

Emma Sharp HB 2657 Testimony

College sexual assault is a pervasive problem across the United States. Women in college are 3 times more likely than all women to experience sexual violence and men in college are 78% more likely than non-students of the same age to be a victim of rape or sexual assault. During my time at the University of Oregon, I joined a peer education group called the Sexual Wellness Advocacy Team (SWAT). The group was responsible for creating and implementing curriculum about Campus Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention for different student groups including fraternities and athletic teams. In reality, our true task at hand was to shape and correct an entire campus culture. It was insurmountable and riddled with barriers.

It became clear early on that information regarding consent, boundary setting and respect was something that needed to be taught at an earlier age. The average age an American teen loses their virginity is 17, meaning we had to deconstruct so many of our peers understanding of what healthy sex actually is and what it is not. There was a pervasive attitude of “well these are just people my age, what are they doing to teach me about sex that I don’t already know?”. It is much easier to shape someone’s understanding of a problem or teach them about healthy approaches *before* they ever engage in sex, versus asking them to reexamine what they think they know after the fact. We noticed our peers really struggling to unlearn toxic behavior.

For example, an incident occurred during one of our presentations to a fraternity. In our presentations we would give the audience an opportunity to engage with one of our actors as if this were a real life situation. In this case, our actress was playing the role of a survivor and was looking to the audience for ways they can be supported and directed to resources. One member of the fraternity thought this would be an appropriate time to make romantic and sexual advances onto our actress. The fact that this young man felt like it was appropriate to hit on a professional trying to educate him about how to make someone feel safe and supported in the event of a sexual assault, really indicated that the scope of sexual violence was so much bigger than one presentation in college could fix.

Being in SWAT felt like we were being tasked to stop a gaping wound with a Band-Aid. SWAT could not tackle some of the more complicated and nuanced problems that arise with college students like drinking and party culture, because we had to teach to the common denominator which meant going over very basic things like what is rape and consent.

Upon graduating, I have since become a Violence Prevention Educator for middle school and high school students. This was the only job I wanted out of college. I was set on making a greater impact in reducing rates of sexual violence by engaging with youth so that by the time they are college age they are better equipped with knowledge of sexual violence, what attitudes overtly and inadvertently promote sexual violence, and how they can support someone who has experienced it.

In retrospect, I can see just how basic our curriculum was now that I teach the exact same fundamentals to middle schoolers. If everyone in the state of Oregon received the basics of consent, boundaries, and communication in K-12 then we would be contributing to a larger cultural shift that would impact the work being done on college campuses. This 3 million dollars in funding would allow this public health issue to be treated at the cause, and not simply bandage over the symptoms.

Thank you for reading this,

Emma M. Sharp

Violence Prevention Educator

Emmas@cwsor.org

503.557.5836

A Safe Place Family Justice Center

256 Warner Milne Road Oregon City, OR 97045



DISCLAIMER

This message is intended for the sole use of the addressee, and may contain information that is privileged, confidential and exempt from disclosure under applicable law. If you are not the addressee you are hereby notified that you may not use, copy, disclose, or distribute to anyone the message or any information contained in the message. If you have received this message in error, please immediately advise the sender by reply email and delete this message.