

## Sexual Violence

I was appalled to learn that 1 out of 3 women are victims of sexual assault. Even more alarming was the fact that many young women do not think they will be a victim or are a target, so they don't take necessary precautions to avoid situations and relationships putting them in harms way. There are no proactive classes teaching preventative measures or preparing them for the consequences caused by unhealthy relationships. Even when an adolescent sees a bad relationship between adults, her overwhelming desire to be in a partnership causes her over look possible warning signs. Even many adults with a wealth of experience think their partners' behavior will change. I was also dismayed to learn that seven out of ten women who have been victims to sexual assault do not report the crimes. I feel that from young childhood, males and females should learn to recognize the signs of dysfunctional relationships.

I am always searching for new opportunities to use interactive learning tools and curriculums in dramatic and educational ways. Many times I find ideas while reading bulletins and newsletters. One newsletter that caught my attention was distributed by the Justice Department. This newsletter documented the steps the Justice Department was making to stop rape, stalking, and overall violence against men and women in middle school, high school, and college campuses. Middle school immediately jumped out at me. The article continued to show the average age of dating is now 12 years old. They used term "Hooking up", which is now an everyday occurrence for adolescents, and is becoming a social phenomenon. But adolescents lack the social and psychological maturity needed to have a healthy relationship. So basically, "hooking up" with anybody is more important than whom you're "hooking up" with. The amount of domestic violence is now increasing dramatically based upon adolescences not knowing the intricacies of a healthy relationship. According to the article the Justice Department has already established an ongoing program providing a significant amount of funding in the form of grants, awarded to develop advocacy

departments on school campuses in order to provide victims support and professional guidance, but noted there were two distinct attitudes of the adolescent and college age women who were interviewed. The women who were victims felt these programs are very important, but the indifference of the women who were not yet victims was astonishing. In fact, most of the women interviewed revealed they didn't need to be protected or prepared because these violent acts could not happen to them. They also didn't think the advocacy centers would be interested or do anything to help if they were attacked. The article was concluded by stating that 70% of all sexually violent acts go unreported.

Without revealing too much about the incident, in an innocent moment, my wife told me she had been sexually assaulted when she was fourteen. At that time in my naivety, I assumed this was an isolated instance, and that very few or none of the other women I knew had ever endured such a tragedy. But after reading the article I started asking, in a very casual and delicate way, if any of my female friends had experienced anything they would classify as sexual violence. Unfortunately, the responses I received verified the article. Not all these women were raped, but a good majority had experienced some sort of violent behavior whether it was when they refused to engage in a sexual activity, through stalking, physical attacks, verbal attacks, or a person trying to force their will after they had said NO. I asked them all what they did about it. Except for one, they all did nothing. They chalked it up to experience and thought they could move on with no effects, but many said the experience had and still has an effect on them.

True to form, this inspired me to create a curriculum. It is my feeling that a woman would probably be more receptive to learning how to analyze their relationships in the privacy of her computer. I also believed I could create a resource tool which would define the hazards and signs of an unhealthy relationship through assorted unhealthy, realistic situations. I also wanted to create a tool that could also be a place for a victim to turn to get guidance and direction.

I went to the Justice Department web site to see how many grants

were distributed and where they went. I was overjoyed to learn that in the past two years 22 million dollars, that's right 22 million dollars has been spent on this initiative. The money goes throughout the country to pay the salaries of the educators tasked to assemble advocacy centers on school campuses. I contacted many of the schools that received these grants. Of these, I contacted ten university advocacy departments, and spoke with the student volunteers who staffed the phones. They were usually open and honest about the problems of sexual violence on campus. There are professionals that manage these departments, but every college attempts to protect their reputation by guarding against the release of negative information to outside sources. It has just been a recent development that Universities have to report and make public knowledge the amount of sexual crimes on the campus, which had been accomplished through Congressional Legislation of the CLERY ACT, named after a young woman who was raped and killed on a college campus. There had been a series of assaults on the campus, and she was unaware if any of these assaults. Her parents spearheaded the legislation so students' safety would supersede colleges protecting their reputation.

A reoccurring theme that was undeniably universal throughout all the schools I contacted, educating the student population was hard, because women didn't think anything would happen to them. An advocacy center is reactive, and has a hard time being proactive. In Florida, the Florida International University advocacy center had received a grant and since they are located only three hours away in Miami, it made the most sense to approach them about producing a proactive educational tool, and Sharon Aaron the advocacy director was kind enough to set up a meeting. I met with her and a committee of her staff and volunteers. Sharon depended on their input and evaluation of what I intended to create. Immediately, I wasn't so sure I liked this, a committee decision usually takes time, and I like to go fast. But I controlled my ADD moment, and Sharon and her committee were quick to recognize the potential the tool could have. She also realized the scenarios and the information had to be accurate and realistic, so Sharon and her committee decided to use case histories to create the scenarios. The advocacy center also

called for a university focus group of which over 500 freshman college students participated. Using e-mails and seminars, they discussed the project, made suggestions and recommendations, and when it came to filming, students on campus volunteered to be the actors.

At the same time I met an unbelievable woman named Angela Rose who helped change the sexual assault legislative laws in Illinois. Angela was sexually assaulted, at the age of 17. She turned her anger to activism refusing to be a victim. She has become one of the nation's most passionate and effective advocates for the prevention of sexual violence. She has lobbied to promote laws protecting the victims and promoted the importance of education on issues surrounding sexual violence. At the time she had been touring the country's middle schools, high schools, and Universities lecturing, giving workshops, and fighting the battle of educating women who didn't think it would happen to them. These tools focus on the need that every woman, whether in middle school, high school, college, or in the workplace needs to know what to do, what to avoid, know that they have to report these crimes, and they are not to blame.

I wish it was not the case, but we know it is.

For more information go directly to [www.motint.org](http://www.motint.org)  
or Email Dr. Friedman [DrFriedman@motint.org](mailto:DrFriedman@motint.org)