Personal Empowerment Through Self-Awareness
Module 2: The Culture of Sexual Violence

2A: What are the Facts?

Personal violence happens on campuses all over the United States. It also happens off campuses, and it can have a powerfully negative impact on those who experience it. So why does this kind of violence happen? Campuses are a part of a larger U.S. culture and many scholars warn of a rape prone culture where prevalent attitudes, norms, and behaviors excuse, minimize, and even encourage sexual violence. This environment creates stereotypical beliefs about women, men, sexuality and power that can lead to a whole range of negative consequences.

These stereotypes are reinforced through images, ideas and conversations we are exposed to every day. Without careful thought, we may simply accept them as a way of life. One of the most important things we can do to protect ourselves against this kind of violence is to clearly distinguish what is reality on our campuses today.

Fact: The vast majority of sexual assault reports are true. Numerous studies show that only 2% - 5% are false reports. Not believing a survivor is emotionally damaging and it lets others know that they won’t be believed if they come forward.

Fact: Stranger assault represents less than 18% of sexual assaults. The overwhelming majority of sexual assaults occur in familiar places and with people we know and trust. It can be someone the survivor has known for a long time, a friend, family member, a spouse, a co-worker, date, classmate or someone they met at a party.

Fact: We are all conscious of and able to control our own actions. When we say perpetrators can’t help themselves, we excuse their actions and place blame on the survivor. It is important to know that rape is much more about hurting, overpowering and humiliating another rather than sexual desire.

Fact: Whether you’re wearing a short skirt or snow pants, the only risk factor is the presence of a rapist. Whatever the reason behind a person’s choice of wardrobe, no one dresses to encourage an attack. Believing that rape happens because a regular guy sees someone dressed sexy is insulting.

Fact: The overwhelming majority of assaults (82%) are perpetrated by acquaintances, friends or family members who use coercion to assault. Coercion (pressuring, guilt-tripping, intimidating or simply ignoring the person’s non-consent) can be just as forceful and disempowering as physical violence.

Fact: Sexual assault is never an accident. The perpetrator claiming that they received “mixed messages” and “didn’t know” the person was not consenting is not valid. The burden for getting consent is entirely on the person who wants to continue sexual activity.

Fact: Wolf-whistling, cat-calling, or honking is not flattery, but gender bullying. Sexual harassment
involves one-directional communication that occurs without the consent of the individual.

Fact: If someone says no, it really means no. If you feel that you are getting a mixed message, don’t assume, stop and have a conversation.

Sexual violence can be experienced by any person of any gender, or sexual orientation or age.

Much of what we accept as inevitable is, in fact, the expression of values and attitudes that can change. And we can change them. We have that power. Working together we can create a campus and a society in which sexual violence of any kind is a thing of the past.

Postscript

Let's go back to our first reality check. Recent studies show that very few reports of sexual assault are false. In fact, most rapes go unreported. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual violence please reach out to your resources.

No means no. It's time to stop asking questions about what people wearing or drinking or doing when they were victimized. Victim blaming hurts everyone. Men and women, their friends and families, all of us. And it ignores the real problem – the people who commit these crimes. It's time to ask the real question. How do we stop it?

2B: Relationship and Dating Violence

Relationship violence, also called dating or domestic violence, occurs when someone uses fear and intimidation to control their partner or loved one. This can take the form a physical and sexual violence as well as verbal threats and verbal abuse. Threats, intimidation, isolation are all behaviors used by the abuser to gain power and control. Abusive relationships typically don't all start out controlling or violent. What seemed at first like interest in who you are in what you do turns into controlling who you spend time with and what you do. It is initiated by such comments as “I just wanna spend more time with you” or “I just love you so much I always wanna know where you are.” So it can appear as caring behavior when it is really controlling behavior.

Other warning signs or red flags are making fun of their partner or humiliating them in front of others, constantly criticizing, keeping track of where their partner is, constantly texting, determining what kind of clothes their partner should wear and how they should look, deliberately interfering with the partner’s ability to complete and turn in homework, and even getting them in trouble with campus policies, not listening, and making our decisions in the relationship, throwing things, or punching walls, destroying valuable or meaningful items, pulling hair, hitting or punching their partner, forcing or coercing their partner to have sex with them.
If you have experienced some of these red flags talk to someone on your campus like an RA, a counselor, a trusted faculty member, a health care provider, or seek out local community programs. They can help you determine if your relationship is unhealthy or even abusive. You may want to work with the counselor or advocate to help you develop a personalized safety plan so that you can stay safe. That could include getting a restraining order, asking to be moved, or having your class schedules rearranged.

If you suspect a classmate, roommate, or friend is in an abusive relationship, talk to them about what you are observing without putting the partner down. Offer to help them find a counselor or advocate to meet with them. Let them know that they deserve to be treated with respect. And understand that these kinds of relationships are very difficult to get out of and may take time. Be patient with your friend.

If you have a friend that you suspect is being abusive to a partner, let them know that you care about them but that their behavior is not OK and encourage them to get help.

2C: Stalking

Stalking is a crime that occurs on college campuses across our nation. The rate of stalking among college students is higher than the general population. Campus environments are ideal for stalkers because they are closed communities; students generally have predictable daily routines that can be easily monitored; and also technology is used to communicate with students in a variety of ways. Your campus defines stalking as conduct that is directed at a specific person that is unwanted, unwelcome, and would cause a reasonable person to fear for her or his safety or the safety of others, or to suffer substantial emotional distress. It is important to know that stalking is a crime and a violation of campus policy—it should be taken seriously.

Most often the stalker is someone the victim knows, an acquaintance, a classmate, someone who lives in your hall or a current or former intimate partner. It can start out in a seemingly harmless way—a text message, a conversation after class, running into someone in the cafeteria -- but something about it might make you feel uneasy. At first stalking may seem innocuous but if it is stalking, it typically escalates. For example, stalking through emails and texting can seem quite normal in the beginning.

A stalker might follow you or just happen to be wherever you are on campus, send you a lot of unwelcome texts or voice messages, repeated phone calls or emails, or monitor where you are and who you are with. They may use GPS devices, tags on social media sites, or other technology to track you. They may even threaten you, your friends, or your family.

It is very common on college campuses for stalkers to use social media to intimidate others. It might be such things as: unwelcome photo tagging on Facebook, posting or tweeting personal information, taking and forwarding inappropriate photos, or starting rumors about someone
The way that we use technology as a part of our normal, everyday routine, such as using social media to share where we are and when, might cause us to overlook technologies as potential tools for stalkers to use.

**Female Student (actor):**
I met him in my Sociology class. We were given an assignment that had to be completed with a partner. He approached me and asked if we could work together. I didn’t know anyone else in the class and he seemed really nice. We exchanged phone numbers and addresses so we could meet up to study together. He started texting me at first just about getting together to work on the class project. If I couldn’t meet up with him, he started to get angry and accusing me of wanting him to get a bad grade in the class. Then I started to run into him around campus - a lot. At first I thought it was just a coincidence but then it became too frequent to be a coincidence. He seemed to always be right there – wherever I went. Later, I realized he was monitoring my Facebook page: even though I had the basic privacy settings on, he was getting to my page through some friends we both knew.

I started getting 20 to 30 texts from him a day. If I didn’t respond, it escalated – I tried ignoring him, then I tried responding to get him to stop. Nothing worked. I was constantly looking over my shoulder, I wasn’t sleeping, my grades were suffering and I was feeling anxious all the time.

The texts became more and more controlling and threatening. He believed we were dating and would get angry if he saw me talking to other guys. One day, he walked up to me and grabbed me. He was yelling at me and threatened to hurt me. That’s when I went to the Student Life Office to talk to someone. I didn’t know what to do. They helped me report it to the police and get a harassment order.

If you are feeling threatened by someone and aren’t sure if it is stalking or not, talk to someone -- an RA, a faculty or staff member, the Title IX officer on your campus, a counselor -- to find out what you can do. Don’t ignore it. Stalking can lead to other serious crimes such as physical attacks or even sexual assaults. Don’t assume it is harmless.

There are a number of things you can do as part of a safety plan. Remember, it is not your fault and you have a right to live and study free from intimidation, harassment and fear.

• First, cut off all interactions with the stalker – even negative interactions feed their desire for control.
• Start to document all interactions with the person and be prepared to electronically record messages right away. Consider showing a trusted friend the unwelcome correspondence so they witness what is being sent or said.
• Report it to your campus Title IX officer or campus security and to the police. Because stalking can involve many incidences, it is important to report each incident and begin official records of the behaviors.
• Apply for a protective order in civil court and write in specific behaviors that you want stopped. For example, request that the stalker cannot post anything about you on social media sites and has to stay a certain number of yards away from you.
• Know that you can request a change in classes or if you live on campus, reasonable requests for changes in living arrangements.
• You can ask your campus to keep private your information that is typically available to the public, such as your email address.
• Change your routine, including your routes to campus and to your classes. Ask others to walk with you.
• Find someone on your campus or in your community that has experience with developing safety plans, or visit the Stalking Resource Center online for more specific safety tips.

Remember, stalking is a violation of our sexual violence policy. It can create an environment that feels unsafe and prevents people from focusing on their education. If it happens to you or someone you know, follow these suggestions and remember that you are not in it alone.

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