

A NATIONAL NETWORK TO END DATING VIOLENCE



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Violence against women is a problem that continues to plague the United States. According to studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice, approximately 1 in 4 women are beaten by a partner and nationally an average of 3 women are killed by a current or former intimate partner every day. The statistics for adolescents are even more heartbreaking. For instance, young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. As a survivor of domestic abuse at the age of 19, my personal experience with dating violence exposed me to the scarcity of resources available to domestic violence victims in the United States, especially within educational institutions and on college campuses. This motivated me to start my own nonprofit, Out Against Abuse (OAA), which works to end dating violence through hosting interactive workshops to teach students to identify warning signs of abuse.

Domestic violence is no longer just a social issue but also an economic one. These crimes have an immense impact on healthcare and legal costs. According to the Bureau of National Affairs, domestic violence costs employers in the United States up to \$13 billion each year. Furthermore, the Centers for Disease Control estimate the cost of domestic violence in 2009 to be more than \$10.3 billion, including the cost of medical care, mental health services and lost economic productivity (National Organization of Women 2009). More specifically, dating violence costs the U.S. approximately \$5.8 billion in medical and mental health services.

Intimate partner violence is a leading warning sign of potential sexual assault in relationships. More specifically, hostile campus environments that create an atmosphere that encourages harmful male behavior and unhealthy sexualization of women become breeding fields for increases in dating violence and sexual assault cases. This greatly limits access to educational opportunities for young women, as they are often discouraged to continue attending

school or suffer from psychological effects afterwards. In my own experience, I went from being a straight A student to making low Bs after my abuse. Furthermore, navigating through the bureaucracies present with the school administration and the campus police further prevented me from feeling safe from my perpetrator. That was ten years ago and administrative efforts on campus still have a lot of work left. Although the Dear Colleague letter issued by the Office of Civil Rights has made tremendous progress and increased pressure on administration to ensure safer campuses, implementation of these procedures and effective student involvement is lagging. This paper will focus on student activism and identifying best practices of campus organizations working to end dating violence and sexual assault on campuses. Specifically, the paper will focus on increasing male participation in efforts to diminish sexual assault on campuses and introduce the idea of a national network of dating violence organizations as a means to increase peer-to-peer education resources nationwide.

I. The Growing Problem: Dating Violence on College Campuses

Dating violence is defined as “any controlling, abusive and aggressive behavior in a romantic relationship, which can include emotional, physical or sexual abuse,” (National Center for Victims of Crime 2002). Studies have found that at least 1 in 5 college students reported some form of physical violence and abuse in their dating relationships, and these numbers continue to grow (Wasserman 6). Furthermore, according to a study conducted by nonprofit *Love is Respect*, 58% of college students stated they would not know where to go on their campuses to get help for someone they knew who was a victim. This highlights the growing gap in education and resources to combat dating violence on campuses. Under the proposed Violence Against Women Act reauthorization, funding for dating violence programs will be cut by more than \$5 million. Furthermore, there are no specific funds or research programs set aside

to educate university officials on the importance of implementing educational programs to teach students about the warning signs of dating abuse.

The Department of Education (ED) has created a basic template of standards to develop a curriculum to educate students on dating violence at both the national and state levels. Specifically, the Higher Education Center, which is part of the ED's Health and Human Development Division, created the National Victim Assistance Academy, which offers a 45-hour core course of work in victim services at different college campuses. Funding is received from the Office for Victims of Crime, under the Department of Justice. However, the biggest problem is that there is no mandate for such trainings to be held on college campuses.

The current Title IX requirements as part of the Education Amendments under the ED mandate certain programs and procedures schools should follow in regards to dealing with sexual violence on campuses. For instance, Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs, which includes rape, sexual assault and sexual battering and holds the school responsible to distribute policies and procedures for students to file complaints. Although there are set guidelines for prosecuting complaints of harassment, there are no specific guidelines set for educating students on school policies and how to identify warning signs of sexual assault. More specifically, there are very few policies in place to mandate education on domestic violence, which is often a key determinant of whether an act of sexual assault will take place. Although progress has been made through the Dear Colleague letter and other government programs such as the Vice President's 'One is 2 Many' campaign have been instrumental in raising awareness of dating violence initiatives, more grass roots implementation of programs is needed to make a stronger impact.

II. Patriarchal Culture and Male Privilege in Relationships

Although most Title IX cases that receive media attention occur on college campuses, the sad fact is that Title IX violations and sexual assault and molestation start from a very young age. Children are taught certain gender norms from elementary school, such as notions that girls should be more demure and soft-spoken, while boys should make sure to appear aggressive and showcase their ‘manliness’. A big contributor to these attitudes is the porn industry, which has continued to showcase more and more violent sexual acts against women. Studies show that boys start watching porn at as young as eleven years old and are exposed to hundreds of hours of pornographic images per year, the effects of which are horrendous. Dr. Michael Flood, a socialist based at the Australian Research Center for Sex Health and Society conducts focused research into how exposure to Internet porn continues to negatively influence the behavior of young adult. According to Dr. Flood, “Boys who watch explicit sexual material develop an increasing belief that all of their friends and peers must all be highly sexually active... which is desensitizing them and putting them under pressure to do the same,” (Marshall 2010). Furthermore, he found that boys who watch violent porn are more likely to behave violently and the exposure to aggressive pornography may be blurring the lines of consent. Sadly, this hypothesis has been seen in many cases of sexual assault. In May 2012, a twelve-year-old boy in the United Kingdom raped and sexually assaulted a nine-year-old girl after imitating hardcore pornography that he had watched online. Even more disturbingly, after the young man was charged he admitted to more offences of statutory offence and sexual assault. Further studies have suggested that “exposure to pornography can prompt kids to act out sexually against younger, smaller and more vulnerable children.” (Hughes 1998). In a study conducted by researcher Dr. Jennings Bryant of six hundred American males and females of junior high school

age, it was found that 66 percent of the males reported wanting to try out some of the sexual behaviors they had witnessed in X-rated pornography. Furthermore, 31 percent of the males admitted to actually *doing* some of the things they had witnessed in the pornography they watched. Thus, pornography causes young men to develop an increased level of sexual callousness toward women. Furthermore, it devalues the importance of monogamy and view of relationships as a lasting institution. The increased viewing of pornography also has changed the definition of consent as early as in high schools. According to Lindy Aldrich who serves as the Deputy Director at the Victims Rights Law Center, although Title IX measures have helped high school girls receive protection from abusers through changes in schedules and receiving help from counselors, the fight to get these provisions implemented has been an uphill battle with administrators. Furthermore, focus continues to remain on the ‘treatment’ side as opposed to the prevention side or on the education of males. These lasting norms of sexual coercion and male privilege in relationships are then taken with young men to college, where they have more freedom and where the presence of alcohol exacerbates the problem ten fold.

Negative male social norms become embedded and internalized in high school and college and lead to instances of domestic violence in adulthood. Attending an undergraduate institution where football was a religion (University of Texas-Austin), I bore witness to athletes receiving preferential treatment in all aspects of their college career. As a resident assistant, I was warned about a specific floor that housed all the athletes, where instances of “multi-partner orgies” and parties with “black-out drunk” girls were common. This culture of sexual violence stems from the coaches and athletics directors themselves. In fact, just last year Cleve Bryant, the UT-Austin Associate Athletics Director for Football Operations was dismissed for “repeated unwanted sexual advances toward a female administrative assistant over a two-year period,”

(Delsohn 2011). School administration makes reporting of such incidents, especially when athletes are involved, incredibly difficult for young women and place the burden of proof on the victim. In my own experience, the Dean of Students claimed that “things will just work themselves out” as long as I made sure to stay away from my abuser. Furthermore, it is not just administrator challenges but also a lack of student activism that discourages victims from pressing charges or even reporting cases of assault. For instance, in May 2012, the University of Montana was accused of “doing too little to respond to claims of sexual assault” brought against the football team (Robbins 2012). Specifically, Montana Vice President Jim Foley attempted to punish a woman who had publicly discussed an assault by four members of the football team and when officials got involved, Foley demanded that they refer to the assault as “date rape” instead of what it really was – gang rape. Even more perversely, according to the NY times, “Reaction among the university’s **14,000** students has been muted...[with] a few low-key demonstrations.” Although the burden should not be placed on students, student activism is a crucial and key factor in placing pressure on administration to take action and ease the reporting of crimes. Furthermore, peer-to-peer education is key in enlisting greater support across campuses for healthy relationships and safe campuses.

Similar to a snowball effect, the culture of male superiority and devaluing women to sexual objects continues on to graduate school and in adult life as well. While attending the Kellogg School of Management where I received my MBA, I never brought up my work with domestic violence or had any conversations with fellow students on unhealthy relationships or the roles of women in society. In fact, none of our leadership or strategy classes ever spoke about the dichotomy between male and female leaders. Furthermore, graduate schools often encourage and breed a culture of sexual aggression against females. According to Hanna Rosin

from the Atlantic Monthly, while on a visit to an Ivy-league graduate business school party she witnessed, “porn pictures being passed around on a students’ cellphones...the men at the party flashed the snapshot at the women, and the women barely bothered to roll their eyes.” (Rosin 2012). Even more appalling was the description of the Asian graduate student who with six guys around her continued to conduct her best imitation of an Asian prostitute “Oooo, you so big. Me love you long time”, no doubt something she had seen in porn before. Even across the river at the Harvard Business School (regarded as the country’s top business institution), a much-prided annual tradition is the Priscilla Ball, where men dress as women and women dress as sluts. Thus, we see that the effects of watching porn and the sexualization of women remain strongly embedded through adult life, potentially leading to unhealthy sexual relationships and instances of sexual abuse in adulthood. By not educating males during their formative years in high school and college, we are failing to limit the cases of sexual coercion and unhealthy abusive behavior that will take place in the future. Thus, education on campuses is crucial in the fight to end both sexual assault on campuses and broader domestic violence in adulthood.

III. Evaluating Current Campus Initiatives

As the above analysis has shown, challenging male sexual norms and bringing men into the conversation at an early stage is critical in ending dating violence and sexual assault on campuses. My own experiences while as an undergraduate and my work with Out Against Abuse have exposed me to the prevalence of men regarding women as sexual objects and means of conquest. Furthermore, it has been alarming to see how many young men fail to accept or even understand that some of their beliefs are wrong. One of my first seminars at the University of Texas at Austin was one of the most eye opening. Our seminars have students act out different short scenarios that highlight warning signs of dating violence. One scenario depicted a

male student *demanding* that his girlfriend give him her study notes and called her a bitch when he finds her studying with another male student. The discussion that followed afterwards was at first lackluster. However, at one point, a young male student raised his hand and asked “Wait, I don’t understand, that’s his girlfriend. She’s supposed to do what he tells her to do.” For a moment there was pin drop silence after which all of his male friends in the room became very animated and involved with the discussion. By seeing one of their peers make an alarming statement, the students (both male and female) saw how one of their trusted friends could be harboring unhealthy behaviors towards relationships. Strikingly, it was this peer pressure or peer education component that truly allowed the young man to talk through his beliefs and ideas and see for himself for the first time ever why they were unhealthy and wrong.

The Campus Education Seminars hosted by OAA have been held across the country, from the University of Texas at Austin to Harvard Law School. Our seminars have received tremendous feedback from students and have helped many young women escape situations of stalking and potential assault. One student specifically wrote to us and stated, “I felt alone and found no help on campus...without Out Against Abuse I wouldn’t have been able to speak with the police and receive the restraining order I so badly needed to feel safe.” However, a problem that OAA and many other domestic violence and sexual assault student organizations suffer from is how to keep the conversation going once a workshop has ended and how to keep students involved in the issue. My organization attempted to provide a solution to this problem by establishing a pilot student chapter at the University of Texas at Austin. The student chapter, run by five very active leaders, focuses on hosting awareness programs with the Women’s Resource Center during domestic violence awareness month in October and helping host an OAA workshop in the Fall. In the Spring, the organization is focused on fundraising for the chapter in

order to remain self-sufficient. Although the organization has made tremendous strides in encouraging student activism and has received university recognition, there still continues to be a lack of ongoing discussion and not a strong enough peer-to-peer network to help students navigate how to report an assault and connect with the administration. In order to understand how to best improve our services and address these issues, I conducted case studies on the following campus initiatives:

a. Mentors in Violence Prevention

Jackson Katz's unique focus on working with student athletes has produced tremendous results and has changed the framing of men from "potential perpetrators" to "empowered bystanders who can confront abusive peers." (Katz 2012). By addressing the violent football culture, MVP combats the defensiveness and hostility present in male coaches and student athletes and works to educate men in safe male-only spaces. In a conversation with Jarrod Chin, who has trained as an MVP educator and continues to train administrators and resident assistants on how to in turn train students on gender violence issues, he spoke about the tremendous impact of male-only workshops. The most obvious benefit is that men and women often disclose experiences or unpopular beliefs in gender-segregated trainings. However, an overlooked benefit is the advantage of creating a safe place where victims won't be re-traumatized or forced to relive their painful experiences. For instance, having men and women in the same room and talking about what is defined as sexual assault may shame certain women in the room who may have experienced some form of sexual abuse. Furthermore, using male only spaces allows facilitators to introduce and talk through myths, such as "women cry rape", in a more effective way than if women were in the room. However, Mr. Chin did acknowledge that certain trainings where segregated groups are allowed to come back together and ask each other questions or

share their learning were tremendously effective. He also mentioned the importance of developing “racially and culturally competent ways to approach gender violence prevention, rather than through a one-size-fits-all approach”. The key lessons learned from the MVP model are the importance of allowing for at least some gender specific discussion and then allowing for a deeper discussion between both groups. Furthermore, keeping a continued conversation is something MVP also struggles with; however, giving students tangible and action items is a unique method MVP has employed to keep students interested. For instance, placing a call to action as simple as having students share the Facebook page or a link to an effective article is a simple and concrete method to tell students that this is what they could do next. Lastly, the most effective strategy to keep males engaged is to highlight healthy male behavior. For instance, the MVP trainer program sends male adults to high schools and colleges to host facilitated conversations on engaging students around preventing men’s violence against women. Using positive role models is a great way to encourage male activism on campuses.

b. Sex Signals

Sex Signals is a theater based nonprofit organization that teaches students about sexual assault awareness through humor, education and audience interaction. The Sex Signals workshops consist of a male actor and female actress focusing on bystander intervention and notions of the hookup culture present on campuses (Sex Signals 2012). The conversation then turns into a facilitation around acquaintance rape, why it counts as acquaintance rape and how to work effectively as a bystander. I conducted an interview with the Communications Director of Sex Signals, Ms. Abbey Fox, who spoke about the successes and existing inefficiencies with the organization. For instance, although the organization has been held over 4,000 programs, they still have a problem with keeping a continued present on campuses. The organization is

currently utilizing a social media strategy, such as enlisting students on its Facebook page and posting provocative articles to spur discussion. Ms. Fox also mentioned her frustration at lack of cohesion between existing sexual assault prevention programs, which also prevents them from connecting to the right administrators at schools as well.

c. One in Four

One in Four's mission is a 501c3 non-profit focused on the prevention of rape through peer presentations to increase "likelihood of bystander intervention in a situation where rape or sexual assault may occur," (One in Four USA 2012). One in Four's unique model is in its collegiate chapters, through which the organization hosts separate men and women's programs. According to the organization's website, One in Four continues conversations with student on campus through regular newsletter and organization wide conference calls as a means to create a nationwide conversation on violence against women. The organization is mainly focused on the Men's Program, which are presented by trained male peer educators to all-male groups and are also available as a manual to "educate rape prevention practitioners with a comprehensive guide to creating a sexual assault peer education group from the ground up." A compliment to the Men's Program was recently created (the Women's Program) which serves to teach students "how to help a friend recover from sexual assault without blaming the survivor." Although this gender segregated approach is similar to the MVP program, it seems that the impact of such workshops is limited when both genders are not able to connect or speak to each other. For instance, not encouraging and establishing key healthy communication practices between genders will prevent students from applying what they have learned in these workshops to their real world relationships. Additionally, OAA hopes to follow a similar path and provide training materials on our website so other student activists can easily use materials on campus. However,

students who have failed to receive adequate domestic violence and sexual assault training will not be able to effectively use these materials.

d. SAFER (Students Active for Ending Rape)

The importance of training peer leaders is a problem that SAFER does an excellent job of focusing on. SAFER “facilitates student organization through a comprehensive training, in person workshops and trainings, free follow-up mentoring and a network for student organizations.” (SAFER 2012). I spoke with a Harvard Kennedy School classmate on her experiences with SAFER at Colgate University. SAFER helped her talk to students about campus assaults at an institutional level and incentivized victims to come forward. Specifically, SAFER was able to help her student organization change the policy on expulsion for perpetrators and create a more nurturing environment for victims (ex. the disciplinary board for perpetrators had been male-dominated and did not have strong advocates to aid victims, but SAFER helped bring in more social workers and female support). Although SAFER hosts a great variety of resources for student activism, such as its Activist Mentoring Program that provides free mentoring services for students after a SAFER training, the website is far from a national network. There are no opportunities for students to connect with other student organizations or easily identify workshops or practices that have been effective at other universities. Although SAFER provides a great foundation for peer-to-peer education, more work needs to be done on establishing a social network or connection between student organizations nationwide.

e. The Network at Colgate University

Another unique model I came across was an organization called the Network at Colgate University, which was the student chapter of an existing domestic violence nonprofit called Liberty Resources. Liberty Resources serves as a confidential house and shelter for victims and

also provides legal, advocacy and victim support through its hotline. The nonprofit created a student chapter to provide students with hotline training and to raise awareness on campuses around domestic violence. Furthermore, the student chapter of Network tried to educate and spread awareness at fraternities and sororities through pressures on the Pan-Hellenic Council to focus on implementing workshops on sexual assault issues. This model is interesting as it connects a student organization to a larger domestic violence organization and provided support to work effectively with administrators. Being a part of a larger nonprofit also helped the student group receive credibility with school administrators. However, serving as a subsidiary of a major nonprofit is limiting as it prevented the organization from fully focusing on serving students or establishing programs specific to dating violence. In addition, The Network could not connect as easily and partner with other student organizations or work with student government, as they were part of an off-campus institution.

IV. Recommendation: Need For a National Network to End Dating Violence

The paper has identified two important themes: (i) the importance of inviting young men into the conversation of dating violence through men only safe spaces **in addition to** having coeducational conversations with women as well and (ii) the dire need for a national network to allow students to learn from other organizations and efforts on campuses in order to create a national student movement to end dating violence and sexual assault on campuses. My vision is to create a platform and web tool that will almost serve as a social network for existing campus organizations that are fighting to end violence and encourage healthy relationships on campus. Similar to a ‘Facebook’ for student organizations, each group will have it’s own page which will provide information on the work it has conducted in the past, partnerships or workshops conducted with other nonprofit groups such as MVP and ‘One in Four’, reviews on each event

and workshop held, and headlines on any current issues it is having with the administration. The website will also provide a resource and discussion board for students to ask questions to the network on issues such as how to get further funding from student government or who to work with on Title IX violations in addition to their Title IX representative. Most importantly, it will provide students with an instant national media outlet to highlight any huge atrocities on campus and place pressure on universities. A key example of the effect of this was seen with the Amherst sexual assault case, which received very quick media knowledge after social media elevated its exposure to readers. The need for a national network was voiced by each of the organizations I spoke with above. Courtney Walsh who worked with The Network at Colgate mentioned that while working with her student group she often felt isolated and alone and often wondered “What are students in nearby Cornell doing to end domestic violence? Are there any others out there who can provide me with some guidance?” She also mentioned the need to have a network for students to be able to learn about different research and work opportunities ongoing in the field of gender violence. Abbey Fox from Sex Signals stated that there was “no one place to find information on the various organizations doing work on dating violence and sexual assault and there should be a more intentional way to partner and share information.” She stated that often times when hosting a Sex Signals presentation at a new school, they have to redesign marketing material and spend a lot of extra time on conducting student research to customize the presentation. Furthermore, when they attend more conservative schools, administrators and even student groups often ask for reviews from past performances. A national network could not only provide detailed reviews on different programs held by various nonprofits to student organizers but can also allow nonprofit workshop directors to quickly gain information on the audience they are serving to customize and increase impact of their programs.

Jarrold Chin from MVP and Sport in Society mentioned that although the Dear Colleague letter was a great wake up call and made colleges more readily respond to sexual assault on campus, “real impact will only take place once a **critical mass** of students take the matter into their own hands and the movement becomes more student youth led. By providing an outlet for students to connect with each other and gain support, I believe an online platform will be able to establish a critical mass of student activists. The vision for the national network is to eventually host annual student leadership workshops where students will go through formal domestic violence training and also link up with activists and government officials to voice any ongoing concerns in regards to dating violence, sexual assault and Title IX violations present on their college campuses.

The first steps in establishing such a network will be to get buy-in from leaders in the dating and domestic violence movements and to also enlist a strong board of directors who can help in bringing in funding and identifying grant organizations. Furthermore, connecting with policy leaders and government agencies will also be crucial. For instance, in September 2011, VP Biden launched the ‘1 is 2 Many’ campaign which uses technology and outreach to reduce dating violence against teens and young women ages 16 to 24. Specifically, the campaign focuses on improving the response to sexual assault and dating violence on college campuses. This government initiative will allow for an unprecedented access to resources and grants for dating violence organization and also serve as a potential partner in developing more effective student-run campus programs. According to an informational interview conducted with Danielle Borrin from the Office of the Vice President, the One is 2 Many initiative is a strong advocate of such grassroots movements and can serve as an instrumental partner in establishing an infrastructure for A National Network to End Dating Violence. I truly believe such a network

will provide students with the tools, resources and network needed to move Title IX efforts forward and eventually eliminate sexual assault and gender violence from campuses.

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