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How I Made Peace: Ending Sexual Assault on College Campuses in the United States

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How I Made Peace:
Ending Sexual Assault on College Campuses in the United States
A Report to the CSB/SJU Peace Studies Department
By Maggie Bernetich, Class of 2017
April 2047

Introduction

Growing up, I was told the statistics. I was told that 1 in 5 women would be sexually assaulted by the time they graduated college. I remember looking around the class I was in and thinking, "Wow, three of us are going to be assaulted." But of course, I never really thought it would happen to me or any of my friends.

Fall semester of 2016, my junior year, it was homecoming weekend. My roommate, some friends, and I put on some crop tops and jean shorts to embrace the warm weather, threw back a couple of drinks, so we wouldn't have to buy them at the bar, and headed to a house party. There was lots of dancing, and I was having a lot of fun- I didn't want to leave.

My roommate, however, was dying to go to the bar, so she left with our other friends and I promised to meet up with them. She later told me how she was dancing on the Sal's Bar dance floor when a boy from another school, asked her to dance.

After a few songs, he asked if she wanted to go outside for some air. She agreed. She told her friends she would be back in a minute. They left through the back bar door. Once behind the bar, he forced her on her knees, unzipped his pants, and forced himself inside her mouth. He pushed her onto her back, took off her pants, as she verbally protested, and shoved himself inside of her again.

He was anally raping her, as she was crying and repeating the words “I don’t want to do this” when two police officers found her. They asked if they had been drinking, breathalyzed the male perpetrator, and told my roommate to go home. When she got back to the house that we, and my other roommates shared, she collapsed on the stairs, sobbing. Her knees and back had scratches and bruises from the pavement that lasted for weeks. The memory of that night, lasted far longer than those weeks.

Would it have been different if I had gone to the bar with her? Would it have been different if one of her friends at the bar didn’t let her go outside with the perpetrator? Shouldn’t the police have done something for her? A link of situational circumstances set my roommate, my friend, for the worst night of her life. We all think sexual assault or rape won’t affect us until it does. I was, and still am, shook to my core that this happened to my friend, to too many of my friends, to myself, to too many girls period.

I couldn’t sit idly by because that is what everyone else seemed to be doing. When do we actually say enough is enough? When do we actually do something? When do we actually create change?

In 2017, during the final stretch of my undergraduate career, an article was published in the CSB/SJU campus newspaper, *The Record*. According to *The Record*, that year CSB/SJU reported the highest number of sexual assault cases of private college campuses in Minnesota and the second highest of all colleges in Minnesota- second to the University of Minnesota. I wanted to pursue the goal of eliminating sexual assaults because the issue had affected too many people- too many of my friends. By the year 2047, I was going to eliminate sexual assaults on college campuses.

What We Knew About Sexual Assaults on College Campuses in 2017:

Sexual assault largely plagued the human race in 2017 as any individual was more likely to be sexually assaulted than attacked by a shark, yet fear of sharks was recognized as a more legitimate fear than sexual assault. By 2017, sexual assault was widely accepted as a criminal act mostly perpetrated by men against women. The rate of victimization of women being 13 times more than the rate for men (Mustaine & Tewksbury 89). It was, at that time, believed to be the most underreported major criminal offense-- with 90 percent of sexual assaults to have gone unreported, according to The Christian Century Foundation. The criminal act of sexual assault held a unique power within society. Mustaine & Tewksbury explained the specialization of this crime as, "Not only is sexual assault the only major crime to have more female than male victims, but it is also an offense in which most victims know their assailants, and it is an inter-gender crime-- males are the typical offenders" (89).

All this information was widely accepted, widely known. But the violence against women continued. The culture of thought of women needing to be dominated by men okay-ed society's assault on women. In the spring of 2016, a college student by the name of Brock Turner sexually assaulted a woman at Stanford University by penetrating her with his fingers, pine cones, and attempting to penetrate her with his penis. "Emily Doe" was 22 and passed out from drinking behind a garbage dumpster. Turner was spotted by two students who physically confronted him and restrained him until police arrived. Turner was put on trial and convicted of two counts of felony sexual assault and one count of attempted sexual assault. His sentence should of

been 14 years in jail, but instead, was sentenced to 6 months of confinement and three years probation. Turner's case was an outstanding example of the male privilege in a patriarchal society that reiterated male dominance. Women, and men, were outraged at this ever so public display of blatant misogyny, but besides angry cries, nothing was changed. Put simply, the "sexual assault of women is a tool for, a consequence of, or a simple example of men's presumed control over or superiority to women" (Mustaine & Tewksbury 91).

Sexual assault was clearly a problem for women over men, and especially a problem for college aged women as they were more likely to be sexually assaulted during their college education than any other time in their life (Bennett et al. 477). Colleges were "hot spots" for sexual assaults as women were more often found in vulnerable situations amongst their male peers, such as when drinking alcohol. Such high amounts of sexual assault cases in 2017 and years previous, left college institutions scrambling.

The government, both at the federal and state level, had tried to intervene with legislation to protect those who were assaulted and entice colleges in justly prosecuting perpetrators. Colleges, often did not want to admit they had a sexual assault problem, and as a result, sexual assault cases were not always taken as seriously as they should be by colleges across the nation. Title IX Act, signed into law in 1972, states "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Sullivan). Not only does Title IX work to eliminate gender biases, but also to

hold institutions responsible for educating their students about sexual assault on campus (Doss 1). In 2014, the US saw further expansion of the meaning of Title IX as the White House and the then US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan released several new interpretations such as calling an “end to rape-permissive cultures and campus cultures that tolerate sexual assault” and encouraged institutions to “adopt confidentiality policies for reporting sexual assault cases” (*White House* 1). Their continued interpretation and clarification of Title IX, showed the evolution that continued in understanding and combating sexual assault at that time.

The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act was signed in 1990 after Jeanne Clery was raped and murdered in her dorm by a fellow male student at Lehigh University . The Act requires all colleges who received federal aid to disclose and distribute a report of any crimes that occurred on a yearly basis (Gregory & Janosik).

Lastly, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1994 which granted money toward investigation and prosecution of violent crimes against women, imposed automatic and mandatory restitution on those convicted, and allowed civil redress in cases prosecutors chose to leave unprosecuted (Federal Legislation). These three acts signed into law set the baseline standards for colleges to comply with in the attempt to curb the number of cases of assault. Unfortunately, legislation was not going to dissolve sexual assault.

In other realms of prevention, studies began to look at the role of bystanders in the hopes of opening another method to curb the ever growing number of sexual assault cases being reported, and the vast number going

unreported every year. Studies from this angle, concentration on bystander intervention, for the purpose of preventing sexual assault did not really grow until the early 2000s. What studies found, however, was that “nearly one-third of situations involving sexual violence occur in the presence of bystanders” (Planty 2002). Thus, what better reason is needed to equip bystanders with the tools to stepping in?

Research quickly found that women were more likely to step in when sexual violence was going to occur compared to men (Bennett 478). It is, thus, no surprise at the conclusions Alegria- Fores et al had in their study. In their study, conducted in the 2011-12 and 2012-13 academic years, they recruited undergraduate participants on campus at University of North Carolina. The demographics of the participants who self elected to participate were 73% female, 64.1% white, and 87.55% heterosexual. A majority of white, female, heterosexual students are those partaking in these bystander trainings.

Diving deeper into finding the motivation for bystanders to intervene, researchers looked back to a study done in 1970. In 1970, Latane and Darley published *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn't He Help?* In which they map the five important steps to intervening that were and continued to be held as the situational model for bystander training programs. The five steps they outlined were: 1) notice the event, 2) identify the situation as intervention-appropriate, 3) take intervention responsibility, 4) decide how to help, and 5) act to intervene (Latane 83). Conversely, barriers occurred in intervening at each of these stages. In a study from 2009, Burn found that 1) failure to notice, 2) failure to identify the situation as high-risk, 3) failure to take

intervention responsibility, 4) failure to act because lacking a general feeling of the appropriate skills to do so, and 5) failure to intervene due to surrounding audience/ peers (781) could stop a bystander at any stage from taking action.

In discovering these motivators and barriers in steps to intervening, research found that relationships between the bystander and victim or bystander and perpetrator is important. It is not important whether the bystander has a relationship with the victim versus the perpetrator, but the importance is knowing one of them plays a significant role in intervening. Palmer et al found that both men and women were found to be more likely to intervene with direct action if the victim or perpetrator was someone they knew as opposed to being someone they don't know (13). Whereas, if the bystander did not know the victim or perpetrator, they were more than likely to choose the option of delegation to intervene.

The last big factor in successfully eradicating sexual assault on campuses comes down to the environment and attitude of tolerance from the institution. Research at this time identified five major groups of influence over bystander intervention at environmental levels. Those groups of influence are: social norms, sense of community, pro-social modeling, policies and accountability cues, and the physical environment (McMahon 475-86). This change in influence, to be done successfully, had to be started with the institution's administration. Having had declared their sexual assault intolerance verbally, on their website, at freshmen orientation, etc., (Schwartz 275), could set the precedent for the community they would want to build in order to have achieved success or eradication of sexual assault.

In 2014, the Obama administration pushed for the end to sexual assault on college campuses with the It's On Us campaign. Elected officials at the time, like US Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, used the administration's campaign as an opportunity to have given their public opinion on how campuses should treat sexual assault. The criticism, or question is, are college administrations effectively communicating with their students their way of addressing sexual assault. Even if the information is available online, is it effectively reaching the students? Gillibrand published an article at the time in which she criticizes the ambiguous nature of colleges differing definition of sexual assault. Saying that their ambiguous definitions create the offenses to be unenforceable (28).

The confusion between what is and isn't defined as sexual assault was something that sadly still plagued most young people in 2017. How were victims and perpetrators to be held to a standard that most did not fully know? Upon realizing the importance of bystander intervention and identifying ways to capture motivating factors to intervene, the next step that researchers took was to create and test pilot programs in effective bystander training. They found, not only would bystanders need to be taught the five steps outlined by Latane and Darley, but the culture of dominance of men over women also needed to be challenged, especially with men.

In a specific pilot program targeted at men conducted at the University of Connecticut in 2013, called "The Men's Project", (Stewart 481), the success was largely due to a companionship of education between bystander training and dismantling of social norms like sexism, rape myths, male privilege, and masculinity. It became clearer with the successes of prevention programs like

this one, what lesson plans needed to be incorporated when talking about sexual assault. But in 2017, the idea to committing to smashing the patriarchy that reinforced male violence against women was not seen as a priority.

In 2017, the Republican presidential nominee, Donald Trump, was caught on camera saying, "Grab her by the pussy" and it was later aired during his presidential campaign. His blatant disrespect towards women did not deter voters, and he won the 2017 presidential election. The need to talk about sexual assault, to combat sexual assault was more than necessary at that time. And because of my own experiences, I had no choice but to pursue a change in cultural thinking and eradicate sexual assault. Through my research at that time, I had hoped to better understand the differing lessons in bystander intervention programs and see if there is a way that I could uniform a standard of what to be taught to hold all institutions to raise to the standard, I had believed that they must be held to.

Sexual Assault Free Campuses in 2047:

It is the year 2047, and there are no more sexual assaults on college campuses across the US. I'm walking across my alma mater's campus in the evening, headed toward my car to drive home for the night. My work, for now, is done. When I run into a small group of guys and girls who are headed into town for some drinks. They ask me where I am headed, and offer to walk with me to my car.

As we walk together across campus, it is well lit, even in the dark of the night. We begin chatting about their night out that they are looking forward to at Sal's. When I tell them I used to go to Sal's Bar every weekend, they invite me for a drink. When we get there, it is completely changed from the college

days- not physically different, but the atmosphere is different. The bar itself is full, but there isn't a crowded line at the bar waiting for drinks. No one is pounding their beers or ripping shots. The air is filled with a sense of comfort. Men and women are mingling and flirting, but the concept of a few drinks instead of getting hammered drunk, has released some kind of pressure we didn't realize existed. People mingle easily and talk freely.

I ask the group I am with if sexual assaults still happen on campus, or if they fear that consequence happening to them. One of the girls laughs, and says "I'm sorry, I shouldn't laugh. But as freshmen we all go through this bystander training together. Everyone. These people are all my friends. If I ever got myself in that kind of situation, every single one of these people would cut in before it got anywhere close to being dangerous. It's just how it goes." The sense of pride and community is tangible. I thank them for letting me grab a drink with them, and head out. Two of the other group members stand up with me and walk me to my car, a few blocks down. I had initially protested, but they just shrugged and one told me "I would want others to do the same for me."

Today, there is a phone application that every student is required to download when they register for college- and everyone, naturally, has a smart phone. It is a universal application that recognizes your location change. For example, it would know when you are on St. Cloud campus vs. St. John's campus. The purpose of the application is to insure safety for the user. After 10pm on weekdays and 8pm on weekends, if you were to hit the app's button (which is found on all lock screens) you tap the button twice consecutively, and the location of the phone (and the owner) is sent to campus security.

Students were more often found in vulnerable situations where they could become the victim of sexual assault when alcohol is involved, and most alcohol related sexual assaults occur at night and on weekends, thus we created the different day and night settings.

Additionally, it sends your location to three of your chosen friends with the message “Hey. I need help. Come get me right away.” To ensure that both your chosen friends and security hears your call for help, a loud alarm noise will go off regardless of the volume setting on your phone. If the owner were to tap the application button during the day, it would simply connect the owner to the security phone line. If you open the app on your phone, you have access to your flashlight on your phone, you can track your top friend’s locations, call an uber car or other taxi service, and you can choose to set off a high pitched alarm. Luckily, today, not many students need to use the app during weeknights and weekends.

All students across the nation participate in a mandatory bystander training when they first start college. It is a specific seven week program where students meet for 2 hours every week to participate in the training. Much like how labs are set up, all days of the week offer the bystander “lab.” In designing this program, we wanted each lab to be intimate, and yet diverse in thought. Special attention during training is focused on assault of those in the LGBTQ community and people of color. As stigmas surrounding these two groups can be heightened within the realm of sexual assaults.

Residential Assistants, as well as varsity and club athletes, go through a deeper bystander training before they’re eligible to work as an RA/CA or participate competitively. RAs/CAs receive victim support training similar to

the training received by those who operate the national sexual assault hotline. The first time a participant goes through, the training is very thorough. Succeeding years, the training is shortened as a refresher. Bystander training for club and varsity sports touch on hazing, alcohol consumption, and how to confront a teammate on any of these difficult topics, as well as, confronting this issue when visiting other campuses.

Because most sexual assaults occur on college campuses during the first 8 weeks of classes, there is extra program activities put on by all upperclassmen groups to try and engage underclassmen to lower those chances of assault. Activities range from movie showings to hide and seek in the library to Open Mic Nights. The purpose of having upperclassmen lead these events is the “cool” factor. Promoting activities that don’t involve drinking, and showing underclassmen that drinking isn’t the most important activities to their older peers hopefully promotes less of a desire for freshmen to binge drink. It also reduces the amount of students drinking in the first eight weeks- both upperclassmen and underclassmen. Athletes and members of other clubs will hopefully feel enticed by their older teammates, and other friends to attend the events that these older friends of theirs are putting on. A reward is given to the upperclassmen who host the event with the highest attendance both of underclassmen and upperclassmen, just underclassmen, and just upperclassmen. Typically, the reward has been a free parking pass for on- campus parking.

Upperclassmen are required to help participate in the planning and execution of at least one event, and athletes of varsity and club sports are required to help with two events. They coordinate with the student employees

in the Student Activities office to make their events happen and get their events approved. After which, they submit their event outline and a reflection of how their event went to all of their professors during that current semester.

Under classmen are required to go to at least four during these first 8 weeks by their college professors. All professors will request two attendances by their students, it can be the same four for every course. In other words, there can be overlap in events attended, but all professors will require it of their students to ensure attendance is met. When they submit their write up of the event (one paragraph) they upload it online where it is counted for on their course records college specific site.

Colleges and universities are required to engage their campus communities in awareness weeks on the topics of sexual assault, sex and human trafficking, and LGBTQ awareness. They may host events as they see fit- events that pertain to the interests of their student body, but are asked to host a number of different types of events to engage and attract their diverse student bodies in thought provoking ideas and dialogue.

Such an event held is one for men on college campuses called, “What does she mean when she says _____,” an event that promotes healthy relationships and dating by trying to engage men in learning good practices for respectfully communicating with their partner. This is typically a gender segregated event, led by students, but with the presence of health counselors, to create an environment where men are comfortable enough to voice their concerns around their peers without fear of embarrassment. It is a part of the “Discussions in the Dark” series in which these discussion are held in a classroom, a safe space, and the lights are turned off. Giving any students

present, the relief from feeling pressure to talk or the relief of fear in being embarrassed of what they want to say. We found that the disconnect of not having a face to look at while speaking relieves some of that worry to talk. Other such topics for this talk series center around hook up culture on campuses, alcohol/ party culture, and why asking for consent is seen as “embarrassing”.

Additionally, through looking for the then current investigative procedures when I was a new graduate, and consulting with multiple deans of students from different colleges, we developed a standard of investigation for all colleges and universities to follow when an official report of sexual assault it made. Colleges and universities can go beyond the standard, but they are expected to meet that standard at the minimum. Their process is checked up upon by accreditation teams. The academic nature of the college is dependent on the student body, and the individuals within the student body are dependent on their health. Therefore, the accreditation team checks on the adjudication panel and process as well as academic affairs.

Sexual assault bystander training, however, is not first introduced at the collegiate level. It is introduced at the grade school level, and is a requirement for curriculum with sex education. When students are taught sex- ed in grade school and high school, sexual assault awareness education and bystander training is a requirement. The curriculum is catered for each grade level. Churches, especially the Catholic Church, highly support these new educational programming as a reparations for their history of sexual assault scandals. With the support of the Catholic Church, their congregations quickly supported, as well.

The result we see today is a more empathetic attitude towards the topic of sexism and gender biases from all peoples and, of course, no more sexual assaults on college campuses. We've seen three amendments added to Title IX since I graduated college, requiring each level of education, primary school, high school, and college, to implement bystander prevention programming and education on social aspects that can influence male privilege, sexism, and gender bias as a requirement for all of their students.

From 2017 to 2047: Demolishing the Existence of Sexual Assault

Second semester of my senior year, it was around April when I still had no job offers, was desperate to stay in Minnesota, and had no idea where I would be living come graduation. Fortunately, a temporary position opened up in the college's Alumnae Relations Department where I had been interning. I jumped at the chance, and got the position.

In light of my personal interest in ending sexual assault, having talked to Jody Terhaar, the Dean of Students and Title IX officer, and my staying on campus for a few more months, she approached me over that summer to help her with a project on changing the conversation of sexual assault on college campuses in Minnesota. She told me, "I don't want my kids or any kids harmed or to harm." Jody wanted to create a inter-collegiate committee to open up the discussion of ways to prevent and end sexual assault on campuses by engaging other colleges. Jody told me we all have the same problem of seeing sexual assault on our campuses, so why haven't we joined forces earlier? So that is exactly what we did.

Together, we first approached all the private colleges and universities in Minnesota- reaching out to the other Title IX officers. Buy-in was a little

slow at first among certain institutions, but as more colleges bought into the idea of opening up the discussion, all remaining institutions followed suit. We met once a week for six consecutive weeks.

During the meetings, each institution informally presented on our current prevention and educational programming on our own respective campuses. We also walked the group through our own investigative processes once a formal report is filed. In doing so, we had a chance to talk with one another on what programming received positive feedback, had high attendance from both men and women, and the benefits and downfalls from our respective investigative processes. Once all the institutions had informally presented our own ways of handling and preventing sexual assault, we moved to create a baseline standard of process for sexual assault reports. Falling in line with already emplaced Federal legislation, we wanted to go farther, and approach the topic with the support of each other. Having lived out handling sexual assault cases as Title IX officers, the group members were able to give valuable feedback that pieces of legislation could not. We agreed to meet back at the end of the following semester to discuss and consult the impact of the potential changes that we made surrounding our investigation process and talk about the successes of our programming.

The investigative procedure that the Colleges and Universities Against Sexual Assault committee agreed upon was as follows:

First, the investigative procedure is broken into two categories based on the degree of the crime. Unwanted touching of the breasts, for example, would often be handled differently than cases of unwanted penetration or

attempted penetration. Similar to the legal differences of a misdemeanor versus a felony.

Once a person has come forward with a case of sexual assault, it is discussed with the victim what kind of reparations from the perpetrator that they are looking for. If this is something that can be handled through mediation, counseling, community service, probation, or something of that nature then it will be agreed upon within a week of the formal complaint being filed.

For more serious incidents, as an institution, we start by confirming: did a policy violation occur? Contact is made with an outside investigator who is hired to carry out evidence and story gathering of the incident under investigation. This includes talking to any witnesses, finding pictures, text messages, meeting with accused and the victim, etc. This process can take up to a month as follow up interviews often occur. The outside investigator then gives a report to the institution of evidence gathered. The school gives each party a copy of the entirety of the report to read. Via a written response (no more than three pages), the parties can rebuttal, clarify, or ask questions about anything in the report. However, these written responses must be submitted to the institution within a week and a copy is then also given to the opposite party to read. The opposing party has the chance for rebuttal within 3 days of the receiving a copy of the submitted written response.

Once all written responses and rebuttals are made, a copy of the report, any written responses, and any rebuttals go to a judicial panel made up of three adjudicators- staff and faculty members of the respective institutions who have been exhaustively trained in understanding sexual

assault. The adjudicators are given time to look over the provided information before they meet to deliberate and discuss. It is their duty to find if “more likely than not” sexual contact was made with a failure to have consent from both parties. The adjudication panel gives their decision to the Dean of Students.

If the case filed against the student is found that they more than likely made sexual contact without having had received consent, sanctions are given by the Dean. Typically sanctions can look like a minimum of one year up to three years suspension, but expulsion can occur if especially heinous. Suspension is dependent on when the victim graduates, allowing them to finish school without seeing their perpetrator on campus. So the suspension is given on how long the victim has left before graduating (i.e. a victim that is a second semester junior would have a year left of school, so the person that assaulted them would receive a year long suspension). An outcome letter with the report from the panel and any sanctions are given to both parties. If, and only if, there was a procedural error or new, significant evidence is brought to light, can a party submit an appeal to the final decision.

If there is an appeal, evidence is deemed significant or not by the initial investigator handling the case. The submission of new evidence or procedural error is given in a written response by the appealing party and given to the opposing party. The opposing party can then, within three days, submit a rebuttal. All this information is given to the adjudication panel who takes this new information into consideration. From their findings, they re-submit to all parties their final verdict in response to the appeal.

Processes for sexual assault between two parties from two differing schools is very similar. However, each institution hires an outside investigator

to collect evidence and submit a report. And the adjudication panel is made up of three panelists from each school. The verdict has to be agreed upon by the majority of the panelists. Here, sanctions can look like campus bans for the different parties (i.e. a St. Cloud State student could be banned from stepping onto Saint Ben's campus or attending any Saint Ben's events held off campus), and sanctions to the possibly guilty perpetrator placed by their home institution (such as academic probation, service, or suspension).

The adjudication panel is chosen from a pool of adjudicators that are hand selected by the institution amongst the institutions faculty and staff. The panelists receive an in depth yearly training that takes one full day plus supplemental trainings over the course of the year. They are educated and trained by both internal and external experts in the fields.

We found that all, or almost all, of the college campuses provided sexual assault bystander trainings, and talks that allowed room for discussion on being a survivor of assault, the topic of consent, and safe sex. All colleges admitted they wanted to have better programming, but was not certain what would be the most effective or would draw the most audiences. Discussions on programming, however, allowed an exchange of ideas in what new programming colleges could bring to their institutions.

Before the start of second semester, in January 2018, the committee met up to discuss the new changes to their investigative process and programming. All the colleges agreed to the success of the investigative process- in that it was thorough and they all felt that it served due process to both parties in a reported case. It was seen as fair, for the limited time that they had implemented it, the drawback, however, was seen in the length of

the process. You can never be too thorough with a case like this, but between the investigation portion and evidence collecting to the judicial panel deliberations to the parties responses, the whole process could take two months or more. Which felt like a further burden on the victim of the assault. The committee agreed to continuing this process of investigating formal reports, and agreed to meet again over the following summer of 2018 to discuss further whether they were pleased with the investigative process, develop a lesson plan for bystander training, and prevention trainings.

Until we met in July of 2018, it was my job to research and compare current bystander training programs and prevention programs used by higher education institutions. We hoped to find common links that worked that we could then implement on all colleges- regardless of size or location. Jody Terhaar and I met on a weekly basis to recap my findings from that week and to adjust the pursuit of information as necessary. Jody was also able to give me her personal experience as the Title IX coordinator, of certain aspects that the college already implements in training and prevention programs that were highlighted by researchers. We were a dynamic duo.

My findings found that success came in initiating multiple training/preventions sessions within one series. Instead of a "one and done," research shows that continued conversation is most effective. Topics that were needed to be discussed were broken into what I classified as three broad topics. The first topic concentrated on gender and sexuality: looking at sexism, gender biased language, male privilege, sexuality as a spectrum, and socialization on gender. The second topic focused on sexual assault: myths surrounding sexual assault, defining sexual assault and related terms, and lasting impacts

of assault. The last topic looks at bystander training and healthy relationships: how to step in, when to step in, and what does a healthy sexual or romantic relationships look like.

I brought my findings to the committee meetings in July. Each campus did a self audit on which, if any of the topics were currently taught in programs or bystander training. The audit also included an assessment if each topic was educated to all students or an option for students to self-elect to attend. Most of the colleges present found that most prevention programs were self-elected for students to attend and only about half of the topics were generally covered. We all had a long way to go. After a summer of deliberation and gaining buy-in from college cabinets, the committee had developed a pilot program to implement for the 2018-19 school year.

The program carved out 15 hours of discussions to take place over the course of seven weeks for the first semester for college freshmen. All freshmen were required to complete the seven week training session, and if college varsity or club athletes, students in extra- curriculars, like band, orchestra, choir, model UN, etc., missed a week, they were not allowed to participate in the next upcoming event for their extra-curricular until that session was made up. This helped create buy-in with coaches and advisors to insure their push of their freshmen students to attend each session. The series topics were broken up as: two weeks spent on understanding gender and sexuality, two weeks on sexual assault, and three weeks on bystander training and healthy relationships.

Before the seminar series, each freshman was required to fill out a survey on their current knowledge of topics and ideas that would be talked

about in the program. Most colleges elected to do this at the seminar as an introduction and to ensure the surveys were done before the series began. At the end of the year, they were given the same survey to ascertain what they learned and had retained.

Over the summer of 2019, our inter-collegiate committee gathered again to discuss the challenges and successes of the training series program. Many students were “disgruntled” at the having to go through this series, where previous years of students did not, but as they realized that a lot of their friends at other colleges had the same mandatory training across the state, and as they grew to appreciate the training, their attitudes improved- it also gave first years a chance to meet new people. And the campus surveys showed a great improvement of understanding on the topics covered. We all saw decreases in the number of sexual assault cases reported, but whether that was coincidence or not, we couldn’t be certain. We were however, excited and encouraged and pledged to keep moving forward.

Jody encouraged all the colleges present to try and persuade their cabinets to look at implementing these training programs into the strategic directions for their respective colleges. Jody presented to the Saint Ben’s/ Saint John’s Cabinet, and with the support of Mary Dana Hinton, found place for this training in the budget and within strategic directions. President Kosch, the newly elected president of Saint John’s (the Board of Trustees thought the school was in need of a new, “younger” president after some disgruntled complaints about the former president) was also in support of such programing as a Peace Studies alum, as well as a former classmate of mine, and made it a priority in the budget for SJU.

Over the course of the next academic year, Jody and I worked on gaining buy-in with public colleges and universities in Minnesota. Some colleges were slow to want to take on this new style of prevention, but thanks to local media, colleges felt pressured to join the prevention training series. In an age where news spreads quickly via social media, it was easy to open the information to current college students and get them to put that pressure on their institutions. No college wanted to be the lone bystander who “supports rape, not their victims, not their survivors.” With the fear of looking bad publicly, a lot of institutions opted to join in.

In 2020, Governor Ilhan Omar pushed state legislation that passed to require all four- year colleges and universities to adopt the proposed training series we developed. The program was regularly assessed by each college and adapted to better fit their needs, but with meeting the standards set into law by the legislation. Apart of the training series was a campus climate survey to be published, taken and the results distributed publicly every four years.

By 2022, with the support of Governor Omar, and all the colleges and universities in Minnesota, we began to ask for buy-in from surrounding state colleges. The dramatic drops in sexual assault were enticing to institution administrations- getting close to almost half at all institutions in Minnesota. There were of course colleges that weren't interested in budgeting for this training program. However, sneaky as we are, in the pursuit for all genders to feel safe on their campus, we went to state medias and government officials to pressure colleges into buy-in. Colleges who had been amongst the spotlight in recent years for specific sexual assault cases, found this a great

opportunity in a way to make reparations for those horrible incidents. Being from Oregon, I took a special interest in having their higher ed institutions opting to take this training program and implementing it into their systems. By 2023, Oregon had passed state legislature giving more tax cuts and financial benefits to colleges who adopted this series.

During the 2024 presidential election, democratic nominee Ayanna Pressley ran with our bystander training series as a main ticket item on her proposed presidential agenda. She maintained that if Congress was to stall this legislation, once she got in office, she would pass it as an executive order. She wanted the chance for republican, democrats, and third party members to discuss the best approach for bystander training implementation, but she also realized that every day they didn't come to an agreement, didn't write and pass legislation, another person's well being was at risk.

On January 25th, 2025, President Pressley became the first US woman president. In August of 2025, congress passed the Minnesota Bystander Act, requiring all 4 year colleges that receive federal funding to require their full-time freshmen students to attend the 15 hour training series that our committee had first outlined back in 2018. All colleges and universities receiving government funding had to implement this program by the 2027-2028 academic year.

Jody and I were thrilled at the domino affect our bystander training program had made. We could not believe that our goal for Minnesota and Saint Ben's could have had the possible ripple effect that it did. For a few years, I went on to work in the Department of Justice in the Office on Violence Against Women. In 2030, on a rainy afternoon in March, I got a call from Jody.

Her husband had been a long time principal at a local grade school, and from his work and her pursuit of eliminating sexual assault, she asked me to come together for a project to fight sexual assault one more time.

Jody and I began to tackle the root of the problem. We realized that sexual assault would always continue to be a problem on college campuses if young adults waited to be educated on the topics we implemented in our bystander training program until they were freshmen in college. We had to start the discussion at a much earlier age. Over the course of the next three years, Jody, myself, and countless contacts I had made at the DOJ and superintendents from across Minnesota met, wrote, deliberated, implemented, assessed, reevaluated, and changed a healthy sexual relationship education lesson plan to accompany sex ed already being taught in schools.

Over a student's 7 years in junior high and high school, they were explicitly taught on: 1) sexism and male privilege, 2) gender biased language, 3) gender and the spectrum of sexuality, 4) sexual assault and rape, 5) what a healthy sexual relationship can look like, 6) the principles of acting as a good bystander, and 7) personal courage. These additional lesson plans were specifically catered to the age group they would be taught to.

Creating buy-in was in some ways much easier with this educational program. Because it would be infeasible for us to go to every single junior high and high school in the state, we went to the governing school committees of cities and counties. By gaining the buy-in of higher ups, they then turned around and asked their schools to implement these educational programs. So instead of seeking buy in from each individual school, we had to tackle buy-in from the boards overlooking the school systems. We had feared backlash or

resilience from religious groups, but with the Catholic Church's history of sexual assault scandals, they saw this as a great opportunity for trying to do penance for that sin. Their religious support was very important, and we did not find too much more resilience from other religious groups.

Additionally, there was some hesitation from more conservative people- fearing and not wanting their kids educated and influenced by topics like homosexuality and transgender, but with the diversification and greater social acceptance our nation saw, issues like, the gender spectrum, were topics that could no longer be avoided. Schools had to teach on them, and copies of our lesson plans could be viewed by these more conservative people to soothe their worries, as we made them open to the public. We made a conscious effort to report facts not opinions, especially when it came to topics like homosexuality and transgender.

By 2035, all the junior high, high school, and colleges had implemented a form of educational training to help their students look critically at the influence of society on gender and how our thoughts and words could affect our actions. We had begun to eradicate the problem of sexual assault by creating educated bystanders from the junior high age. By 2040, the Terhaar Act was put into federal law and implemented into schools by 2042. The Terhaar Act guaranteed significant tax breaks to parents of students who attended a school where they received this positive bystander education. Again, helping creating buy-in by offering rewards to the parents of students, the parents who pay tuition and choose where to enroll their kids. The schools had to implement this training program if not for the students, but for the

loyalty of the parents money. By 2046, we saw our last case of sexual assault on a college campus. The domino effect had made it to the end.

Conclusion

It takes personal courage to survive in society authentically. To be boldly who you are, do as your heart desires, and say what you mean. We live in a society not driven by courage, but by fear. Fear of what will people will think of how we dress, how we act, and what we say. Which is why we will teach courage. Teach our sisters and brothers to find the courage to speak up and speak out. Act up and act out. For preventing sexual assault is not because of students ability to spit back in reiteration of what they were taught, but to act with courage to stop friends or strangers from being harmed or causing harm.

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