
3. What are you involved in?
4. Do you currently live on or close to campus? Why or why not?
5. What are your experiences around sexual assault prevention on campus?
6. Where would you find resources if you saw someone experiencing sexual assault in your campus community?
7. What is your role in dealing with sexual assault on campus?
8. What would make you consider participating in a group dedicated to combating sexual assault on campus?
9. If you knew a victim of sexual assault, what would you do?
10. And if you were the victim? What would you do? Who would you go to?
11. Does it happen a lot on your campus?
12. What do you think or feel when you notice it either happening or about to happen?
13. Are you encouraged to step in? Why or why not?
14. What if you ignore it? How do you feel? What questions do you ask yourself? What do you wish you could have done?
15. What is the school's responsibility in all of this? How is your school showing up? Not showing up? What do you expect of the school in this regard? Why?

