

viewpoints

open for  
debate



# Nine Things You Should Know About Your Title IX Rights and Your School's Responsibilities

1. Title IX is a landmark federal civil right that prohibits sex discrimination in education. Title IX is not just about sports; it is a prohibition against sex-based discrimination in education. It addresses discrimination against pregnant and parenting students and women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programs. It also addresses sexual harassment, gender-based discrimination, and sexual violence. Sexual violence includes attempted or completed rape or sexual assault, as well as sexual harassment, stalking, voyeurism, sexism, verbal or physical sexuality-based threats or abuse, and intimate partner violence.

# ruling out rape

## Campus SaVE Act Depends On Reauthorization Of Violence Against Women Act

The Huffington Post | By Tyler Kingkade

Colleges could soon have new national standards for how they handle reported sexual assaults on their campuses, thanks to a provision in the latest re-authorization of the Violence Against Women Act.

The Campus Sexual Violence Elimination (SaVE) Act was first introduced in 2010 by Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pa.), but now depends on the passage of the Senate version of VAWA, which has incorporated much of its language. It's the most significant reform of policy on how college sexual assaults are handled since the Jeanne Clery Act of 1990 and the Campus Sexual Assault Victim's Bill of Rights of 1992.

The SaVE Act would require that schools provide victims with contact information for legal assistance and for counseling and health services. Officials handling disciplinary proceedings would be required to receive annual trainings, and campus crime reports would be expanded to include reports of stalking and domestic violence.

Currently, American universities are required to take action once a sexual assault is reported and to provide resources for victims, but are not obligated to have a prevention policy. The SaVE Act would require institutions to provide prevention and awareness programs for all incoming students and new employees.

...and traditional risk reduction alone and covering primary prevention, consent, reporting options we will begin to change the culture of tolerance it." S. Daniel Carter, formerly director of a blog for The Huffing-

## Sexual assault is epidemic in the United States. Recent media reports, public outrage, and activism have been focused on the institutional settings in which these assaults occur. Colleges and universities, as well as the military and athletic programs, have come under increasing scrutiny as settings that not only fail to deter, but possibly foster rape.

Vanderbilt, Notre Dame, Maryville, Steubenville, Florida State, and the University of Missouri, to name a few, are among the recent highly-profiled institutions in which student athletes allegedly committed rapes that were ignored or downplayed by school administrators. The victims in these cases were treated with hostility by the schools, police, and even their peers who considered the reports of rape to be exaggerated responses to a party culture where “everyone is just trying to have fun” and where “stuff happens.” Some of these victims have committed or attempted suicide.

Social consciousness around putting the victims of rape on trial may be evolving, but are the environments that foster these assaults really changing? President Obama recently promised women who have been sexually assaulted in college: “I’ve got your back.” Should we be guardedly optimistic that this message from the top signals change, or do policy trends indicate attempts to protect institutions at the continued expense of victims? In this *Viewpoints*, five experts weigh in on the question of situational factors and institutional accountability around rape.

Lisa Wade reviews what we know about who commits rape on college campuses and the conditions that support this behavioral profile. She asserts that campus officials need to understand the interplay of cultural, psychological and situational causes for rape in order to make viable policy decisions. Brian Sweeney highlights the connection between alcohol consumption and sexual assault. He argues that campus policies that address binge drinking are doomed to fail unless they take into account that, for many young people, drinking and casual sex are rewarding. Amelia Seraphia Derr focuses on federal policies for reporting campus rape. She notes that colleges and universities are beginning to take these regulations more seriously, but raises concerns that they may trend in the direction of a “culture of compliance,” where the fear of litigation that drives policy making could be counterproductive for prevention and support programs.

Michael A. Messner turns the lens on rape culture among male college athletes and asks what can be done. He’s not convinced that current reform programs that target individual men and men’s sports teams will mitigate sexual violence. He suggests we need a deeper understanding of the link between sexual domination, and the ways we celebrate male athletes and their violent domination in sports. Writing about a different, though familiar context, Carol Burke examines recent rape scandals in the military. She chronicles the mounting evidence for a high-level official blind eye on sexual assault and the resulting outrage among congresswomen who are calling for accountability. Is change in the offing? Read on and see what these experts have to say.

Illustrations by Tracey R. Jones

# understanding and ending the campus sexual assault epidemic

by lisa wade

College attendance is a risk factor for sexual assault. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, one in five women who attend college will be the victim of a completed or attempted sexual assault, compared to one in six women in the general population. Up to 90 percent of these women will know their attacker. Only about half will identify their experience as assault and fewer than 5 percent will report their experience to campus

authorities or the police. Four percent of college men also report being sexually assaulted, overwhelmingly by other men.

understand these interrelated causes and how they contribute to rates of sexual assault.

What are the psychological factors? A small number of men may be more predisposed to assault their peers than others. In a 2002 study by David Lisak and Paul Miller, 6 percent of male college students admitted to behavior that matched the legal definitions of sexual assault or rape. Of those men, two-thirds were serial rapists, with an average of six assaults each. Serial rapists plan their assaults, carefully choose their victim, use alcohol as a rape drug, and employ force, but only as a back-up. Lisak and Miller find that these men are more likely than other men to engage in other forms of violence as well.

What about context? Some men may be inclined to harm others, but whether they do so is related to their opportunities. The right context can offer these men an opening to do so. Peggy Sanday first recognized the role that context plays in facilitating sexual assault. Studying fraternity parties, she found that some are generative of risk and others are less so. Parties that feature loud music, few places to sit, dancing, drinking, and compulsory flirting are, she explains, "rape prone." In these more dangerous places, rape culture camouflages the predatory behavior of

If institutions of higher education want to, they have the tools to reduce rates of sexual assault. And, even if they do not make this a priority, they face increasing pressure to do so.

Scholars have been working to gain a better understanding of the prevalence of rape on campuses, why it's infrequently reported to authorities, and what we can do about it. In a 2006 article, Elizabeth Armstrong and her collaborators point to cultural, psychological, and situational causes. In the effort to prevent sexual crimes, colleges and universities need to



serial rapists—like plying women with alcohol or pulling them into secluded areas—making it look normal and more difficult to interpret as criminal.

And then there's culture. Rape culture narratives—those that suggest that rape is simply a matter of miscommunication, that "date rape" isn't "real rape," that women frequently lie about being sexually assaulted for vengeance or out of shame—make it difficult for bystanders to justify intervening and for some victims to understand that their experience was a crime. Rape culture also gives rapists plausible excuses for their actions, making it difficult to hold them accountable, especially if members of the campus administration buy into these myths as well.

Armstrong and her colleagues show that all three of these causal factors interact together and with campus policy. Strict penalties for drinking alcohol in residence halls, for example, especially when strongly enforced, can push party-oriented students off campus to less safe places. Rape-friendly contexts offer a target-rich haven for the small percentage of individual men who are motivated to use force and coercion to attain sex. Rape culture contributes to concealing the predatory nature of their behavior to victims, their peers and, all too often, their advocates.

Currently, we're in the midst of a transformation in how colleges and universities handle sexual assault. While our understanding is far from complete, we know more than ever about the interaction of situational, cultural, and psychological causes. If institutions of higher education want to, they have the tools to reduce rates of sexual assault. And, even if they do not make this a priority, they face increasing pressure to do so. A strong national movement now aims to hold institutions accountable for ignoring, hiding, and mishandling sex crimes. Thanks largely to Know Your IX, 30 colleges submitted complaints to the U.S. Office for Civil Rights in 2013, nearly double the number from the year before. We should expect even higher numbers in 2014. Praising these activists, President Barack Obama announced that he was making the end of men's sexual violence against women a priority. The combination of "insider" and "outsider" politics, and a sympathetic media, is a promising recipe for change.

**Lisa Wade** is in the sociology department at Occidental College. She is the principal writer for "Sociological Images" and the author of a forthcoming sociology of gender textbook, with Myra Marx Ferree.

## drinking and sexual assault [kids just wanna have fun]

by brian sweeney

Getting wasted is fun, as is hooking up. In today's campus hookup culture, alcohol and sex often go together, and both can be rewarding experiences for young adults. Party culture glamorizes heavy drinking, making it seem less dangerous and, too often, causing students to dismiss the negative effects—whether getting puked on at a football game or being sexually assaulted—as "just stuff that happens." But sexual assault is a predictable result of party subcultures characterized by extreme drinking and sexual double standards. A majority of college rape victims are drunk when attacked, and rapists use alcohol as a weapon to incapacitate their victims. Men—and other women, for that matter—may see overly drunk women as fair game, giving up their right to feminine protection because they have failed to be respectable and ladylike. Given the connection between intoxication and sexual assault, many ask, "Why not just tell women not to get so drunk?" But a mindset that places responsibility on women ignores the widespread attitudes and practices that encourage men's sexual predation

and victimization of women in the first place.

To be clear, drinking, by itself, does not lead to sexual assault. Drinking heavily makes women more vulnerable, but it is overwhelmingly men who take advantage and rape. It is also

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men who stand by and watch their male friends ply women with drinks, block women from leaving rooms, and sometimes gang-rape women too drunk to walk home. Equipping women with "watch your drink, stay with your friends" strategies ignores both the fun of partying with abandon and the larger structures of domination that lead men to feel entitled to (drunk) women's bodies. Moreover, while rape-supportive beliefs are widespread, their influence over men's behavior is dependent on rape-supportive social and organizational arrangements—campus

party culture and alcohol policy included.

Drinking subcultures have a long history on American college campuses, but since 1984 and the passage of the National Minimum Drinking Age Act, all 50 states have opted for billions in federal highway aid in exchange for passing Age-21 laws. As a result, many college campuses send mixed messages and endorse confused policies. Students are regularly fined and written up for drinking infractions but also educated about drinking responsibly. Students flock to so-called party schools and then spend most of their college years trying not to get caught—secretly “pre-gaming” with hard-alcohol in dorm rooms, hiding out in fraternity basements during party inspections, and nervously sweating as the bouncer checks for fake IDs. Alcohol becomes a coveted commodity, with many students seeking access to it and fortunate others wielding control of it.

Problems related to drinking exist, in part, because we have constructed a firewall between students and the adults who run universities—a divide that surely undermines our mission of creating safe and rich learning environments. We are allowing young people, unsupervised, to initiate each other into adulthood, often through rituals built around drinking. The campus pub is long gone at most schools, a relic of a bygone in loco parentis era when many professors lived among students and mentored them academically and socially. We could perhaps learn valuable lessons from a time when drinking was less illicit and student social life more open and watched over. Bringing drinking “aboveground” would disrupt some of the party scenes

that sociological research has shown to be productive of sexual danger for women, would remove some of the constraints college administrators face in crafting effective alcohol education and policy, and would embolden sexual assault victims to come forward, reducing their fears of being punished for drinking violations.

Many schools are trying to get students to drink more responsibly. Since 2008, over 125 college and university presidents and chancellors have signed on to the Amethyst Initiative, which calls for “informed and dispassionate public debate” on Age-21 drinking laws. The supporters of the initiative, while not explicitly endorsing a lowering of the drinking age, believe Age-21 laws drive drinking underground, leading to dangerous binge drinking and reckless behavior among students. Five years after its inception, it is unclear if anything will come of the Amethyst Initiative. Federal and state government officials seem stubbornly unwilling to open discussion on Age-21 laws. And yet, because the initiative focuses on moderate and responsible drinking among students rather than abstinence, its ideas should have traction in correcting party cultures that, as they are currently organized, produce both fun and sexual danger. What is fairly certain is that sexual assault policies that ignore the collective, rewarding nature of drunken, erotically charged revelry will likely fail among many young adults.

**Brian Sweeney** is in the sociology department at Long Island University, Post. His teaching and research focus on gender and sexuality among young adults.

## a culture of compliance vs. prevention

by amelia seraphia derr

The under-reporting of campus sexual assaults has become a social problem. Students around the country are waging protests and demanding accountability from university administrators who have been accused of making light of alarming rates of sexual violence on college campuses. In 2011 the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, in reaction to a Department of Justice report on the serious under-reporting of campus sexual assaults, and with the encouragement of Vice President Joe Biden, issued a Dear Colleagues Letter (DCL) on the topic of sexual violence. Specifically, the DCL emphasized and reiterated the legally mandated expectations for systems of reporting and adjudicating cases of sexual violence, for training staff, and for developing prevention and support programs.

Legislated reporting of sexual assault is the fruit of efforts dating back to the 1972 issuance of Title IX of the Education

Amendments, which included sexual violence along with a variety of other forms of gender discrimination. In 1986 the Clery Act clarified and expanded the reporting requirements that were part of Title IX by establishing clear expectations for support services for students who are victims of sexual violence, and for the types of sexual violence-related reports that colleges and universities must file annually.

This legislative action intensified in 2011 when Bob Casey (D-PA) learned of Title IX violation complaints against Swarthmore College, alleging under-reporting cases of sexual misconduct, and took action. He introduced the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (The SaVE Act), which became law with the passage of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act in August 2013. This act closes a serious gap in the existing law by requiring clearer and more publicized policies, education on

"By going beyond traditional risk reduction alone and covering primary prevention, consent, bystander intervention and reporting options we will begin to change the culture of tolerance for sexual violence and the silence that surrounds it."

- S. Daniel Carter, formerly director of public policy for Security On Campus, Inc., wrote of the SaVE Act in a blog for The Huffington Post.

"By going beyond traditional risk reduction alone and covering primary prevention, consent, bystander intervention and reporting options we will begin to change the culture of tolerance for sexual violence and the silence that surrounds it," S. Daniel Carter, formerly director of public policy for Security On Campus, Inc., wrote of the SaVE Act in a blog for The Huffington Post. Security on Campus is one of 29 organizations that has endorsed the SaVE Act. (Carter is now with the VTV Family Outreach Foundation.)

At least 75 instances of sexual assault were reported on college campuses in news articles within the first six weeks of the current academic year, according to a survey of media reports by The Huffington Post. That number reflects only a small percentage of the total instances, as few assaults make it into news reports and only a small percentage of sexual violence victims ever report their attack to school or law enforcement officials. According to a survey of justice

student's rights, "bystander education" for the purpose of prevention, expanded reporting requirements, mandated prevention programs, and procedural rights for the accuser and accused.

This federal-level attention has created a sense of urgency in higher education, prompting university administrators to revisit policies on sexual assault to ensure compliance. But does it actually help change an organizational environment that is highly conducive to assault?

Institutionalizing accountability is essential; policies are a sustainable tool for addressing sexual violence on campuses. Evidence of the effectiveness of such policies can be seen in the fact that since the 2011 DCL there has been a steep increase in the number of Title IX and Clery Act complaints filed. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 62 Title IX complaints dealing with issues of sexual violence and harassment were filed between Oct. 1, 2012 and Sept. 30, 2013 alone.

However, a heightened regulatory environment may create

a culture of compliance where the fear of litigation—rather than expert knowledge on prevention—drives policy-making. Institutional priorities and resources are directed differently depending on whether a university focuses on compliance-based reporting policies or prevention and support programs (which

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also include reporting policies, but within a framework of victim advocacy rather than institutional protection). For example, the DCL states that "if a school knows or reasonably should know about a potential sexual assault it is required to take immediate action." Ambiguity about what this means may prompt universities to adopt a mandated reporting policy for adult-aged

students similar to those in place for minors or other vulnerable populations in order to avoid litigation.

Duke University (along with University of Montana, Swarthmore, and several others) has instituted such a policy, naming almost all of its 34,000 employees as mandated reporters. When staff or faculty members realize that students are about to share a concern with them, they must inform the student that the information they share will be reported to the designated administrator, with or without the student's permission. Duke University states that reports have increased since this policy was adopted. However, some victim's advocates oppose the practice. They counter that campus policies that mandate reporting irrespective of the victim's desire perpetuate a campus environment of silence and isolation and limit victims' options for confiding in trusted sources. A student Resident Assistant (RA) at Swarthmore, where RAs are considered mandated reporters, was recently fired from her position because she refused to break confidentiality by identifying a victim. Critics warn that these

policies could ultimately lead to decreased reporting from victims who feel there is no safe space for them to turn in confidence. This is especially likely to be the case at a campus with few or insufficient survivor support services.

The real issue is how to move beyond a culture of compliance to a culture of prevention. In response to the requirements of the Campus SaVE Act, university policies should foreground survivor self-determination, provide strong perpetrator-prevention programs, offer robust victim support services, and promote increased dialogue about sexual violence with all members of the university community. These efforts will take us beyond the high visibility that reporting requirements have had, and into the areas of support and education required for true change.

**Amelia Seraphia Derr** is in the social work department at Seattle University. Her work focuses on social support and barriers to health and social services for immigrants.

## can locker room rape culture be prevented?

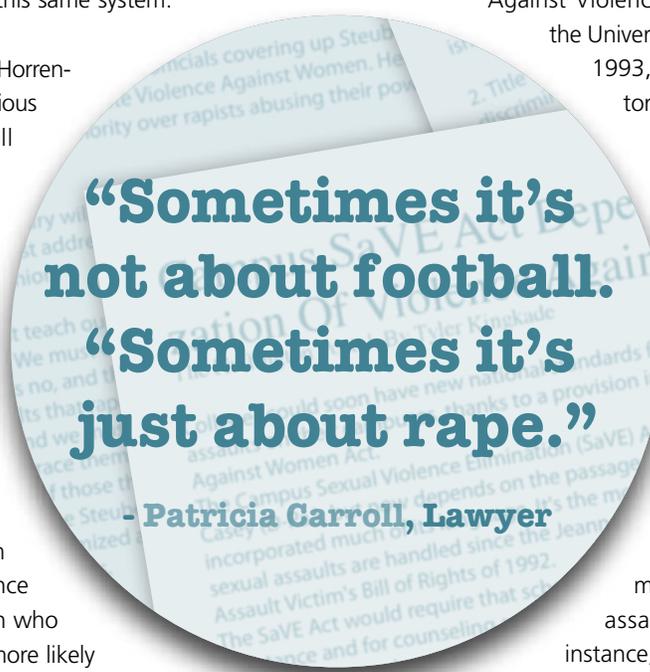
by michael a. messner

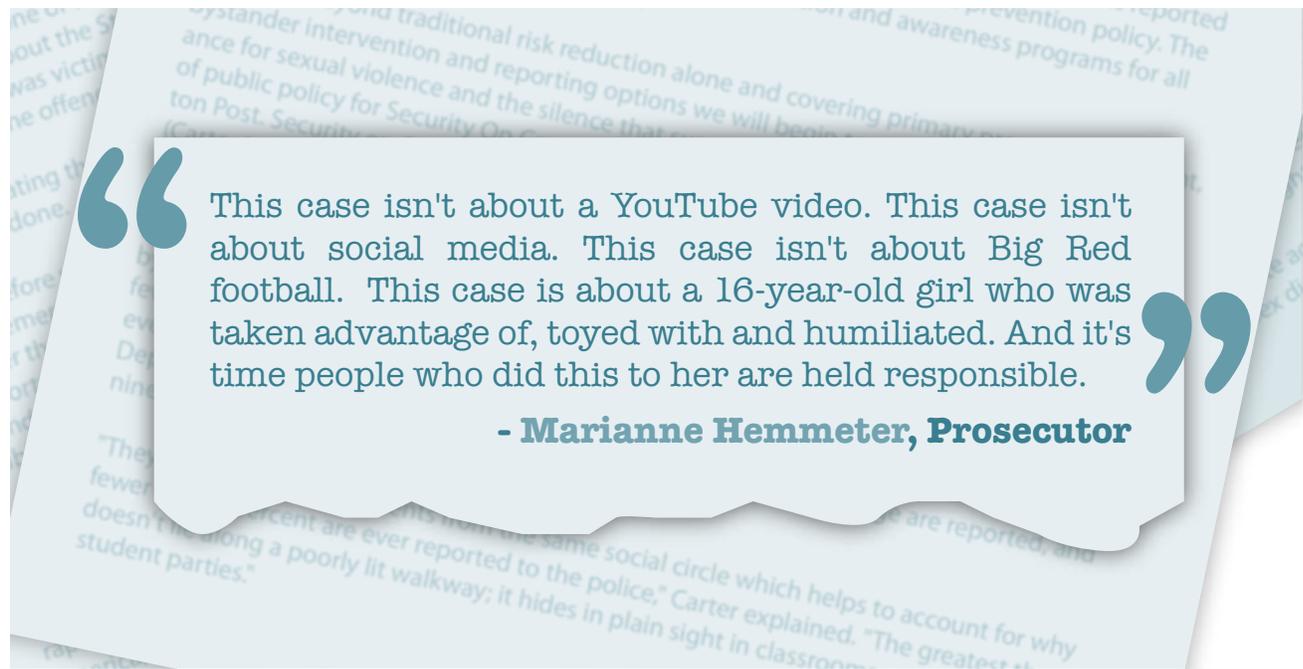
Recipe for sexual assault: Assemble a group of young men. Promise them glory for violently dominating other groups of young men. Bond the group with aggressive joking about the sexual domination of women. Add public adulation that permeates the group with the scent of entitlement. Provide mentors who thrived as young men in this same system. Allow to simmer.

What have we cooked up? Horrendous sexual assaults on unconscious girls by high school football players in Steubenville and Maryville as well as an ongoing parade of sexual assault accusations against college football players, most recently at Florida State, Vanderbilt, and the United States Naval Academy. Do we over-emphasize cases of football player sexual misconduct because of their high profile? Perhaps. But research by sociologist Todd Crosset since the 1990s has shown that men who play intercollegiate sports are more likely

than non-athletes to commit sexual assault—especially those in high-status sports that valorize violence.

Of course most football or ice hockey athletes don't rape women. Recently, some male athletes have even formed organizations to stop violence against women. "Male Athletes Against Violence" has done peer education at the University of Maine for years. And since 1993, Northeastern University's Mentors in Violence Prevention program has created a template for a national proliferation of sports-based programs that deploy a "bystander" approach to violence prevention. These programs attempt to disrupt the ways that high status male groups—like sports teams and fraternities—layer protective silence around members who perpetrate violence against women. A bystander approach teaches men to intervene to stop sexual assaults before they happen—for instance, stepping in when seeing one's





“This case isn't about a YouTube video. This case isn't about social media. This case isn't about Big Red football. This case is about a 16-year-old girl who was taken advantage of, toyed with and humiliated. And it's time people who did this to her are held responsible.”

**- Marianne Hemmeter, Prosecutor**

teammates dragging an inebriated woman to a back room. A good man, the bystander approach teaches, steps forward not only to keep a woman safe, but also to keep the team safe from public trouble.

The years of silence surrounding Penn State University football coach Jerry Sandusky's serial sexual assaults of children is one example of the absolute failure by high-profile university coaches and administrators to model the responsible bystander behavior they say their young athletes should engage in. This case showed that, rather than resulting simply from the actions of one bad man, sexual assault is embedded in the routine values and culture of silence in organizations.

A number of years ago, I assisted psychologist Mark Stevens—a pioneer in working with athletes to prevent sexual violence—in an intervention with a college football program after members of the team were accused of sexually assaulting a woman at an off-campus party. Before the first of two workshops, I asked Stevens if he really thought that a few hours of talk could change the culture of sexual dominance that so commonly cements football team members' loyalties while simultaneously putting women and vulnerable men at risk. Stevens answered no. “But,” he added, “if we can empower one or two guys who, down the road, might intervene in a situation to stop a sexual assault, then our work will have made the world safer for at least one woman.”

I still worry that such interventions do less to prevent acts of violence than they do to contain the public relations nightmare that sexual assaults create for athletics departments. Confirming that fear, a man I recently interviewed told me that he had been hired by a big-time college sports program to institute a violence

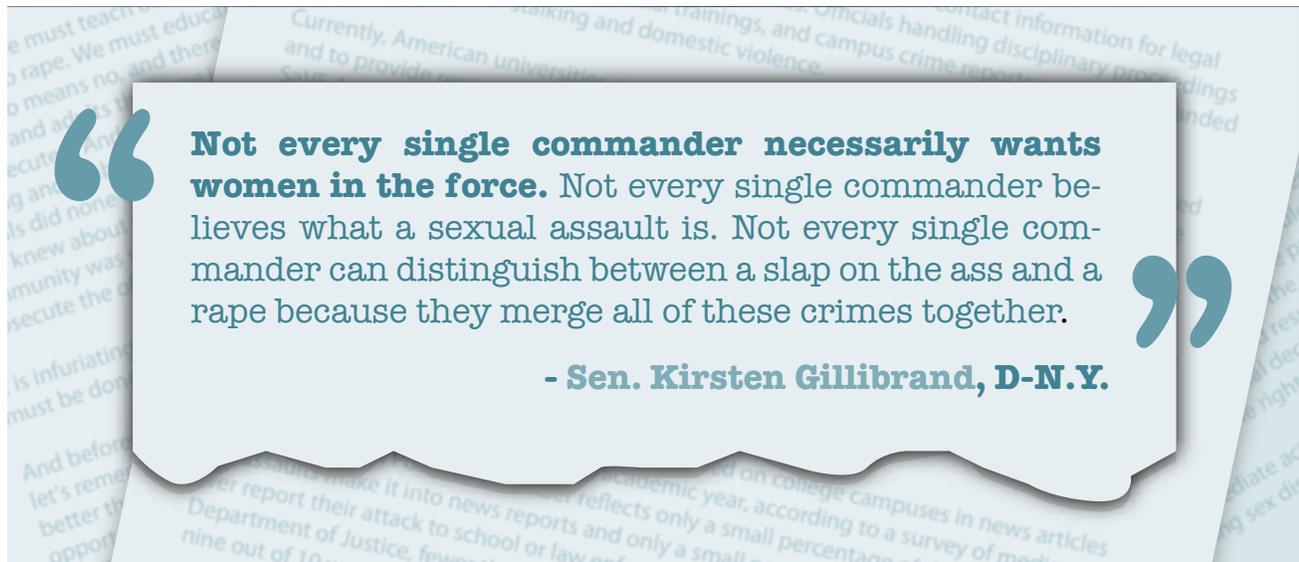
prevention program, only to find it “incredibly disappointing” when he learned his employers had hired him mostly to work with male athletes of color to keep them eligible to play sports. “I thought that they were genuinely ready to do something, you know, make some changes... I got kind of duped. I had this particular background [in violence prevention] so that was really enticing for them, and they had no intention of actually letting me do any of that work.”

While some schools have adopted sexual assault prevention programs for some of their men's sports teams, we just don't know how well they work. We need good research that points

## Sexual assault is embedded in the routine values and culture of silence in organizations.

to how, or under what conditions prevention programs within institutions like football (or the military) can actually succeed in mitigating gender-based violence. To have such an impact, I believe these interventions will need to confront how sexism is routinely intertwined with male entitlement and celebratory violence. To be truly successful, I suspect, such a program would render the game itself to be no longer football as we know it.

**Michael A. Messner** is in sociology and gender studies at the University of Southern California. He is currently writing a book with Max Greenberg and Tal Peretz on men who work to prevent violence against women.



“ **Not every single commander necessarily wants women in the force.** Not every single commander believes what a sexual assault is. Not every single commander can distinguish between a slap on the ass and a rape because they merge all of these crimes together. ”

- Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y.

## failure to serve and protect

by carol burke

Military scandals in the past two years have brought new attention to old problems: sexual harassment, sexual assault, and the potential for bias in the handling of these crimes. The general who commanded the 82nd Airborne was charged with forcible sodomy, indecent acts, and violating orders, and was issued a reprimand and ordered to pay a \$20,000 fine. The commanders in charge of Lackland Air Force Base apparently didn't realize that, over a two-year period, 62 recruits were assaulted by 33 drill instructors. Even those tasked with preventing sexual assault

At trial, the officer was acquitted.

Ultimately, the scandal that ignited the outrage of several congresswomen was Lieutenant General Craig Franklin's decision to overturn Lieutenant Colonel James Wilkerson's court-martial conviction for sexual assault. To Franklin, it seemed incongruous that a man "who adored his wife and his 9-year-old son," a man who as a pilot had flown in the same unit as him, and a man who had been selected "for promotion to full colonel, a wing inspector general, a career officer" could be a sexual predator. So

Franklin exercised the power granted him and other commanders under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) to reverse any verdict without explanation. Although this might have looked at the time like the decision of an out-of-touch commander from his lonely and lofty post, identifying more with the plight of the accused than

Nowhere in America do we allow a boss to decide if an employee was sexually assaulted or not, except in the United States military.

were charged with the crimes they had pledged to thwart. A lieutenant colonel who headed the Sexual Harassment and Assault Response Prevention program at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, was arrested and charged with stalking an ex-wife and sending her threatening emails in violation of a restraining order. A lieutenant colonel in charge of the Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program was charged with the sexual battery of a stranger in a parking lot. His alleged victim, according to witnesses, took justice into her own hands and after pushing away the drunken officer, ran after him and punched him in the face.

of the victim, emails related to the case revealed that generals of even higher rank than Franklin's supported his decision.

According to the Defense Department's own survey, 26,000 anonymous respondents claimed that they had been sexually assaulted in 2012, yet only 3,374 complaints were officially reported in that year. The incendiary mix of the skyrocketing rates of assault and the apparent indifference of some commanders to the plight of victims captured the attention of many women in Congress, and they demanded reform. These congresswomen, joined by some of their male colleagues, took aim at the heart

## Sexual assaults by US military in Japan unlikely to end in prison

At US military bases in Japan, most service members found culpable years did not go to prison, according to internal Department of Defense data. Hundreds of cases filed in America's largest military base in Japan.

## Rape victims say military labels them 'crazy'

By David S. Martin, CNN

## The Military Has a Rape Problem—and It's Not Just Women Who Suffer

The military says it's working to wipe out sexual violence in the armed forces, but some victims say nobody talking about the danger of men

of military culture, the sacrosanct military justice system, which can only be as impartial as the commander who oversees it. Senator Kristin Gillibrand (D-NY) proposed a two-part judicial system akin to those of many of our NATO Allies, a system that would take the most serious crimes like murder and sexual assault out of the chain of command and ensure that decisions to investigate, prosecute, and convict could not be arbitrarily reversed by a commander. In a statement issued December 20, 2013, Gillibrand said, "Nowhere in America do we allow a boss to decide if an employee was sexually assaulted or not, except in the United States military."

Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) fashioned a more moderate compromise that left the investigation and adjudication of crimes of sexual assault in the hands of commanders but that lifted the five-year statute of limitations on courts-martial for sex-related crimes, criminalized retaliation by commanders (but not by peers), provided counsel for victims, and did away with the "good soldier defense." The compromise carried the day, much to the chagrin of victims who regard the UCMJ as a system that often denies them justice.

For several years now the Department of Defense has required mandatory training intended to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment, crafted public service announcements for broadcast on military TV stations, established hotlines for victims, and posted pleas in bathrooms on bases here and abroad for bystanders to step in when they see abuse taking place.

Unfortunately, these costly efforts have failed to build trust in a military judicial system. Victims see these public campaigns as the military's efforts to protect the institution and not them. As long as the investigation and adjudication of sexual assault cases remain within such a command-centric judicial system, the partiality of a single individual can easily trump justice.

**Carol Burke** is in the English department and a faculty associate in the anthropology department at the University of California, Irvine. She is the author of *Camp All-American*, *Hanoi Jane*, and *the High-and-Tight: Gender, Folklore, and Changing Military Culture*.



# working class growing pains

by jennifer m. silva

In a working-class neighborhood in Lowell, Massachusetts, I sat across the kitchen table from a 24-year-old white woman named Diana. The daughter of a dry cleaner and a cashier, Diana graduated from high school and was accepted into a private university in Boston. She embarked on a criminal justice degree while working part-time at a local Dunkin' Donuts, taking out loans to pay for her tuition and room and board. But after two years, Diana began to doubt whether the benefits of college would ever outweigh the costs, so she dropped out of school to be a full-time cashier.

## She explained, “When I work, I get paid at the end of the week. But in college, I would have had to wait five years to get a degree,

and once I got that, who knows if I would be working or find something I wanted to be.” Now, close to a hundred thousand dollars in debt, Diana has forged new dreams of getting married, buying a home with a pool in a wealthy suburb of Boston, and having five children, a cat, and a dog—by the time she is 30.

But Diana admitted that she can’t even find a man with a steady job to date, let alone marry, and that she will likely regret her decision to leave school: “Everyone says you can’t really go anywhere unless you have a degree. I don’t think I am going to make it anywhere past Dunkin’ when I am older, and that scares me to say. Like it’s not enough to support me now.”

Living with her mother and bringing home under \$275 per week, Diana is stuck in an extended adolescence with no end in sight. Her yardsticks for adulthood—owning her own home, getting married, finishing her education, having children, and finding a job that pays her bills—remain spectacularly out of reach. “Your grandparents would get married out of high school, first go steady, then get married, like they had a house,” she reflected. “Since I was 16, I have asked my mother when I would be an adult, and she recently started saying I’m an adult now that I’m working and paying rent, but I don’t feel any different.”

What does it mean to “grow up” today? Even just a few decades ago, the transition to adulthood would probably not have caused Diana so much confusion, anxiety, or uncertainty. In 1960, the vast majority of women married before they turned 21 and had their first child before 23. By 30, most men and women had moved out of their parents’ homes, completed school, gotten married, and begun having children. As over a decade of scholarly and popular literature has revealed, however, in the latter half of the twentieth century traditional markers of adulthood have become increasingly delayed, disorderly, reversible—or have been entirely abandoned. Unlike their 1950s counterparts, who followed a well-worn path from school to work, and courtship to marriage to childbearing, men and women today are more likely to remain unmarried; to live at home and stay in school for longer periods of time; to switch from job to job; to have children out of wedlock; to divorce; or not have children at all.

### long and winding journey

Growing up, in essence, has shifted from a clear-cut, stable,

and normative set of transitions to a long and winding journey. This shift has been greeted with alarm, and the Millennial Generation has often been cast as entitled, self-absorbed, and lazy. In 2013, for example, Time Magazine’s cover story on “The Me Me Me Generation” headlined: “Millennials are lazy, entitled narcissists who still live with their parents.” And a poll conducted in 2011 by the consulting firm Workplace Options found that the vast majority of Americans believe that Millennials don’t work as hard as the generations before them. The overriding conclusion is that things have gotten worse—and that young people are to blame.

But this longing to return to the past obscures the restrictions—and inequalities—that characterized traditional adult milestones for many young people in generations past. As the historian Stephanie Coontz reminds us, in the 1950s and ‘60s women couldn’t serve on juries or own property or take out lines of credit in their own names; alcoholism and physical and sexual abuse within families went ignored; factory workers, despite their rising wages and generous social benefits, reported feeling imprisoned by monotonous work and merciless supervision; and African Americans were denied access to voting, pensions, and healthcare.

The social movements for civil rights, feminism, and gay pride that emerged during subsequent decades erased many of

## Working-class youth are growing up in a world without jobs, without community, and without trust.

these barriers, granting newfound freedoms to young adults in their wake. In many ways, young people today have a great deal more freedom and opportunity than their 1950s counterparts: women, especially, can pursue higher education, advance in professional careers, choose if and when to have children, and leave abusive marriages. And all young adults have more freedom to choose a partner regardless of sex or race.

As psychologist Jeffrey Arnett argues: “More than ever before, coming of age in the twenty-first century means learning to stand alone as a self-sufficient person, capable of making choices and decisions independently from among a wide range of possibilities.” But that’s not the whole story. Just as many social freedoms for young people have expanded, economic security—stable, well-paid jobs, access to health insurance and

Illustrations by Bridget Beorse



pensions, and affordable education—has contracted for the working class. Meanwhile, the growing fragility of American families and communities over the same time period has placed the responsibility for launching young adults into the future solely on the shoulders of themselves and their parents.

For the more affluent young adults of this “Peter Pan Generation”—those with a college fund, a parent-subsidized, unpaid internship, or an SAT coach, the freedom to delay marriage and childbearing, experiment with flexible career paths, and pursue higher education grants them the luxury to define adulthood in their own terms. But working-class men and women like Diana have to figure out what it means to be a worthy adult in a world of disappearing jobs, soaring education costs, shrinking social support networks, and fragile families.

From 2008-2010, I interviewed 100 working-class men and women between the ages of 24 and 34—people who have long ago reached the legal age of adulthood but still do not

## Coming of age means learning to depend only on yourself.

feel “grown up.” I went from gas stations to fast food chains, community colleges to temp agencies, tracking down working-class young people, African Americans and whites, men and women, and documenting the myriad obstacles that stand in their way. And what I heard was profoundly alarming: caught in the throes of a merciless job market and lacking the social support, skills, and knowledge necessary for success, working-class young adults are relinquishing the hope for traditional markers of adulthood—a home, a job, a family—at the heart of the American Dream.

My conversations with these men and women uncovered the contours of a new definition of working-class adulthood: one characterized by low expectations of loyalty in work, wariness toward romantic commitment, widespread distrust of social institutions, and profound isolation from and hostility towards others who can’t make it on their own. Simply put, growing up today means learning to depend on no one but yourself.

### work and love amid inequality

Pervasive economic insecurity, fear of commitment, and confusion within institutions make the achievement of traditional markers of adulthood impossible and sometimes undesirable. The majority of the young people I spoke with bounce from one unstable service job to the next, racking up credit card debt to make ends meet and fearing the day when economic shocks—an illness, a school loan coming out of deferment—will erode what little stability they have.

Upon leaving high school, they quickly learned that they shouldn’t expect loyalty or respect from their jobs. Jillian, a 26-year-old white woman, started out as a line cook, making \$5.50 an hour the year she graduated from high school. Under the guidance of her manager, she worked her way up the line until she was his “right hand man,” running the line by herself and making sure everyone cleaned up their stations at the end of a long day. When Bill died suddenly from a heart attack, the owner waited to hire a new manager, causing a year of skeleton crews, chaos, and back-breaking 70-hour work weeks.

Jillian knew that she was lucky to have all those hours a week to work, especially in the recession, and she didn’t complain: “...you basically worshipped the ground they walked on because they gave you a job. You had to keep your mouth shut.” But when Jillian pushed for changes and the owner snapped, “You won’t get respect anywhere else, so why expect it here?”

She quit. “I thought I had it going good for a while there. But everything really came to a screeching halt, and I bought a car, and now not having a job...I feel like I’m starting over.”

Indeed, growing up means learning that trusting others, whether at school, home, or work, will only hurt them in the end. Rob is a 26-year-old white man whom I met while recruiting at a National Guard training weekend in Massachusetts. Rob told me his story in an empty office at the armory because he was currently “crashing” on his cousin’s couch. When he graduated from his vocational high school, he planned to use his training in metals to build a career as a machinist: “Manufacturing technology, working with metal, I loved that stuff,” he recalled longingly. As he attempted to enter the labor market, however, he quickly learned that his newly forged skills were obsolete.

“I was the last class at my school to learn to manufacture tools by hand,” he explained. “Now they use CNC [computer numerical controlled] machine programs, so they just draw the part in the computer and plug it into the machine, and the machine cuts it... I haven’t learned to do that, because I was the last class before they implemented that in the program at



school, and now if you want to get a job as a machinist without CNC, they want five years' experience. My skills are useless."

Over the last five years, Rob has stacked lumber, installed hardwood floors, landscaped, and poured steel at a motorcycle factory. His only steady source of income since high school graduation has been his National Guard pay, and although he recently returned from his second 18-month deployment in Afghanistan, he is already considering a third: "I am looking for a new place. I don't have a job. My car is broken. It's like, what exactly can you do when your car is broken and you have no job, no real source of income, and you are making four or five hundred dollars a month in [military] drills." He explains his economic predicament: "Where are you going to live, get your car fixed, on \$500 a month? I can't save making 500 bucks a month. That just covers my bills. I have no savings to put down first and last on an apartment, no car to get a job. I find myself being like, oh what the hell? Can't it just be over? Can't I just go to Iraq right now? Send me two weeks ago so I got a pay-check already!"

Insecurity seeps into the institution of family, leaving respondents uncertain about both the feasibility and desirability of commitment. Deeply forged cultural connections between economic viability, manhood, and marriage prove devastating, as men's falling wages and rising job instability leave them uncertain about the meanings of masculinity in the twenty-first century. Brandon, a 34-year-old black man who manages the night shift

at a women's clothing chain, explained matter-of-factly, "No woman wants to sit on the couch all the time and watch TV and eat at Burger King. I can only take care of myself now. I am missing out on life but making do with what I have."

For working-class women who have grown up shouldering immense social and economic burdens on their own, being responsible for another person who may ultimately let them down doesn't feel worth the risk. Lauren, a 24-year-old barista who was kicked out of her father's house when she came out as a lesbian, has weathered years of addiction, homelessness, and depression, finally emerging as a survivor, sober and able to pay her own rent. She has chosen to remain single because she fears having to take care of someone else.

"I mean, everybody's life sucks, get over it! My mom's an alcoholic, my dad kicked me out of the house. It's not a handicap; it has made me stronger. And I want someone who has you know similarly overcome their respective obstacle and learned and grown from them, rather than someone who is bogged down by it and is always the victim." As Lauren suggests, since intimacy carries with it the threat of self-destruction, young working-class men and women forego the benefits of lasting commitment, including pooled material resources, mutual support, and love itself.

Children symbolize the one remaining source of trust, love, and commitment; while pregnancies are usually accidental, becoming a parent provides motivation, dignity, and self-worth. As Sherrie, whose pregnancy gave her the courage to break up with her abusive boyfriend, explained: "You have a baby to take care of! My daughter is the reason why I am the way I am today. If I didn't have her, I think I might be a crack-head or an alcoholic or in an abusive relationship!" Yet the social institutions in which young adults create families can work against their desire to nurture and protect their children.

Rachel, a young black single mother, joined the National Guard in order to go to college for free through the GI Bill. However, working 40 hours a week at her customer service job, attending weekend army drills, and parenting has left her with little time for taking college classes. Hearing rumors that her National Guard unit may deploy to Iraq for a third time in January, she is tempted to put in for discharge so that she is not separated from her son again. However, her desire to give her son everything she possibly can—including the things she can buy with the higher, tax-free combat pay she receives when she deploys—keeps her from signing the papers: "I am kinda half and half with the deployment coming up. I could use it for the money. I could do more for my son. But I missed the first two years of my son's life and now I might have to leave again. It's just rough. You can't win."

## distrust and isolation

Common celebrations of adulthood—whether weddings, graduations, house-warming’s, birthdays—are more than just parties; they are rituals for marking community membership and shared, public expressions of commitment, obligation, rights, and belonging. But for the young men and women I spoke with, there was little sense of shared joy or belonging in their accounts of coming of age. Instead, I heard story after story of isolation and distrust experienced within a vast array of social institutions, including higher education, the criminal justice system, the government, and the military. While we may think of the life course as a process of social integration, marked by public celebrations of transitions, young working-class men and women depend on others at their peril.

They believe that a college education will provide the tools for success. Jay, a 28-year-old black man, struggled through seven years of college. He failed several classes after his mother suffered a severe mental breakdown. After being expelled from college and working for a year, helping his mom get back on her feet, he went before the college administration and petitioned to be reinstated. He described them as “a panel of five people



I didn’t find it at all worthwhile.”

Since graduating three years ago, with a communications major, Jay has worked in a series of food service and coffee shop jobs. Reflecting on where his life has taken him, he fumed: “They were just blowing smoke up my ass—the world is at my fingertips, you can rule the world, be whatever you want, all this stuff. When I was 15, 16, I would not have envisioned the life I am living now. Whatever I imagined, I figured I would wear a suit every day, that I would own things. I don’t own anything. I don’t own a car. If I had a car, I wouldn’t

be able to afford my daily life. I’m coasting and cruising and not sure about what I should be doing.”

Christopher, a 24-year-old, who has been unemployed for nine months, further illustrates how distrust and isolation is intensified by bewildering interactions with institutions. As he put it, “I have this problem of being tricked...Like I will get a phone call that says, you won a free supply of magazines. And they will start coming to my house. Then all of a sudden I am getting calls from bill collectors for the subscriptions to *Maxim* and *ESPN*. It’s a run around: I can’t figure out who to call. Now I don’t even pick up the phone, like I almost didn’t pick up when you called me.”

Recently, Christopher was taxed \$400 for not purchasing mandatory health insurance in Massachusetts, which he could not afford because he was unemployed, and did not know how to access for free. Like many of my respondents, he lacks the skills and know-how to navigate the institutions

that frame the transition to adulthood. He tells his coming of age story as one incident of deception after another—each of which incurs a heavy emotional and financial cost. But while he acknowledges that he has not achieved the traditional markers of adulthood, he still believes that he is at least partially an adult because of the way he has learned to manage his feelings of betrayal: “I ended up the way I am because of my experiences. I have seen crazy shit. Like now if I see someone beating someone up in the street, I don’t scream. I don’t care. I have no emotions or feelings.” Growing up hardened against and detached from the world, and dependent on no one, Christopher protects himself from the possibility of trickery and betrayal.

## Soaring education costs and shrinking support networks make it difficult to gain the skills and knowledge needed to build a secure adult life.

who were not nice.” As Jay saw it, “It’s their job to hear all these sob stories, you know I understand that, but they just had this attitude, like you know what I mean, ‘oh your mom had a breakdown and you couldn’t turn to anyone?’ I just wanted to be like, fuck you, but I wanted to go to college, so I didn’t say fuck you.” When he eventually graduated, when he was 25, he “was so disillusioned by the end of it, my attitude toward college was like, I just want to get out and get it over with, you know what I mean, and just like, put it behind me, really.” He shrugged: “I felt like it wasn’t anything to celebrate. I mean I graduated with a degree. Which ultimately I’m not even sure if that was what I wanted, but there was a point where I was like I have to pick some bullshit I can fly through and just get through.

## remaking working-class adulthood

The working-class men and women I spoke with lack the necessary knowledge, skills, credentials, and money to launch themselves into a secure adult future, as well as the social support and guidance to protect themselves from economic and social turmoil. But despite their profound anger, betrayal, and loss, they do not want pity—and they do not expect a handout. On the contrary, at a time when individual solutions to collective structural problems is a requirement for survival, they believe that adulthood means taking responsibility for one's own successes and failures. Emma, who works as a waitress, praised her grandfather who worked his way up digging ditches for a gas company; she says it is now up to her to "take what you are given and utilize it correctly." Similarly, Kelly, a line cook who has lived on and off in her car, explains, "Life doesn't owe me any favors. I can have a sense of my own specialness and individuality, but that doesn't mean that anybody else has to recognize that or help me accomplish my goals."

This bootstrap mentality, while highly praised in our culture, has a darker side: blaming those who can't make it on their own. Wanda, the daughter of a tow-truck driver who wants to go to college but can't afford the tuition, expresses anger at her parents' lack of economic support: "I feel like it's their fault they don't have nothing." Working-class youth have little trust even in those closest to them and—despite the social and economic forces that work against their efforts—they blame themselves for their shortcomings.

Julian, a young black man, is a disabled vet who is unemployed, divorced, and living with his mother. Describing his inability to find a steady job and lasting relationship, he tells me: "...Every day I look in the mirror, and I could bullshit you right now and tell you that race has something to do with it. But at the end of the day looking in the mirror, I know where all my shortcomings come from. From the things that I either did not do or I did and I just happen to fail at them." They believe that understanding their shortcomings in terms of structural barriers to mobility is a crutch; both blacks and whites are hostile toward others who do not take sole responsibility for their own failures.

John, a 27-year-old black man who sells shoes, explained: "Society lets it [race] affect me. It's not what I want to do, but society puts tags on everybody. You gotta be presentable, take care of yourself. It's about how a man looks at himself and how people look at him. Some people use it as a crutch, but it's not gonna be my crutch." That is, while black men and women acknowledge that discrimination persists, they see navigating racism as an individual game of cunning. All make a virtue out of not asking for help, out of rejecting dependence and surviving completely on their own, mapping these traits onto their definitions of adulthood. Those who fail to "fix themselves"

are met with disdain and disgust—they are not worthy adults.

This hardening against oneself and others could have profound personal and political consequences for the future of the American working class. Its youngest members embrace self-sufficiency, blame those who are unsuccessful in the labor market, and choose distrust and isolation as the only way to survive. Rather than target the vast social, economic, and cultural changes that have disrupted the transition to adulthood—the decline of good jobs, the weakening of unions, the shrinking of communities—they target themselves. In the end, if they have to go it alone, then everyone else should, too. And it is hard to find even a glimmer of hope for their futures.

Their coming of age stories are still unfolding, their futures not yet written. In order to tell a different kind of story—one that promises hope, dignity, and connection—they must begin their journeys to adulthood with a living wage and the skills and knowledge to confront the future. They need neighborhoods and communities that share responsibility for launching them into the future. And they need new definitions of dignity that do not make a virtue out of isolation, self-reliance, and distrust. The health and vibrancy of all our communities depend on the creation and nurturance of definitions of adulthood that foster connection and interdependence.

## recommended resources

Cherlin, Andrew. *The Marriage Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today* (Vintage Books, 2009). Traces the transformation of American families over the past century and points to alarming class-based differences in marriage patterns.

Edin, Kathryn, and Timothy J. Nelson. *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City* (University of California Press, 2013). Sheds light on the experiences of low-income fathers and their struggles to care for their children despite their lack of jobs and rocky relationships with their children's mothers.

Furstenberg, Frank F., Sheela Kennedy, Vonnie C. McLoyd, Rubén G. Rumbaut, and Richard A. Settersten Jr. "Growing Up Is Harder to Do," *Contexts* (2004), 3: 33–41. Provides a comprehensive overview of the delayed transition to adulthood for working-class youth.

Hacker, Jacob. "The Privatization of Risk and the Growing and Economic Insecurity of Americans" (2006). <http://privatization-of-risk.ssrc.org>. Documents the recent cultural and political shifts in the United States that have demolished social safety nets and promoted self-reliance, untrammelled individualism, and personal responsibility.

Kalleberg, Arne L. "Precarious Work, Insecure Workers," *American Sociological Review* (2009), 74: 1–22. Explains how and why working-class jobs have become increasingly scarce, insecure, and competitive.

**Jennifer M. Silva** is a fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School. She is the author of *Coming Up Short*.