

Science AMA Series: I'm Laura Salazar, associate professor of health promotion and behavior at the School of Public Health at Georgia State University. I'm developing web-based approaches to preventing

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April 17, 2023

Abstract

Hi, Reddit. I'm Laura Salazar, associate professor of health promotion and behavior at the School of Public Health at Georgia State University. I have developed a web-based training program targeted at college-aged men that has been found to be effective in reducing sexual assaults and increasing the potential for bystanders to intervene and prevent such attacks. I'm also working on a version aimed at college-aged women. I research the factors that lead to sexual violence on campuses and science-based efforts to address this widespread problem. I also research efforts to improve the sexual health of adolescents and adults, who are at heightened risk for sexually transmitted infections and HIV. Here is an article for more information I'm signing off. Thank you all for your questions and comments.

[REDDIT](#)

Science AMA Series: I'm Laura Salazar, associate professor of health promotion and behavior at the School of Public Health at Georgia State University. I'm developing web-based approaches to preventing

PROF_LAURA_SALAZAR [R/SCIENCE](#)

ABSTRACT

Hi, Reddit. I'm Laura Salazar, associate professor of health promotion and behavior at the [School of Public Health](#) at Georgia State University.

I have developed a web-based training program targeted at college-aged men that has been found to be effective in reducing sexual assaults and increasing the potential for bystanders to intervene and prevent such attacks. I'm also working on a version aimed at college-aged women. I research the factors that lead to sexual violence on campuses and science-based efforts to address this widespread problem. I also research efforts to improve the sexual health of adolescents and adults, who are at heightened risk for sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

[Here is an article for more information](#)

I'm signing off. Thank you all for your questions and comments.

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CORRESPONDENCE:

DATE RECEIVED:
November 06, 2015

DOI:
10.15200/winn.144672.25201

ARCHIVED:
November 05, 2015

CITATION:
Prof_Laura_Salazar , r/Science , Science AMA Series: I'm Laura Salazar, associate professor of health promotion and behavior at the School of Public Health at Georgia State University. I'm developing web-based approaches to preventing, *The Winnower* 2:e144672.25201 , 2015 , DOI: [10.15200/winn.144672.25201](#)

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In your research, what factors have you found that lead to sexual violence on campuses? What seems to be the prevalent attitudes toward sexual assault on college campuses? My son is in college, and he and I have had a couple of conversations about this topic. He has told me he thinks sexual assault numbers are inflated and that some (not all) women use it to hide mistakes or "get back at" the guy. I would be interested to hear if that attitude is normal on college campuses and how it should be addressed.

[EllaFant27](#)

The sexual assault rates have been very consistent for a long period of time and I feel strongly that they are not inflated. There is a myth out there, which many young men want to believe is true, that many women make false accusations—if they only knew that MOST sexual assaults go unreported. There may be a few cases where a woman makes a false report, but research shows that the number of false reports is in fact very low, and is not higher than for other types of crimes. I think we all know that the false reports garner a lot of media attention and that is also feeding into that attitude.

Several factors influence sexual violence—some are specific to the individual such as hypermasculinity, endorsing rape myths where “the woman says no when she means yes” or “she was dressed like she was looking to have sex”, etc, use of alcohol, having peers who endorse violence, and a lack of knowledge of what constitutes real or effective consent. Other factors may be specific to the college as well and suggest that schools with high residentiality (meaning lots of student who live on campus) equates with more opportunity and more drinking, which also contributes.

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RealConsent participants were significantly less likely to engage in sexual violence perpetration and significantly more likely to engage in prosocial intervening behavior when they encountered a situation in which they could intervene.

[From your paper, here.](#)

My experience in an industry that has used web-based training since 2000 tells me that this is an *extremely* bold statement. There are only three truths that I can say with any confidence: 1) Online training is extremely cost effective and easy to implement; 2) it ensures compliance with OSHA, et al; and 3) it teaches people only how to pass web-based assessments, not necessarily modify behavior.

Every single one of my subordinates passes online-based safety training every year, yet most have no qualms about taking shortcuts when no one is looking. It is only after they are caught and coached/written-up that they start following the rules.

How can you make the quoted statement with confidence? How does the ability to pass a web-based assessment positively correlate to a real-life reduction in sexual harassment/assault? In fairness, I may have misunderstood your paper, but I am not seeing anything to suggest anything more than that your subjects know how to take tests.

[In-burrito](#)

My program was tested with a rigorous design, a RCT (Randomized Controlled Trial), utilizing a control group and with a diverse sample of male undergraduate students. Behavioral outcomes were assessed with a survey instrument through self-report and comparisons were made on these outcomes between guys in the intervention condition and those in the comparison condition. Thus, I feel that the statement is well supported as there were significant differences between groups. You can read the full study and see the methodology at: <http://www.jmir.org/2014/9/e203/>

associate professor of health promotion and behavior

It's the first time I've ever heard such a field of science exist. Can you explain what does "health promotion" study as a science?

[dracony](#)

Thanks for your interest in my field. Health promotion is a field within public health that is defined as the art and science of motivating people to enhance their lifestyle to achieve complete health, not just the absence of disease. So, focus is on a balance of physical, mental and social health and uses a combination of strategies to develop cultures and physical environments that will facilitate behavior change and encourage healthy practices. Hope this helps! Check out our program at Georgia State University, School of Public Health <http://publichealth.gsu.edu/>

Georgia State University lacks a traditional, centralized college campus. It's spread out inside commercial buildings in downtown Atlanta. How does this affect your research on sexual assault? What makes studying GSU different from studying a traditional University, like UGA for example?

[ThoseWhoDoVoodoo](#)

I chose GSU due to its diversity in the student population, but your point is a good one. Perpetration and victimization rates may differ by type of school (mostly residential versus commuter, size of school, athletic designation, etc.) so using only GSU was a limitation to my study. It is possible that my web-

based program may not have the same effects with male undergraduates from other campuses. I am trying to get funding to test the program at other campuses to see if the same results are obtained.

What does the training entail? I really can't fathom how it would work. I'm picturing some sort of Clockwork Orange scenario here. If someone has made it to college age without the concepts of right and wrong, what sort of training would be effective in preventing them from doing wrong? Aren't they pretty much beyond help at this point?

[seriouslees](#)

We use educational entertainment to model the good behaviors (e.g., getting consent, not trying to have sex with a drunken woman, intervening to stop an assault). The modules include a high degree of interactivity and visuals and humor to keep guys engaged in the program. It was important that it did not come across as an after school special. Because many times there are gray areas when initiating sex—sexual assault is not always about a guy forcing himself on an incapacitated woman— we focused our training on affecting a range of immediate outcomes such as knowledge of real consent, understanding the socialization process and how men and women tend to adopt gender roles that create misunderstanding when it comes to sex; the role of alcohol in negating consent; and the negative outcomes for hooking up when drunk and when the young woman is drunk; enhancing empathy for victims and teaching how to intervene safely and effectively to stop bad behaviors such as making crude sexist remarks about women or trying to hook up with a drunk girl. I know what you mean when you say, this is about Right and Wrong—and certainly it is in many situations. But, there are other situations where young men and women don't always know and these instances contribute to the high rates of sexual assault as well.

Whenever I see anti-sexual assault programs, literature, seminars etc aimed at men, especially those on campuses, the push-back from the target audience tends to be rather... spirited shall we say.

How do you intend to get them to listen and take part in the program to begin with? How do you get past the "well this is insulting to me because I'm clearly not a rapist" response?

edit: seeing how this is currently the top comment, I'd love to share a video commissioned by the Thames Valley Police, in which consent is explained using cups of tea. Very British, and makes the concept very clear <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXju34Uwuys>

[MrTomFTW](#)

There has been some backlash from a few programs because men have felt defensive and I don't blame them. The way I have approached the topic is from a different perspective that emphasizes most men are not rapists, but most young men do not have the right information about what constitutes real consent; many do not understand how alcohol or drugs negates real consent, and they lack skills for communication about sex. There are those guys who are opportunistic and who will wait for a woman to be drunk and try and take advantage of her, without a doubt, but that is not the majority of guys. This is why we also advocate for bystanders to safely intervene to stop this when they see it. Our program wants to reduce sexual assault perpetration to not only protect women and reduce sexual assault, but also to keep young men from ruining their future and help them have healthy sexual relationships.

I know this is anecdotal, but I've never gotten to know any man who thinks that it's okay to rape a woman. I'm sure they're out there, but aren't they pretty rare? Who is your target audience?

[Flight714](#)

Who we typically consider to be a "rapist" is someone who is pathological and is lurking in the shadows to attack vulnerable women. You are correct, those types of men are rare. The main issue with sexual assault and rape on college campuses is that many young men and women do not call it "rape" if you would ask them and clearly many men would not consider some of their behavior to constitute rape. However, if you ask someone whether they had initiated sex with a person who was under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and thus was not really able to provide real consent, they would probably say 'yes, that has happened'. This scenario happens quite frequently on college campuses, and even though many men and women would not view it as rape or call it rape, legally it is.

So, the target audience is all students because young men and women need to understand fully the elements of consent and what is not consent and what the consequences are so that they will not do anything wrong unintentionally or intentionally.

Why do you erase rapes by heterosexual women, lgbtq and their victims and isn't this by definition the promotion of rape culture?

[ee4m](#)

i am not sure what you mean by "erasing" rapes by women. I acknowledge that men can be victims, and women can be victimized by other women as well. I cover male victimization in my program called RealConsent as part of the content. This program is gender specific to enhance its relevancy, and it raises awareness that other men can be victimized. But, more often, when men are victimized, it tends to be by other men. Women certainly can be perpetrators as well, but not to the same degree. let's just acknowledge that.

There is also sexual assault within same-sex couples, both male and female. All of it i take seriously and acknowledge that it occurs. My research focus is on male-on-female sexual assault as the rates are such that it is a serious public health issue, which does not mean that these other forms of violence are erased. This is my research focus whereas there are other researchers who look at these other forms.

What are your program evaluation protocols? Have you carried out your formative evaluation (or is it assessment, I can never keep the two words straight) yet? What are your desired outcomes? Impacts (long term goals, so that the outcome of a smoking cessation program would be less smoking while the impact would be respiratory morbidity)? How will you measure these? Could you post your logic model?

What behavioral model are you using? SCT? TPB? That one based on TPB that I can never remember the name of (it's like PP² or something)?

Or you incorporating any techniques of community-based participatory programming? Who are your collaborators, key informants, and stakeholders?

[scalfin](#)

Thanks for your question. You can find details about methodology and my research partners in this published study: "A Web-Based Sexual Violence Bystander Intervention for Male College Students: Randomized Controlled Trial" at <http://www.jmir.org/2014/9/e203/>

Do you consider sex when both partners are intoxicated to be sexual assault by the male?

[Shitopia](#)

Tough question but an excellent one. It can be a gray area where a lot depends on other factors and by the law in your state. That is why I try and teach young men that if they drink, they are responsible and cannot hide behind the fact that they were drunk too. Does not negate their responsibility. They have to understand that they may be charged with a crime so "don't do it drunk" and certainly never initiate sex with a woman who has been drinking unless it is crystal clear she can provide consent—but sometimes it's hard to tell, how do you know for sure? You don't--some women can appear to be in control. better to wait for another time to have sex when both have not been drinking.

Why is your program "targeted at" men? Why isn't this program co-ed?

[r12ski](#)

Great question—For programs to be effective, they need to be personally relevant. To enhance relevancy, programming should be gender specific versus a one-size fits all approach. Also, I was trying to prevent sexual assault perpetration—so the program is targeted to young men. I am working on a program for women as well, that will involve risk reduction strategies, plus similar content on the role of alcohol. Once i finish the female version, then it can be offered as a package.

Here is peer-reviewed research (sorry for the pay-wall, maybe someone can help with that) regarding women saying "no", but meaning something different: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/3379584>

How does your program/university address this dangerous and controversial issue?

Please be respectful that this is a difficult topic to address, on both sides. Serious answers only.

[PmYour_ToMe](#)

The way I have addressed this issue in my program is to teach young men that "no" means NO, no matter what they may think. I also emphasize that socialization of both men and women plays a role in how men and women approach a sexual decision and there may be times when a woman could mean yes but says no to avoid looking promiscuous or easy (double standard of course, but its our society)—but you don't know for certain unless you ask her to clarify or have a conversation to make sure. But, good rule to live by, is, if she says NO, then its no.

Hi Laura

Always very interested to watch a science based approach to crime prevention

Can you offer an opinion on what is largely wrong with the current prevention strategies on campuses and why your approach is different?

[straydog1980](#)

I think there are some really good primary prevention of sexual assault perpetration strategies being implemented on campuses that also take science based approaches, however, the problem is that many of these have not been evaluated using rigorous designs such as a randomized controlled trial and with behavioral outcomes that would allow the CDC to designate them as effective primary prevention. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1359178914000536> Of the ones that were deemed effective, none were specific to college populations.

Do you think we should extend these sorts of trainings into High Schools? Further, what role can parents play in effecting better understanding of consent?

[VirtualMachine0](#)

Yes, I definitely think we need to extend these trainings into high schools. The sooner the better—and there are several, evidence-based programs for high school students, Safe Dates to name one that have been implemented and should be scaled up. I agree completely that parents need to play a stronger role in teaching both sons and daughters about sexual decision making and understanding the elements of real consent. I am also a parent and have had many discussions with my sons, and daughter about these issues—its difficult at times to approach the subject, but parents can have a real effect on their teens even more so than peers. I would love to develop more programs for parents to help them have these discussions as well as health care providers. Many times we are focused on identifying victims, rightfully so, but we should also focus on helping our kids to not perpetrate sexual assault. It's about giving them the information to know what is OK and what is not, and what can be considered a crime especially in situations that it might not be certain such as when both parties have been drinking. We should not assume that all kids understand this or know this, as it is not always clear cut.

Hi Dr. Salazar, thank you for doing this AMA!

Given that your research has shown intervention studies to be effective in reducing sexual assaults can you describe what methodologies in particular seem to be the most effective? Second, has there been interest from Universities and or students in implementing these strategies?

Third, hi mom; I was surprised to see your name on reddit this morning! Give me a heads up next time ;)

[quattro](#)

Hi Nick! Thanks for your question. In my study, what I focused on was a core of proven behavior change strategies that involve providing knowledge and information, building skills to engage in the targeted behaviors, and emphasizing positive outcomes for good behavior and negative outcomes for bad behavior. In addition, it was important to correct misperceptions surrounding what young men believe other young men think about sexual assault—in other words, their normative beliefs. These strategies are all based on Bandura's social cognitive theory and social norms theory. Because it was a web-based program, it was also very challenging to implement these techniques without having any face-to-face interaction. So, we had to develop videos, interactive elements and we used a lot of audio over text and images.