

Men Assaulting Women: How do We Stop Them?

August 20, 2026

Transcript

[00:00:00] Jens Ludwig: One of the biggest and most important lessons of all of social science for me over the last fifty years in social science is essentially that nobody is living in the real world.

[00:00:19] Cristina Quinn: Welcome to today's episode, looking at alternate realities. I'm just kidding. Let's get serious. On this podcast, we do want to know how people think and what their motivations are, because that's the best way to fight crime, and the crime we're fighting today is sexual assault, more specifically sexual assault that men commit against women.

And a heads-up, we are going to talk about these topics in detail throughout this episode. Now, sexual assault is a huge problem in many parts of the world, including in the United States, and the statistics are staggering. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that around 20% of American women have been raped throughout their lifetimes, and that just over 40% have experienced some form of contact sexual violence, which also includes assault or unwanted sexual contact.

And while data on perpetrators is hard to come by, we'll later hear about a survey which shows that a shocking 13.1% of college-aged men admit to committing rape. It's one survey, but that figure is astounding. Economists like Jens Ludwig are all about studying how we make decisions, and in the case of sexual assault, men are making decisions to commit these acts.

[00:01:41] Jens Ludwig: All of that boils down to decision-making, and so I think there's a real opportunity-

[00:01:48] Cristina Quinn: So today, we're going to focus on what drives men to commit sexual assault and what we can do to stop it and to keep us all safer. This is Fighting Crime, the show that asks big questions about crime and how to stop it.

I'm Cristina Quinn, a journalist, and I've spent my career digging into stories to discover the truth. I'm going across the country, from prisons to universities, police chiefs to inmates, to look at the evidence and question everything we think we know about how to make America safer. I want to know what actually works and meet the people who are making it happen.

So join us as we figure out new ways to fight crime and make society safer, and be prepared to think differently.

On this episode, we're purposefully doing something different when it comes to talking about sexual assault perpetrated by men against women. We want to start our conversation with men, rather than talking about the things women should and shouldn't do to stay safe. You may have heard us say in previous episodes how one of the best ways to [00:03:00] prevent crime is to increase the probability of getting caught.

But with sexual assault, the perpetrators usually get away with it. I mean, conviction rates for rape specifically are in the single digits. One reason for this is that very few people report these crimes. Later, we'll hear about some interesting things people are trying to collect better data about sexual assault.

We'll also hear about unique aspects of this crime, which make it especially tricky to report and to hold perpetrators accountable. For example, the fact that generally victims and perpetrators actually know each other. We just heard from Jens Ludwig, an economics professor at the University of Chicago, who also runs their crime lab.

In more recent years, Jens started to look at sexual assault on American college campuses and what can be done to combat this. He says that crime experts usually have some idea of who is committing various types of crime. This allows them to design prevention methods to target potential perpetrators.

But it's harder to do this with sexual assault, given that there is so little reporting of these crimes. Now, let's not forget that sexual assault is all about consent, or rather, the lack of it. And so we need to understand what makes perpetrators act this way. When it comes to sexual assault specifically, we may be surprised to hear that sometimes men have views that don't exactly condone rape and violence towards women, but are still problematic.

[00:04:34] Jens Ludwig: People are very, very good at talking themselves into believing something that they want to believe. I read a paper a few years ago that interviewed US college students about their attitudes towards women and sex and sexual violence, and the results were astonishing and horrifying, as someone who has two daughters himself.

Unbelievable. And it has the flavor of a sizable share of college-age men in the United States agree with statements like, "If I've paid for dinner, she owes me something."

[00:05:15] Cristina Quinn: Hm.

[00:05:15] Jens Ludwig: Right? "If she's dressing provocatively, that is instigating me, and what did she think was gonna happen," kind of thing, right? It is shocking to think that people are able to kind of mentally twist things around into kind of up is down sense of what the right thing to do is in a moment.

But I do think, like that recognition that people are so prone to do that is a really helpful insight in them thinking about what types of things might actually be helpful. Be helpful to prevent more of it.

[00:05:57] Cristina Quinn: Jens Ludwig says we need to understand the influence of peer groups on normalizing bad behavior, in particular on younger people and how they behave.

And when talking about college campuses, he believes we can focus on athletes and fraternities.

[00:06:12] Jens Ludwig: You know, I'm 100 years old, but even I can remember back to what it was like to be a teenager, and like the human brain up through like your early to mid-20s, the human brain is designed to be insanely sensitive to what other people think, to peer influences, right?

And when you look at violent crime, for instance, right? A huge share of violent crime committed by adults is like just one person doing it, maybe two people doing it. When you look at violent crime committed by teens, it's overwhelmingly done in groups of teens.

[00:06:54] Cristina Quinn: Hm.

[00:06:55] Jens Ludwig: Right? And I think that that also speaks to how powerful these sorts of peer influences are.

That's for just like regular, quote, "street violence." Yeah. And I think the same logic carries over to sexual violence as well. You know, and what I think the data say, the data suggests that what fraternities and sports teams are doing as well is creating these little sub-communities of people that interact a lot with each other.

Like, they create these very, very intense peer environments where the norms just go off in a direction that leads to all sorts of horrible things.

[00:07:44] Cristina Quinn: He says focusing on fraternities could be a key place to start if we want to tackle rape and sexual assault on college campuses.

[00:07:52] Jens Ludwig: One of the studies that made a huge impression on me was comparing fraternity members and non-fraternity members, looking at their high school behavior, and then looking at what happens when they get to college.

And what you can see is that, you know, in high school, you look at male students who will go on to join fraternities or not, and their behavioral patterns don't look all that different. And then they get to college, and the guys who join the fraternity join the fraternity, and then what you see is huge differences in rates of committing sexual assault and rape on campus, right?

And I think as an economist, I would look at that and I would say that is clearly strong circumstantial evidence that the fraternity might be having a causal... It's not just that date rapey guys are joining fraternities. I'm sure that happens, too. But, so it's not just the type of guy who's joining the fraternity, but I think the data suggests that the fraternity itself might be changing people's behavior.

I think the second thing that will make, would make you very worried about that, makes me very worried about that, is a huge body of research from psychology and behavioral science that shows us how strongly people's behavior is shaped by the behavior of people around them. Right. And what these... And, and I think the data, it's very clear.

It's like fraternities and athletes on campus are the two groups that have particularly high rates of offending, of campus sexual assault and rape, right?

[00:09:44] Cristina Quinn: So are you, I mean, you're suggesting or is the data suggesting that the culture within these communities are collectively, or cultivating an environment where sexual assault is okay?

[00:10:00] Jens Ludwig: Talk to anybody in a fraternity or just, you know, we have a bunch of fraternity houses right next to the University of Chicago campus. Walk by there on any Friday or Saturday night, and you can form a judgment for yourself, and I think the data are very consistent with that as well.

[00:10:19] Cristina Quinn: Okay, so people seem really good at justifying things to themselves, and younger people are especially influenced by their peers, and this can lead to groups normalizing bad behavior.

And the lack of data makes it hard for experts to know how to tackle these crimes. One key reason there is so little data on sexual assault is that there is also very little reporting of it. Statistics vary, but they generally show that around 80% of women don't ever report their assault or rape to the police.

And as for college students, 90% of them never report it to their campus' Title IX office, which is the department that handles allegations of harassment, abuse, and assault. There are a number of reasons many victims are so reluctant to report an assault.

[00:11:09] Jess Ladd: I was sexually assaulted in college by a friend of mine, and it took me several years to report my assault, and in the end I ended up regretting reporting.

[00:11:22] Cristina Quinn: That's Jess Ladd, an advocate and entrepreneur. She's the co-founder of the Fund to Prevent Sexual Assault, an incubator that focuses on innovative projects to this end. She's also the co-founder of a revolutionary website called Callisto, which has been used by universities across the US. It allows victims to report their sexual assault, get resources for help and support, and they can also be alerted if someone else has the same assailant.

Her journey to doing this work began after a friend sexually assaulted her in college. Like many other people who've been sexually assaulted, the aftermath was confusing. In 80% of cases, perpetrators and victims know each other, so they may be friends or even partners or exes. This can make it hard to know that an assault has taken place and to then figure out what to do about it.

[00:12:17] Jess Ladd: It took me a while to figure out how to label my experience.

So often sexual assault does not fall into super, you know, clear-cut, this-is-definitely-rape scenarios where, which involve, you know, a stranger like in bushes with a knife, which is a lot of what our original kind of criminal justice policy and definitions are built around.

Far more often, especially on college campuses, perpetrators are friends of a survivor. They know them, maybe it's a partner, it's somebody in their life, it's at least an acquaintance rather than a stranger. But it also means that there's tends to be an emotional bond a lot of the time between a victim and their perpetrator that's preexisting and causes them to both question whether or not it's sexual assault, because if what happened to me was sexual assault, then this person who was my friend is a sexual assailant, and therefore that means that they're evil, and I know that they're not evil, and therefore it couldn't have been sexual assault.

So there's a bit of this sort of logic track that, that happens just based off of the relationship between victims and their perpetrators. And then there's that the act itself, again, is often not, you know, super violent with a weapon, et cetera. Often it might involve alcohol or be a little bit more gray, or there wasn't consent, but there wasn't violence.

And so figuring out how to label your experience and whether or not it counts can be really challenging and often takes months or years for survivors to report. And we learned that on college campuses, the average time to reporting if a survivor does report is 11 months.

[00:13:57] Cristina Quinn: Having a preexisting relationship and emotional connection with the perpetrator can also complicate figuring out what to do next, if anything.

[00:14:06] Jess Ladd: A lot of survivors either don't want their perpetrator to get into trouble. Often they're unsure that if they do report, they will be believed or that they will be taken seriously, and that is a rational concern. Often survivors are not believed, often not taken seriously. Often they end up in pretty traumatizing processes post-reporting that don't actually result in justice. And often survivors are a bit worried of, "Hey, what happens if the perpetrator finds out," right?

"We're in the same social network. We often have the same friends. If they learn that I've reported them, will they retaliate? Will my friends hate me? Will I lose my social connections?"

[00:14:47] Cristina Quinn: A woman may also feel discouraged to report because of what others will think, in particular that they're lying or are out for revenge, especially in the case of a perpetrator who may be an ex-partner.

We'll hear later about some research looking at how likely people are to think a woman is lying if she alleges an assault. And then if you do decide to report the assault, there's the uncertainty and loss of control over what happens next.

[00:15:13] Jess Ladd: If you're a survivor of sexual assault, you've just been, gone through something where your control over your own body was taken from you, to then be going into a process where you might lose control all over again around something connected to your sexual assault has the potential to be really scary and really triggering.

So there's a lot of very rational reasons to not come forward. I would say when survivors do come forward, often the main reason is to protect other people.

[00:15:49] Cristina Quinn: For Jess Ladd, it took around a week for her to realize that what her assailant had done was not right, and that she wasn't feeling okay about it, and then over a year to label his actions as sexual assault.

Two weeks after the assault, she spoke to the assailant about what he had done.

[00:16:07] Jess Ladd: I would say he didn't really get it initially. He was quite confused, and that was an in-person conversation.

[00:16:12] Cristina Quinn: But she says it wasn't until more people from their community got involved that he started to take his actions seriously.

[00:16:19] Jess Ladd: A while later, one of my friends who, this is over six months later, over one of my friends who I did feel like stood up for me. She said she told him that she wasn't gonna come to a birthday party of his because she was upset about what he had done. And that, I think, was the thing that caused him to begin to take what I was saying kind of seriously, was having another mutual friend flag, "Hey, I'm upset with you, and here are the consequences of that."

Right? In a small way. I'm not coming to your birthday party, but still real way. That caused him, I believe, to reach back out again and be like, "Hey, can we talk about this a little bit more?" We did. It didn't necessarily go great.

[00:17:05] Cristina Quinn: But there was some conversation. Jess gave her assailant a handwritten letter about what had happened and the impact his actions had on her.

She asked him to keep distance from her, like not sitting at the same cafeteria table, not coming into her dorm area, as she didn't wanna run into him in places where she would otherwise feel safe. She says she walked around campus with a constant sense of dread, being afraid she may run into him. He wrote a letter back apologizing, and though he never acknowledged his actions as sexual assault, he agreed to her requests.

But that all changed.

[00:17:41] Jess Ladd: One day, I came home to my, my dorm, and I found him there unexpectedly, and his explanation was, "Well, I didn't think you would be here." And I was like, "Well, that wasn't part of the terms."

[00:17:54] Cristina Quinn: Jess had thought her letter had made him take his actions seriously. This is when she realized he wasn't committed to changing his behavior.

She decided to report the assault so it would be on the record in case another victim came forward, and then it could validate this other person's experience. She hoped that the school would also let her know if there were other allegations against the assailant. Would things have been different if you knew he had other victims?

[00:18:21] Jess Ladd: It would've changed things a lot for me if I had known there were other victims.

Yeah. And I think, and that's on many different levels. So I think one is on, on the labeling part of it. I would have felt much more comfortable labeling it as sexual assault if I knew there were other victims. I would have been less likely to

blame myself.

I would be more likely to see this as a, you know, a pattern that is something to do with him and something about his character.

[00:18:47] Cristina Quinn: First, she went to campus security to report the assault, and they said it was school policy to call the police. Things got worse when the police started taking the report.

[00:18:56] Jess Ladd: The folks who I talked to from the local police department were not very empathetic, not very helpful, told me that there are two sides to every story, and then handed me a brochure for battered women shelters in the local area because they didn't have their brochure on sexual assault in the car.

So that process of reporting and being somewhat gently coerced into speaking with the cops ended up being, and feeling not believed and not supported by the folks who I thought were there to believe and support me and help me, was, in the end, more traumatic than the original rape.

[00:19:39] Cristina Quinn: It's not an unusual story, hearing rape or sexual assault victims say that the process of reporting was re-traumatizing or somehow made things worse, which is another key reason why reporting rates are so low.

[00:19:54] Jess Ladd: The assault somewhat broke my trust in people, but that experience broke my trust in institutions, and it felt like The things that I thought in the world that might be built to help me out as a human being were maybe all broken and that there wasn't actually a safety net when bad things happen.

[00:20:17] Cristina Quinn: After spending time at graduate school studying epidemiology and working in public policy, in 2015, Jess launched the website Callisto, where survivors can log their assault.

It's timestamped, which helps them if they want to use it later for a formal investigation, say, with the police or at a university. The website also gives them information about their reporting options and access to resources. Most importantly, it alerts them if someone else has also reported an assault by the same person, something that she really wanted to do when she came forward.

[00:20:53] Jess Ladd: Some of the hope is also how to relieve that psychological burden that survivors are facing, as they're often blaming themselves not only for the original rape, but for somehow not responding in the most selfless or rational way possible. And so, the hope of a system like this was not only to increase reporting and identification of serial offenders, but to also really improve the mental health of survivors when their perpetrator isn't a serial offender.

[00:21:25] Cristina Quinn: We're going to take a quick break. I want you to think about three people you know who are thoughtful and care about these issues, and to send it to them now. When we come back, we'll hear about an interesting survey method that helps both victims and perpetrators be more likely to report a sexual assault, and the impact is pretty astounding.

[00:21:51] Kennedy Johnston: As a 21, 22-year-old woman who was in college, like, I saw my friends go through these things, right? This was a... We weren't necessarily talking about it, but we all knew that it was happening, and I saw them over and over again make the same choice, which was not to report it. And I think as someone who's analytical in the way that I am, my biggest question was always, "Why?"

And I knew why, 'cause we'd had those conversations, but then how can we quantify it, and how can we fix it? Which is what ultimately led me here.

[00:22:15] Cristina Quinn: Kennedy Johnston is in the final year of her economics PhD at Texas A&M University. And like Jens Ludwig, she is interested in looking at how we make decisions, and she is also aware that one of the key problems with the lack of reporting is the limited data we end up having about these crimes, and who is allegedly committing them.

Now, while Jens Ludwig has a long career researching violence and ways to fight crime, including looking at matters around masculinity and teens and peers, Kennedy Johnson's current work also looks at groups, but from a different angle. She's interested in social judgment and how this plays a role in sexual assault, and whether victims and even perpetrators report it.

[00:23:01] Kennedy Johnston: I essentially think about this as, like, reputational costs of some kind. Reputational damage, your... People are gonna say things about you. Like, social costs, expected judgment, those types of things.

[00:23:12] Cristina Quinn: She explores this in her paper, The Under-Reporting of Sexual Assault: An Experiment on Victims, Perpetrators, and Social Judgment.

Here she is looking at reporting on surveys. Since we don't have much data on sexual assault, it's hard to implement effective interventions, so researchers are interested in ways that could help collect more information. There are two sections. In the first section, she looks at people's reactions to statements about victims, and also what they think other people may think.

[00:23:42] Kennedy Johnston: So one thing I wanted to do was quantify perceptions of these social norms regarding college sexual assault or sexual assault more broadly. And so I have two statements that I use in my paper on this. The first is on victim blaming. And this isn't the exact statement, but it's something along the lines of, "Women who were sexually assaulted might be partly to blame."

And I also focus on accusations of lying, so for that, I use a statement that is, "Women who say they were sexually assaulted might be lying." For instance, they could just regret an otherwise consensual encounter.

[00:24:14] Cristina Quinn: In her paper, she gave these two statements to all the respondents, and asked them to agree or disagree, and to then say if they think other people would agree or disagree with the statements.

[00:24:27] Kennedy Johnston: In my paper, I find that about 50% of men and about a quarter of women agree that women who say they were sexually assaulted could be lying. And to be honest, those numbers were way higher than I expected them to be, and was a little upset when I found them. But interestingly, people have accurate perceptions of that.

So they expect about 50% of men and about a quarter of women to agree with that statement.

[00:24:49] Cristina Quinn: Wow. Okay, so we can totally understand why a lot of victims are worried they won't be believed. When it comes to the victim-blaming statement, interestingly, fewer men and women agreed that a victim may be to blame for the assault, but they thought a lot more other people would think the victim is to blame.

So it seems that victims have valid concerns if they worry that people won't believe them. Now, the second part of her paper looks at ways in which we can increase the likelihood a woman will come forward to report an assault. In this case, she's looking at ways we can design data-gathering surveys where we can get more accurate information about sexual assaults and make it likelier that victims will report.

Kennedy Johnston looked at a method called hard garbling. I know. I had never heard of this before either. It has nothing to do with mouthwash. And better yet, I will let her explain it.

[00:25:48] Kennedy Johnston: When you are running a survey, there is a standard technique that we use to record answers called direct elicitation. So you can think of this as if I asked you a yes or no question, you say yes or no, [00:26:00] that's what's recorded in the data.

Hard garbling is the treatment condition that I use to see if I can increase rates of reporting. And so what this does is for a yes or no question, for example, in my study, I ask essentially, "Have you been sexually assaulted?" You would say yes or no. For a subset of those answers, I use 20%. They get recorded as yes regardless of what you say.

And so what that means is in my data, when I see a yes in that treatment condition, I cannot verify if it was really a yes or if it was someone who said no that had their answer randomly flipped to a yes.

[00:26:34] Cristina Quinn: Do you get that? So in this particular survey, for about 20% of the answers to the question, "Have you been sexually assaulted?"

The answer gets automatically recorded as a yes, and this could actually be really helpful for someone coming forward to report an assault. This isn't the first time hard garbling has been used to help people feel more comfortable reporting something difficult. This method was developed in an influential paper called Monitoring Harassment in Organizations, which surveyed factory workers in Bangladesh.

The paper found that hard garbling increased reports of sexual harassment by a staggering 306% and physical harassment by 295%. And so it seems hard garbling makes it more possible that someone is willing to report an assault. What it does is it gives them plausible deniability. That means if someone finds out you've reported a sexual assault, you could always deny it by pointing to the survey technique and claim that it's just one of the 20% of answers that is automatically switched to a yes.

[00:27:40] Kennedy Johnston: So I do find that hard garbling increases reports of less severe sexual assaults, so not including rape, but kind of these more, I hate to call it, but like more marginal incidents, like unwanted kissing or unwanted touching, by about 20%.

[00:27:54] Cristina Quinn: So hard garbling makes it more likely that you'll report a less severe sexual assault.

Interestingly, hard garbling didn't change reports of more severe allegations, in particular rape.

[00:28:07] Kennedy Johnston: In my sample, 34% of women reported being rape victims under the direct elicitation treatment. So the rates of reporting for that were already quite high.

[00:28:17] Cristina Quinn: And hard garbling didn't really change those results.

And that can make more sense. We are more likely to report something that is considered more serious, like rape. Now, something fascinating about her paper is that she also used hard garbling to ask men if they had sexually assaulted or raped a woman.

[00:28:35] Kennedy Johnston: Among men, I do find that it doubles reports of rape perpetration.

And so in my control or direct elicitation treatment, I find that 6.1% of men are willing to tell me that they have raped somebody. And under my treatment condition, that rises to 13.1% of men.

[00:28:53] Cristina Quinn: Okay. Wow. So hard garbling can make it more likely that men will admit to having
[00:29:00] committed rape. Now, this sort of survey could have a real impact.

It could help us have more data on who is committing rape and could help us be able to target these men. One finding from Kennedy Johnson's research is that maybe more men are committing rapes than we had assumed.

[00:29:19] Kennedy Johnston: There is this idea, and I historically would have agreed that like serial perpetration is a pretty big problem and drives the vast majority of sexual assaults, right?

So it's not that every man is a sexual assault perpetrator. It's typically that like one man victimizes multiple women. And while I'm sure that's true in like the more severe cases, my results at least suggest that 13.1% of men have raped somebody, at least according to the definition and the question that I used, which is a lot higher than I thought it was gonna be.

And so serial perpetration is certainly an issue. I do also think, though, that there could be more one-off cases that we're missing 'cause these are exactly the types of cases that aren't going reported to law enforcement.

[00:29:59] Cristina Quinn: And this can have policy implications. As one example, she believes that hard garbling could help us know if interventions are working.

How can you apply your research to that side of this?

[00:30:11] Kennedy Johnston: So let's say I go onto a college campus and I give half of the male college students some intervention that I think will help. Okay, so you've ran the intervention, but if you're relying on reported sexual assaults by women or by campus women or men, you're still gonna end up with a thing where at the end of the year you have 10 reported sexual assaults on your college campus in a year, and so you'll, and you'll have no way of knowing if it was committed by a man who received the intervention or by somebody who didn't.

And so what I hope to do is use this hard garbled perpetration outcome as kind of my own outcome measure in an intervention like that. So I think knowing that this works and knowing that I can get at least 13.1% of men to admit that they have sexually assaulted someone is really useful when I think about how do I decrease that?

Because now I have a way to go into, let's say, a college fraternity, put them through some kind of social norm, bystander intervention, consent workshop, whatever you wanna test, and at the end of it, I can give them the survey. And I can see if by the end of the year, if men who completed the workshop and men who didn't complete my workshop have different rates of sexual assault perpetration, then I'll know that my intervention did something, right?

[00:31:22] Cristina Quinn: What Kennedy's saying is important. Hard garbling can be used in surveys to figure out whether trainings are actually working and yielding results. Jess Ladd, the Callisto co-founder who we heard from earlier in the episode, is also interested in projects focusing on potential perpetrators. Currently, she's the co-founder of the Fund to Prevent Sexual Assault.

This is an incubator program, which means they choose projects and give them six months worth of support and coaching, as well as \$50,000 to develop their idea. Their mission is to reduce sexual assault in the next generation, and she says it's important to understand why boys and men commit these acts.

[00:32:04] Jess Ladd: So there's a lot that we still need to understand about why people perpetrate assault. But when you look at high schoolers, some predictors that we've seen is that youth or boys who grow up in house- households where there's domestic violence at home between their parents are more likely to perpetrate sexual assault.

We know that holding misogynistic beliefs makes you more likely to perpetrate sexual assault. Believing in rape myths is correlated with perpetrating sexual assault. We're beginning to understand, although the evidence is still a little bit murky, that having single-sex friend groups, like all-male friend groups, makes you more likely to perpetrate.

[00:32:47] Cristina Quinn: So do these boys know that what they're doing is sexual assault, or is it more that they're describing behaviors that fit into the definition of it?

[00:32:55] Jess Ladd: So it's rare that somebody who's perpetrated sexual assault or rape will label it as that themselves or sort of realize that they have committed something that fits that label.

Often, though, they agree on the behavior. So when you sometimes see disagreement about sort of false reporting, if you ask the victim and the perpetrator what happened, they'll often tell you a very similar series of events, but they differed sort of in interpretation of what was happening during it, and they'll label it differently afterwards.

So what you'll see among perpetrators is they'll often justify their actions in some way for themselves. So for example, "Well, she was drunk, and that meant that she wanted to have sex that night with somebody," or, "Sure, she said no, but that's because she was just ashamed of saying yes, but I could tell that she wanted it."

And so often people who perpetrate will have some narrative that they create after the event so that they're not the bad guy. And what can be challenging about that is [00:34:00] If they really believe a narrative that makes what they did okay, or especially that blames the victim, that really enables doing it again.

[00:34:07] Cristina Quinn: So like Jens Ludwig was telling us at the start of this episode, people really do have justifications for their actions, even if they harm others. And it seems that the profile of a young man who commits sexual assault is often just a young man.

[00:34:22] Jess Ladd: For the most part, the vast majority of sexual assault committed by young men or boys falls into a sort of a category of very normal psychological profile feels entitled in some ways and falls into this entitled opportunist group.

But it's not sociopathic, it's not a sign of other delinquent behavior. It's in this sort of normal-ish category when it comes to psychological profiling.

[00:34:50] Cristina Quinn: Jess Ladd says that it's most effective to prevent these acts if we try to teach people about matters like consent. There are two projects that they're currently funding and working with that she thinks are promising.

[00:35:01] Jess Ladd: The first one I'll talk about is Teach Us Consent, which was based out of Australia and we're helping spread to the US. They are better than anyone I've seen at basically doing high-quality consent education via social media and in a way that's really engaging to young people and that we see boys consuming that content.

A lot of it is, you know, meeting young people where they're at on YouTube or TikTok, and developing the type of content that they enjoy watching with teens.

[00:35:32] Cristina Quinn: Another project Jess is excited about is called Is This Okay?

[00:35:35] Jess Ladd: Another project that I'm really excited about, which is a AI-enabled sort of coach for a young person or older sibling to a young person who's in some sort of gray area sexual situation.

They're looking for advice on whether or not what they did was okay or what they're thinking about doing is okay. The idea there is we see a lot of young people going to Reddit to ask questions like this, and often they're not getting any answers or they're not getting high quality answers. So to try to figure out, given that we know that young people have these questions, how do we help them get answers in a way that they'll actually use?

[00:36:13] Cristina Quinn: So we have covered a lot in this episode, and there's still a lot more research that needs to be done in this area. But there are people trying things, and we need more. So how can we prevent sexual assault? Well, number one, we need to target the people who sexually assault women and teach them about prevention, including key issues like consent.

And the main group of people who sexually assault women are men. Men in general, though on college campuses, it's likely to be men on sports teams or fraternities. Which takes us to our next point. Number two, we need to understand why victims don't come forward with these crimes if we're going to design methods to gather more data about alleged perpetrators.

And number three, to get more data, we have to get creative about ways to encourage victims to report, like with new survey methods and platforms that make it more likely they will open up about sexual assault

Thanks for listening to Fighting Crime. Please follow and subscribe to us wherever you listen to podcasts. That way, you can easily keep up to date with all the new ideas we're covering. Our series producer is Nastaran Tavakoli Far. Production by yours truly, Cristina Quinn. Video production and editing by Mike Tamman and James Page.

Emily Owens is our resident expert. Our researcher is Ben Miley-Smith. Elliott Edwards is our production coordinator. The theme music is by Armen Bazarian. Marketing by the Podglomerate. Our executive producers are Meredith Peebles and Jonathan Coates. If you have been a victim of sexual assault and would like support, you can reach out to the National Sexual Assault Hotline at rainn.org.

That's R-A-I-N-N.org. The link is also in our show notes. Thanks for listening. This was an Indiemedia production for Arnold Ventures.

