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Theater for Social Justice: Sexual Violence Prevention Programming for College Campuses

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Summer Fellows 2017

Mentor: Dr. Meghan Brodie

“Theater for Social Justice: Sexual Violence Prevention for College Orientations”

My summer fellows project focused on how theater for social justice might be harnessed to reimagine Ursinus College’s sexual assault prevention program for first year orientation. My work was driven by a desire to implement a more structured and inclusive program, one specific to the College’s culture. The first part of the research done was on theater for social justice and theater in education and the advantage that using theater programs has to make messages more clear and accessible to audience members. The second phase of my research examined the college sexual assault epidemic and included books that look at first-hand accounts of mostly women survivors of sexual assault. These accounts examine each case on a personal level and also at an institutional level and explore how colleges and universities react to assaults on their campuses. Books such as *The Hunting Ground* and *College Women Respond* also have notes from professionals in this field including lawyers for sexual assault cases, Title IX educators, and news reporters who covered high profile cases. The final portion of the research included reading *Preventing Sexual Violence on Campus: Challenging Traditional Approaches through Program Innovation* and looking at other colleges’ and universities’ programs to teach students about the topic of sexual misconduct, prevention, and reporting on their campuses. I also looked at national campaigns and theater groups dedicated to fostering conversations among students about this once taboo topic. The “Dear Colleague Letter” of 2011, the It’s On Us campaign, Speak About It

theater programs, and other performance-based programs were all used in the proposed redesign of the Ursinus sexual misconduct orientation program. By looking at other colleges' responses to sexual misconduct as well as their prevention programs, I was able to identify the major topics that should be included in a new Ursinus orientation program, including: healthy relationships, unhealthy/abusive relationships, LGBTQ identities, rape, bystander intervention, and safer sex practices.

Educating students on safer sex as well as sexual assault and misconduct has not always been a priority for schools. Within the past decade, there have been major changes in policies to better protect and serve students including survivors of sexual assault. There are constant changes in the world of Title IX sexual violence prevention policies. By proposing this new program as well as sharing this research, I hope to help educate the Ursinus community on the issue of sexual assault prevention and help motivate students to become part of the solution to the sexual assault epidemic crisis in the United States.

Why Theater?

When thinking of typical teaching styles the first to come to mind are lectures, PowerPoints, exams, but hardly ever theater and performance pieces. This style of teaching can be one of the best ways to teach a specific topic to an audience. The idea of Theater in Education originated in England in the 1960's as a way for students to watch a performance and be able to participate themselves by interacting with the performers. In *Learning through Theater*, Jackson and Vine argue that performances are more engaging for younger audiences and take topics such as history, current events, and social justice and bring them to life in theater. Theater in Education helps facilitate "participatory engagement, social learning through role play, work with young people (formal and informal settings), and innovative theatrical forms within the

process” (Jackson, Vine 2). Through theater we can teach important lessons with emotion and compassion that cannot be gotten through online sources or textbooks. Drama in Education, a branch of Theater in Education, is “a use of dramatic arts [...] to explore values, by dramatizing human conditions and behaviors so that the audience makes meaning through experience” (Jackson, Vine 44).

Student involvement and buy in is a large factor for the development of theater for social justice programs for new student orientations and passive programming on campuses. The use of theater creates more student buy in. As the students watch and actively engage with performances they are provided with an opportunity to cultivate compassion. Actors are able to portray the emotions and trauma that occurs after sexual assaults and demonstrate these reactions on stage, ideally helping audience members sympathize or empathize with the characters. The use of talk back and question and answer sessions after performances also make theater programs more personal and relatable for audiences making it easier for audience members to ask for clarification on topics and discuss different aspects of the performance.

First-hand Accounts on College Campuses

Throughout the past few years the topic of sexual assault on college campuses has become controversial because of cover-ups within college administrations, the protection of star athletes and Greek organizations, and failures to follow Title IX policy procedures correctly. This has brought a lot of media attention to these problem areas at major universities. Two notable books include firsthand accounts by survivors who discuss their universities and the support they did or did not receive as well as the emotional toll sexual assaults have on college women specifically.

Campus Sexual Assault: College Women Respond looks at sexual assaults on college campuses. The book is a collection of the personal accounts of sexual violence survivors, chronicling their stories and experiences after being assaulted. The author, Lauren Gremain, looks specifically at 28 sexual assault cases on a particular college campus and how administrators, friends, and family reacted to each case in terms of Title IX, the Cleary Act, and reporting. Gremain examines how the campus culture affected the survivors after the assault and the culture of sexual assault on college campuses in a general sense. Gremain uncovered many stigmas and ideas surrounding assault such as the term “the perfect victim” (Germain 25-26). In *Campus Sexual Assault*, the idea of “the perfect victim” arises and proves to be problematic for survivors. This “perfect victim” is the media’s and campus safety’s idea of a star student who experiences stranger rape while completely sober, follows the directions of going immediately to the emergency room for a rape kit without bathing prior, reports the assault to police, all while seeming calm and rational through the entire experience and not showing signs of trauma (Germain 26). The “perfect victim” is a myth.

The critically acclaimed and controversial documentary-turned-book *The Hunting Ground: The Inside Story of Sexual Assault on American College Campuses* follows landmark college sexual assault cases, exploring college policies, cover ups of incidents, and students’ fights against corruption in this area. The book also features essays from reporters, lawyers, and professors on their views regarding colleges’ responses to sexual assaults and the culture in which these assaults occur. The authors, Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering, are quoted in an interview in the book calling for more activists on campus and in society to support this civil rights issue. They note that there are “visionary and courageous student activists out there- and it’s now time they are joined and supported by the rest of society” (Dick, Ziering 136).

Statistics of reporting sexual assault on college campuses can be somewhat problematic since there is no hard data or evidence supporting the numbers of reports. The number of women assaulted during their time in college ranges from 1 in 4 (Dick, Ziering 142) to 1 in 5 (Department of Education “It’s On Us”). A reason that the numbers are ever changing is the lack of reporting to colleges and police after an assault occurs. According to RAINN.org, the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network, only 20% of sexual assaults on college campuses are reported to authorities, meaning roughly 80% of cases go unreported. In the study conducted in *Campus Sexual Assault*, 22 of the 26 survivors interviewed did not report their assaults (Germain 33), a common trend when looking at sexual assault numbers. The lack of reporting stems from victims’ fear of victim blaming by schools, families, friends, or the perpetrators themselves as well as a lack of evidence (Germain 25, 33). These two major drawbacks hinder survivors from being able to report assaults. Survivors also fear for their safety and often do not trust their school administration and judicial processes, making survivors less inclined to report (Germain 80).

Programming on College Campuses and Policy Changes

A simple Google search of college programming for preventing sexual assault would astound anyone in terms of the variety and volume of programs all across the world that have been started to educate students on this matter. There are programs of all sorts and sizes, including one implemented by the White House aimed at combatting the college sexual assault epidemic. I researched other colleges’ and universities’ programs to find common themes and ideas among them. In conjunction with the White House campaign called “It’s On Us,” the Department of Education also released a letter to administrators to make large scale changes to schools’ and universities’ sexual assault policies so they are more up to date and better help

survivors. The “Dear Colleague Letter” of 2011 made monumental changes to schools’ policies on sexual assault, drinking, and Title IX programming to help create safer school communities all across America.

The letter outlines “Title IX Requirements Related to Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence” (3) including: “responses to sexual harassment and sexual violence” (3), “procedural requirements pertaining to sexual harassment and sexual violence” (6), and “steps to prevent sexual harassment and sexual violence and correct its discriminatory effects on the complainant and others” (14). The Department of Education under the Obama administration called for schools to make new and updated changes concerning each subheading found within the letter. The responses to sexual harassment section requires schools to take “immediate action to eliminate the harassment, prevent its reoccurrence, and address its affects” (4), and train school officials on how to properly report sexual harassment and to whom. The letter mandates that a Title IX investigation must take place after someone has reported a sexual assault. Identity and confidentiality must also be respected if required by the victim according to the new policies. The new procedures require that the school does not discriminate based on sex regarding programs and activities within the school, the institution has a Title IX coordinator to oversee and comply with Title IX regulations, and grievance policies are in place. Under the grievance policies fall more requirements including fair and impartial investigations, “prompt time frames of the complaint process,” “notices of outcomes to complainant” (9), and steps towards prevention of the harassment reoccurring. Finally the prevention programming and discrimination portion of the letter calls for prevention programs to include new student orientation and training for resident advisors, coaches, athletes, and school assemblies. The programs are to include definitions of sexual harassment and violence, the school’s policies pertaining to sexual

harassment and violence, and disciplinary actions for when the policies are not followed to the school's standards. This section also calls for an update to policies following sexual assault cases and taking measures to assist the survivor to get medical, emotional, and other help following the assault. New materials such as posters and flyers defining sexual violence and harassment are encouraged to be distributed and posted around the school in visible areas.

Programs at other schools bring students together from all social groups to educate them on matters pertaining to sexual assaults, form support groups for survivors, and advocate for changes regarding sexual assaults at their schools. National programs and organizations include national ones such as It's On Us, Green Dot, and RAINN (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network) among other smaller scale programs specific to each campus. Each program tries to bring together college communities from Greek members and athletes to administrators and faculty to advocate for changes within sexual assault policies, aid and safety for survivors of assault, and better prevention and education programs schoolwide.

There have been other policies put into place in schools to combat problems that coincide with sexual assault and the culture surrounding it including binge drinking and Greek life. Many colleges have enforced stricter alcohol policies banning hard liquor, kegs, and social drinking at sporting events to combat the number of sexual assaults related to alcohol (McGarvey). While large athletic teams labeled as "revenue sports" (Kimmel) and fraternities have reputations as being the main perpetrators of sexual assault, some Greek organizations are stepping up to combat sexual assault on their campuses. Fraternities recognize the labels following them regarding assault and many are partnering with prevention programs such as Green Dot and It's On Us to educate the rest of their community on safer sex and consent. (Horowitz). The College of Saint Benedict took action when designing its new student orientation so that it catered to their

school environment and set the goals of being able to cultivate “awareness, education, engagement, and action” (Wooten, Mitchell 143).

What’s New at Ursinus College

Following my research, I have proposed a new program design, structure, and script for the new student orientation program for sexual assault prevention on campus. The proposed script is comprised of both monologues and scenes. The pieces were adapted from the old Ursinus Program “My Story Doesn’t Have to be Your Story,” the [Un]Spoken Maine Program, and the *Out & Allied* anthology. I pulled specific pieces to highlight topics regarding sexual assault and misconduct for college-age students including: healthy and unhealthy/abusive relationships, consent, rape, LGBTQ identities, stalking, dating violence, bystander intervention, and safer sex practices. These topics all fall under the sexual assault and harassment umbrella and are the most common to occur on college campuses. Some of the pieces are lighter and more comedic such as those about safer sex practices and healthy relationships while the more intense pieces do not hide or soften the harsh realities of rape and abuse. The script is structured in a specific order so that the pieces flow from one topic on healthy relationships and sexual violence prevention to the next without too much heavy narration between pieces.

Please see “Program Pieces” for a synopsis of each piece of the performance as well as a description of why the piece was chosen for the proposal.

The structure for the program was modeled off both the [Un]Spoken Maine Project as well as the program of an American-based theater troupe “Speak About It,” geared towards high school and college students. Both programs use theater to educate students through monologues, poems, scenes, and question and answer sessions following the performance. Each program has a

collection of student-written pieces that are performed to better connect to the audience of college-age students. The topics discussed within the proposed program were also modeled after The College of Saint Benedict's and Saint John's University's orientation programs that include the following information: "characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships, confidential reporting, definition of consent (what it is and what it is not), frequently asked questions, how to make a campus report, how you can help, reporting to law enforcement and the court, sexual misconduct policy and procedures, website resources" (Wooten, Mitchell 146).

The new Ursinus proposal, if approved, will be performed by theater majors and minors and directed by Professor Meghan Brodie who helped create and lead a similar program at the University of Southern Maine. By having a student-run and performed program we will be able to better connect with the new students and have a more relatable performance with issues specific to college students. By having theater students perform the proposed student-written program, we can achieve a more realistic and polished program to which audience members can relate. While the performers themselves will not be trained in sexual assault and misconduct response, they should be upstanding members of the Ursinus Community and wish to help educate others on this topic. A long term goal of this program proposal is to have the student actors trained in sexual assault, statistics, and resources to guide the new students after the performance is completed in case new students seek them out for support. Peer Advocates will be at the performance during orientation week to help students who may be triggered by the performance. They will also share facts throughout the performance, lead a question and answer session, and ask the new students scenario-based questions on how they would react to experiences similar to those in the program.

For the Future

As this program is performed for future incoming students, my hope is that it changes to reflect the culture and students that attend Ursinus College. Throughout time the pieces can and should be updated to fit the issues that need to be addressed at the college pertaining to sexual assault. The topic of sexual assault on college campuses is ever changing with new information, statistics, and methods in reporting and this program should be included in these changes.

Policies within the government will also change and this program needs to reflect and adhere to the changes in policies. As with all the changes implemented by the “Dear Colleague Letter” in 2011 regarding policy changes and reporting, the program will need to be kept up to date with similar changes as well, but if procedures and standards were to be overturned or abandoned by future Department of Education officials, I would hope that Ursinus would continue to follow the procedures and standards outlined in the original 2011 “Dear Colleague Letter” to make Ursinus a safer place. As this program becomes better known within the community I hope that more students will submit their own personal pieces to be used within the presentation to fully represent our students and their relationships to the subject of sexual assault.

This year we will also be having a set of questions for incoming students to answer before the presentation to test their knowledge on definitions of consent, bystander intervention, and statistics on sexual assault. After the performance we will then retest them on the same questions to get an understanding of how well the program material was retained by students and if they were able to grasp the take away messages. I hope that this material will help to shape future programming throughout the year to focus on the areas that require more attention based on the student questionnaires. The peer advocates will be able to focus more on programs

throughout the school year that will educate and facilitate conversations surrounding the questions in the questionnaire as well as the question and answer session after the performance.

By having a general knowledge of consent and bystander intervention as well as other terms that fall under sexual assault, the students attending the performance will be better equipped to make informed choices, be safe, and help others. Through this program proposal, I hope to educate incoming students and the Ursinus community as a whole to be able to identify the positive aspects of relationships as well as the negative ones that need to be addressed. This program will help empower students to stand up for themselves and others when a problem arises and will give them the resources needed to make a change. From Wellness Center counseling, to peer advocates, to reporting, this program is able to show students the many ways Ursinus College is prepared to support survivors. Resources will be outlined including names and numbers of each resource and this information will be distributed to students.

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Program Pieces

- *Rules*
 - This piece shows the romantic progression of a couple from their first date until their relationship begins. It includes how the women met and first went out and transitions to them talking about dating and bringing up concerns both have before becoming official. They set ground rules with one another as they become more serious within their relationship. It is important within this program to show what a healthy relationship looks like to contrast the unhealthy relationships portrayed in the performance later on.
- *What's Wrong with Me?*
 - This monologue looks at a narrator who admits she is ready for a relationship but not sex. She describes how important the emotional connection to a partner is for her and she does not want a causal relationship based only on sex. She struggles with this idea and wonders if she is different for wanting this rather than following others into the hook up culture. By including this piece we recognize that not everyone enjoys or wants causal sex or is very comfortable with the idea and that it is okay to reject casual hookups.
- *Vibrator*
 - This lighter piece shows the discussion four friends are having while studying as they take a break to talk about vibrators and masturbation. One of the girls is extremely uncomfortable with the discussion and tells her friends she is a virgin and does not masturbate like the others. It brings normalcy to this topic that

women almost never talk about in public as well as comedic relief to those who feel uneasy talking about sexual health.

- *Last Night*
 - This story retraces two friends' night out at a party the night before and the aftermath over the next two days after a sexual assault took place. One of the roommates was incapacitated and went home with a man who raped her after the party. She asks her roommate why she did not stop either one of them as she knew she would not have been comfortable with the situation and does not remember much. This piece is important to include because it includes a real life and very common experience of a college woman who does not remember the night before and was too intoxicated to give consent. It also includes the lack of bystander intervention and the emotional distress her friend suffered because someone did not step in to stop or check in with the friend.

- *To the Boy Who Yelled "Faggot" Outside the Library*
 - This piece is a letter-as-performance to a fellow student who yelled homophobic slurs to a gay man right in the middle of campus. The author questions the definition of "faggot." He also addresses the normalcy of using this slur in today's culture and how infrequently it is corrected by others. The author asks why those around him did not stand up for him and focuses on the lack of bystander intervention again. This piece was included as a reminder of sexual harassment and assault within the LGBTQ community, a largely underrepresented group but one that is often the target of assaults and harassment. Bringing attention to the issue of the physical, verbal, and emotional violence to the LGBTQ community is

important to include in a performance about sexual assault and violence because it does not just happen to heteronormative individuals, but to all.

- *My Story*

- This shorter piece/ poem tells the story of a student when she went abroad and was raped by her boyfriend. She talks about her emotional distress almost a year later when someone touches her wrist in defense class and she cannot handle the physical touch. She explains that no one came to her help when she yelled that her boyfriend was assaulting her because it was her boyfriend. This story was included to demonstrate that even in committed relationships, consent is still needed regardless of how serious a relationship is. It shows that in relationships, assault can occur and that asking your partner to say yes to sex is still part of a relationship. It also exemplifies a lack of bystander intervention when no one intervenes when she cries out for help.

- *But, He Said He Loved Me*

- This piece is a monologue that discusses a serious high school relationship that continued into college. Over time the woman noticed controlling and abusive elements of her boyfriend's behavior that eventually turned into physical violence. From limiting contact with others to not allowing outings besides with each other, the boyfriend was abusive and then hit his girlfriend on two separate occasions, finally prompting her to end the relationship. The girl eventually gets a no contact order and counseling to heal from this relationship. This piece was included to show how abuse can be a progressive thing and to highlight real and common examples of abuse. It also shows the struggles and strength of the

woman for leaving her boyfriend but also how difficult the choice was, as well as the options for protecting herself after the relationship ended.

- *The Apartment*
 - This piece again shows the gradual progression of an abusive and controlling boyfriend. When the college-age couple moves in together, the woman starts to notice her boyfriend's controlling behavior and harsh words. Eventually with the help of a friend she leaves her boyfriend and threatens to call the police to get him to stop harassing her at work. This piece is important because it highlights the use of bystander intervention as well as more subtly abusive behaviors. Showing that the woman was able to leave the abusive environment of her own home might encourage those in similar situations to step up and leave or motivate bystander intervention by others.
- *New Age of Sex in the 50's*
 - This light and comical piece is used as an ending to discuss safer sex practices with the audience in a way that addresses sexually transmitted infections, condom use, and consent. The game show host guides the man through choices and ways to ask the important questions during sexual activities. This piece was included to show that asking for consent, using a condom, and practicing safer sex are critical. The piece highlights ways to and not to ask those important questions.