

they first knew about their homosexuality or bisexuality, what it is like to “come out”, experiences in romantic relationships, and positive and negative reactions by family and friends. After the presentations, students in the class were invited to ask questions.

Many students were interested in contemporary issues, such as the effect of gay and lesbian parents on children raised in those households, and the question of whether homosexuality is genetically or socially acquired. A large number of students were curious about more personal experiences, such as dating, role negotiation in relationships, and dealing with homophobia. Answering questions not only provided factual information but also allowed an opportunity to illuminate some common misperceptions (such as that only gay men need to be concerned about AIDS).

The feedback from students was overwhelmingly positive, much more so than anticipated by panel coordinators. We asked students to rate on a seven-point Likert-type scale the effectiveness of the panel in increasing their awareness of gay, lesbian and bisexual issues. The mean was 5.7, with a 7.0 indicating “extremely effective.” Of approximately 500 surveys received, only five were considered negative (i.e., the panel was “a waste of time”). When asked about the most effective part of the presentation, the majority of the responses mentioned the informality of the panel, the honesty of its members, and the willingness by panelists to answer any questions. Discussions also had a positive effect on panelists who were presented with an opportunity to articulate, in some cases for the first time, their beliefs to a primarily heterosexual audience.

In educating a society about bisexual, lesbian and gay issues, we have to “walk before we can run.” Since so few of the undergraduates claimed to know personally anyone who is gay, lesbian or bisexual, the use of a panel format that is nonthreatening, non-judgmental, and encourages open and honest dialogue between panelists and students appears to be a positive and effective step toward increasing the sensitivity of all students toward those who are lesbian, gay or bisexual.

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Overcoming Men's Defensiveness Toward Sexual Assault Programs: Learning to Help Survivors

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Berkowitz (1992) reports that few acquaintance rape programs exist targeting all male groups. He praised such workshops, particularly when peer facilitators encourage less sexist behavior. Research has shown that men with fewer rape supportive attitudes and greater knowledge of rape's effects on a survivor report lower intent to rape (Hamilton & Yee, 1990). Others have found that programs describing a man being raped help develop men's empathy toward rape survivors (Lee, 1987). Funk (1993) suggests that men's defensiveness toward discussing rape rises to protect them from feeling guilt over the violent behavior of fellow men. The program discussed in the present article overcomes defensive reactions by identifying supportive roles for men to decrease rape's prevalence and damaging effects.

According to researcher M. Koss (personal communication, January 17, 1995), men are likely to interact with rape survivors as dating partners and as fellow employees. She found that among working women, the person they most commonly informed of their assault was their employer. Given the likelihood that men will be in a position to offer support, the program detailed in the present article focuses on how men can be part of the solution through helping

survivors and working to change societal norms.

The Peer Education Program

"How to Help a Sexual Assault Survivor" is a program we developed in our roles of advisor to and president of "Stealing Home," the sexual assault peer education group at the University of Richmond. Male peer educators present this program to all male groups. The advertising for the program stresses a focus on opportunities men have to help survivors -- thus motivating men to attend out of a desire to help others. While learning to help a survivor is an intended outcome, equally important is our intention to decrease the likelihood that participants will be perpetrators themselves.

After presenters review rape definitions (Berkowitz, 1992), a 15 minute video is shown. It is prefaced by a statement that the video describes "a rape situation" which will put participants in a more informed position to understand how to help a sexual assault survivor. What participants do not know, is that the video describes two men raping a male police officer. The police trainer on the video describes an event in which a police officer encounters a situation in which he had no way to predict what was about to happen, is startled and stays still, succumbs to a sexual attack out of fear for losing his life, experiences a painful hospital visit, fears the potential of sexually transmitted diseases, and endures the reactions of his colleagues who wonder why he did not fight back and suggest that he really wanted the rape to happen.

Once the video finishes, there is usually a stunned silence in the room. Peer educators first acknowledge that there are healthy homosexual relationships, just as there are healthy heterosexual relationships. They state that a scenario with a man being raped by a man is used because it is easier, anatomically, to describe a man penetrating a victim than it would be to describe a female attacker. Peer educators then draw parallels from the male police officer's rape experience to common rape experiences of women. By making such connections, men

rethink their attitudes toward rape and their belief in rape myths.

Peer educators then encourage men to help survivors by listening, believing, and accepting the survivor's decision. In addition, men are urged to resist the temptation to ask for details about the rape and to avoid suggestions of further violence (Virginians Aligned Against Sexual Assault, 1992). Men are also encouraged to communicate openly during their own sexual encounters, to recognize that cooperation does not equal consent, and to stop, ask and clarify when any uncertainty exists. They are urged to educate themselves further about the sexual assault issue, and support other men's efforts to educate themselves. Peer educators then discuss the effects of rape jokes and sexist attitudes and encourage men to condemn the abuse of women. After questions are taken and resources on campus are identified, the program ends on a serious yet solemn tone, noting that in the one hour in which the program took place that approximately 80 women in the United States were raped (FBI, 1992).

Evaluation of the Program

Peer educators have presented this program as a resident assistant inservice, to several fraternities, and to all eight men's residence halls at the University of Richmond. An experimental study of the program's effects on rape myth belief is being completed. On a pilot survey, 65% of 17 participants reported that they were less likely to be sexually coercive after having seen the program. Thus, in addition to learning how to help a survivor, nearly two-thirds may in fact be less likely to become perpetrators. Ordering instructions for the nominally priced Seattle Police Department video and complete presentation instructions can be obtained from the first author.

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