Gilbertson Hasse-Lanier

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In this podcast we talk with Jessica Gilbertson and Dustina Hasse-Lanier with the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, about prevention and education work in LGBTQI communities.

Q: What drew you to prevention?

Dustina: So I’ve been in the field for about 11 years working with sexual and domestic violence survivors and I would say that brought me to prevention was the survivors themselves. I have a friend who’s in cancer research and we often joke that we would love to put ourselves out of business.

Jessica: I guess I started kind of down the path of prevention before I was even calling it prevention work. As an activist in different social justice movements, even before I entered into anti-sexual violence as a career, I was really clear and recognized the way in which undoing all of the power and balances and forms of oppression were parts of ending violence and ending forms of oppression and so if sexual violence is a form of oppression which we view it is, then I see the work of prevention being anti-violence work or anti-oppression work which is kind of where my heart and soul lies in this work.

Q: What is your vision for how sexual violence will end?

Jessica: Well I think just to piggy back of what I talk about a lot in terms of prevention work and ending violence is when we look at sexual violence as a form of oppression that all of the different work that activist are doing and social justice workers are doing and social work and anti-violence work, all of the pieces we all play together in unraveling those root causes of violence and root causes of oppression is the way in which we are ending all forms of oppression and in doing so we’re going to end sexual violence because it’s not going to happen on its own.

Dustina: I also think there’s big pieces of ending sexual violence that have to do with holding accountable, truly accountable, perpetrators and also talking about true consent. And when talking about true consent we have to talk about sex positivity and talking about having really engaging, enthusiastically engaging conversations around consent. And as a movement we actually have to talk about sex. We have to lift that taboo and that silence around sex to be able to end sexual violence.

Q: How do you see norms around communication, boundaries, and consent influencing sexual violence in LGBTQI communities?

Dustina: I think that LGBTQI communities have been absolutely doing consent work for a lot of years. They have been doing norms change work and social norms change work for a lot of years. One of the things that we talk a lot about in our workshop is that in the 70’s queer communities were talking about consent. They were talking about negotiating consent. And I think a lot of that comes from this place of not having a lot of understanding in the media or even in any kind of way around what sex is even for queer people. I know growing up as a queer woman, like nobody told me what sex was, right. And so there had to be conversations and negotiations around sex which kind of created this beautiful thing around consent because consent became a part of the everyday conversation. If you were getting intimate with somebody it was always about the multi-layers of what consent was within that.

Jessica: We had lots of really interesting conversations with the different kind of experts, if you will, who are doing negotiation and consent work in the LGBTQ community where they would talk about you know queer sex has much less definition kind of in our culture, partially because it’s not talked about. But also there’s an idea a lot of times with straight sex or heterosexual sex that it is a certain type of contact and we kept hearing the kind of language around when we’re talking about queer sex, we’re talking about a whole menu of options here. And so we have to talk about what we’re in to to know what we’re even going to do and so I just think that the kind of movement toward about having to talk about what we’re going to do means that we have learned naturally skills of negotiation and yeah I’m into this but not so much into this and we don’t necessarily call it consent work but ultimately that’s what’s happening in those conversations.

Dustina: Absolutely, and the other thing is like in the 80’s a lot of the gay male movement around HIV was around safer sex. But often in these workshops around safer sex they were also doing a lot of consent work, right. They never used the word consent. They’d talk about things like the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence talk about shame reduction work. Like really, when I wake up in the morning after an intimate night with someone I don’t want them to feel ashamed and I don’t want to feel ashamed and whatever work we need to do to make sure that doesn’t happen, needs to happen.

Jessica: And we heard a lot about shame reduction from all of the different folks we’ve talked to in communities, we talked to a lot of folks and did some research on early BDSM and queer women and the way in which there was all sorts of conflict among feminist and among lesbians and around what is acceptable types of sexual contact, and can BDSM be truly consensual when at its core there are conversations around these are the things I can do and will do and these are things that are physically impossible and these are things that are emotionally impossible and the negotiation that happens around that. And also connected to that was undoing the shame around being able to talk about our fantasies, the things that we want to do, and again like Dustina mentioned sex positivity, being able to even talk about sex and the good stuff that comes along with that. And we discovered that a lot too in our conversations with trans communities and gender non-conforming folks who are sort of tasked with being able to talk about their bodies around this is what these parts of my body is called, these are the types of contact that are acceptable to me, and the ways in which trans folks have been tasked with that explanation and how much danger there is around conversations like that and so some of the organizing that communities have done around talking to partners and those folks who are having contact, sexual intimacy with trans folks. So, everybody’s talking about reducing shame and the other side of that being of course having good healthy sex that we’re all feeling good about the next morning and while it’s happening.

Q: How is prevention and education work in LGBTQI communities unique or different from the general work of the movement?

Jessica: I think that probably the most, in our interviews again and research with different communities around prevention work and specifically consent work within queer communities, what we saw is that folks are not necessarily referring to this as anti-sexual violence work or even consent work that really what people are talking about is how do I learn to, or how do we as a community learn to talk about what we do want and that goes hand in hand with what we don’t want and how to have conversations and negotiations and be in a space where we can not only feel fulfilled but fulfill someone else. We heard a lot about that much more than I hear kind of in mainstream conversations around sex - how do I find out what the people I’m engaging with want and are going to enjoy and how can I bring that. And so that’s completely in line with prevention work and consent work but they’re just not calling it that. Or we’re not calling it that.

Dustina: The interesting thing, like Jessica said, the interesting thing about the communities that we interviewed was this piece around doing almost sometimes the exact same work that’s being credited now as consent work in the mainstream movement but not calling it that, you know. I mean you talk about the kink community and safe, sane, consensual has been since the 70’s. That’s been a coined phrase within the kink community and now I’m hearing it in mainstream just sex ed conversations and I just find that really interesting, right, cause their not being credited for that work, right. They had the hard conversations, they did the work and their not being credited for that, but they’re still using it and building on it every day and have been for 30-40 years.

Q: What is the one thing you want people to take away from you NSAC workshop?

Dustina: I think that to collaborate and to credit where information is coming from is the most important thing that you can take away from our workshop. That there is this ridiculous notion that we all have that you need to recreate the wheel every time you get into that doing prevention work and so often the ground work has been laid by marginalized communities over and over again. And what happens is either nobody makes that collaboration and they recreate the wheel, or they make that collaboration and then they co-opt that information and I think that that’s sad because I think that there are some building bridges that need to be done that haven’t happened because of that piece, that co-opting piece.

Jessica: And I think that we’re seeing more excitement in the mainstream sexual violence movement around talking about the type of sex we want to have, sex positivity. How can we have consent conversations, how can this be more engaging and exciting as prevention work in terms of getting people in the door, in terms of changing the social norms that allows silence to continue, that allows power and balance to continue. And so what we’ll be offering to people who attend the workshop is look at the work that’s already been done, consider the ways in which these norms were changed or created within our communities. And then how can that be then transferred into the mainstream anti-sexual violence movement and then again just like Dustina was saying, how to credit that. We come across this so often where in ideas are co-opted by mainstream movements. As an activist I saw this all the time where people with more privilege or power in the system got all the credit for doing the work that had been done for a long, long time by different marginalized communities. And so, that’s definitely a connection that we want to leave people with as they attend our workshop and go forth and talk about the sex that we want to have and how to have more healthy relationships and learn how to build on consent and negotiation work and see the way in which it’s been done and successfully.

Dustina: A the reminder that sex is fun. Sex is good, we all like sex. Let’s talk about that. I think so often when you walk into a sexual violence workshop, everybody gets all you know negative and yeah there’s some serious stuff we’re talking about but let’s also talk about the good, right. I’m not going to get somebody, some teenager to come talk to me about sexual violence. But man I can get a teenager to talk to me about sex, you know. Like they want to talk about it, they want to know more. And I think most communities do.

Jessica: And we’ve seen a lot of success around the culturally specific LGBTQ anti-violence programs and the ways in which they do outreach and prevention work that is about coming to workshops and talking about different types of safety or the benefits of negotiation. And when you outreach in ways like this, you’re going to get more people in the door and the more people we get on board to end sexual violence, the more we can be connecting people to be doing all sorts of social justice work and that of course puts us out of business, which is a goal.

Dustina: Personally I just want to see more workshops about you know, 10 great ways to use condoms. It’s true, I do.

For more information on the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, please go to [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org) or call toll free at 877-739-3895. The NSVRC was founded by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape and is supported in large part with funds from the Centers of Disease Control.