

RISE: Restructuring Institutions in Service to Equality

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Centre County Women's Resource Center



- Culture, real culture, is radical and transformative. It is capable of expressing what lies deep within us. It gives words to our reality. It makes us feel as well as see. It allows us to empathize with those who are different or oppressed. It honors mystery.

- Chris Hedges

RISE



SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS in COMMUNITIES of COLOR and the LGBTQA COMMUNITY

To raise awareness and increase the systems and community response
to sexual assault in communities of color and the lgbtq community

April 15th, 2010 from 7-10pm
Heritage Hall, PSU campus

Shani Robin, Jasmin Rakestraw, Michele Hamilton of the CENTRE COUNTY WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER,
community members, students, and allies



**National
Organization
for Women**



Objectives

- Share the history of the creation of RISE
- Discuss the importance of this type of outreach and participatory healing program
- Learn about barriers to our services for survivors of sexual violence in “underserved populations”.
- Discuss social construction of Gender, Race and Disability

Tim Wise

- “We can’t all ‘just be individuals’ because no one is just that, nor has anyone ever lived as such. There is no such thing as an individual human being abstracted from their social context.”
- “To speak of the individual as if their various group identities did not exist or...not to any degree that matters- is to speak of an abstraction.”

The Inspiration

- Three counselor/advocates at the CC Women's Resource Center – Jasmin, Michele, Shani
- Three community activists
- Beyond Beats and Rhymes
- No! The Rape Documentary
- Toni Morrison- “Being a Black Woman Writer means my world is larger not smaller. Understanding both the marginalization and agency of African American women means truly understanding the dynamics of this society.”

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- Women of Color face complex, complicated relationships with law enforcement, the criminal justice system and communities due to the intersection of gender, race, nationality and class.
 - Gender is raced; race is gendered.

Recent example

- Judge Baugh , Montana
- Stacey Rambold the perpetrator
- 14 year old victim, Cherice Moralez
- 31 day sentence because the victim was (according to Judge Baugh): “older than her chronological age” and “as much in control of the situation” as her rapist.
- This is a combination of sexist and racist rape myths.

Original Plan

- Combine our experiences of victim service providers with community outreach
- Provide a creative space for survivors of color to express themselves
- Healing for a social action perspective
- Poetry slam or conscious hip hop

Our Resources

- Pennsylvania State University
- National Call to Action Statement –Women of Color Network
- Ni-ta-nee NOW, National Organization for Women
- Diversity within the CCWRC and Centre County
- What resources do you have in your community to do outreach and events?

Roadblocks

- Time and balance
- Lack of long term community ties
- Getting “buy in”
- Finances
- Competing activities

The New Plan

- Bring in Outreach and Education
- Support of Women of Color Caucus
- Justice League-Activate
- Penn State Cultural Conversations
- Center for Progressive Leadership

Barriers to advocates of color integrating outreach work

- Lack of community within the organization
- “Not the face” of the agency to outside partners
- Lack of mentorship/training
- Lack of community advocacy by the agency
- Outreach to Communities of Color, immigrant and LGBTQ communities may not be part of an organization’s strategic plan

Chen Guang

As you immerse yourself in creating something, you find you have to face yourself. Through yourself, you think about the future of the country and the past.

“Isms Travel in Packs”

- “Black women are seen as ‘hot in the pants’, tough, strong, able to withstand a lot physical and emotional abuse, unfeeling... I find this demeaning, degrading and unproven. Yet I find myself constantly trying to disprove them.”
- Celcilia, 52 Hartford, Connecticut
- From “Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women”

Statistics of Sexual Violence in Communities of Color

- Among African American women
 - 40% reported unwanted sexually contact before the age of 18
 - 20% of nonfatal violent crime victims
 - 33% of all Domestic Violence victims

Statistics on Sexual Violence in Communities of Color

- Among Asian American women
 - 12% reported experiencing Intimate Partner Violence
 - 16 % reported being a victim of sexual assault
 - 27 % reported emotional abuse

Statistics on Sexual Violence in Native American Communities

- 44% of Native American Health Service Emergency Rooms reported not having an accessible protocol, or trained personnel in place for a sexual assault response
- U.S. Dept. of Justice estimates that 1 in 3 Native American/Alaskan Indian women will be raped or sexually assaulted in her lifetime.

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- The insistent focus on immigrant and Third World women as victims also leads many to deny the existence of **agency within patriarchy**, ignoring that these women are capable of emancipatory change on their own behalf.

Factors that Increase Vulnerability to Sexual Violence for Women of Color and Immigrants and LGBTQ Communities

- Stereotypes and historical misrepresentations
- Public policy
- The need to constantly shift
- Non diverse agency service plans
- Higher levels of housing and employment discrimination and increased levels of incarceration
- Gender essentialism

Barriers to Services: Victims of Color/Immigrant Victims

- Communication barriers (linguistically and culturally)
- Lack of outreach to victims in communities of color
- *Mistrust of service providers based on history (personal, community and historical precedent)*
- Racism and xenophobia (from institutions and individuals)
- *Criminalization of men of color/immigrant men*

Women in the World

- One half the population
- One –one hundredth of the property
- One- tenth the income
- One-third the labor force
- Two-third the working hours
- Centre County Women's Resource Center poster from 1981
- Why

How Gender is Socially Constructed

- Androcentrism- male as rational and normal; female as other
- Male as citizen- the effect on how laws are created and women are treated
- History of jury duty and women

Gender essentialism

- The belief that there are innate, essential differences between men and women; that people are born with these traits and that they are natural to the sexes and universal.
- Contributes to racism- Page Act
- Contributes to homophobia and transphobia through heterosexist notions of how relationships should work

Gender Fluidity

- *Gender variance is a normal part of human expression, documented across cultures and recorded history. Non-binary gender diversity exists throughout the world, documented by countless historians and anthropologists. Examples of individuals living comfortably outside of typical male/female identities are found in every region of the globe.*

Social Construction of Race

- James Baldwin-”No one is white before he/she comes to America.”
- Race has significance inside systems (personal, communal) of privilege and oppression.
- White people define what is normal and what issues are “universal” and “marginal”.
- This effects what issues are discussed and policies championed in victim services.

Sexual Violence in LGBTQQII communities

Common fears of LGBTQ survivors include:

- Not having their experience labeled as rape/sexual assault
- Having their experience sensationalized or minimized
- Being perceived as the perpetrator
- Being treated in a homophobic/transphobic manner by police, medical personnel, rape crisis centers

Additional causes of trauma

- Social violence –homelessness, dislocation
- Institutional violence- incarceration, forced commitment
- Attacks to health and emotional wellness- lack of access to healthcare, assistance (SNAP and TANF)
- Attacks to financial security- pay inequality; housing and job discrimination
- Attacks to citizenship- restrictive voting laws; “we must protect the middle class”; mass deportation of undocumented immigrants; disrespecting tribal authority in legal issues

What RISE gives survivors in our communities

- Language to talk about oppression (in their own voice)
- Safety to show that we are not alone as individuals or groups
- Taking our issues from the “margin to the center.”
- Teaching each other to change the systems of oppression not just conform to them
- Destroying the myth of meritocracy- If you are not “equal” ; it is because of you.

Bringing in the Community

- Susan Russell- PSU Cultural Conversations – immigrant conversations
- Lambda Theta Alpha Latina Sorority
- Rainbow Roundtable
- Caribbean Student Association
- Undertones

Working with the Performers

- Trauma informed methods
- Community involved methods
- Participatory
- Strengths based

The CCWRC's Role

- August to October 2009 (choose dates; reserve room; design posters; BUDGET)
- November 2009-February 2010 (post flyers and posters; update whole staff; security; clean up)
- March and April 2010 (reconfirm everything; gather volunteers and performers)
- Afterwards (reflection and evaluation)

Logistics

- Food-seeking donations
- Music – combining multiple talents and inspirations
- Advertising-
- Set up

The RISE Participants (Audrey, Jasmin Rakestraw-coordinator)



RISE participants at Harvey Milk March May 2010 (Michele H. at far left)



RISE coordinator Shani Robin



Lessons Learned/Impact

- Greater comfort in sexual assault counseling
- Better ability to work with groups and in the community
- More assurance as a public speaker, activist
- More connection to Penn State and the community in general
- The need to break out of conventional counseling methods
- Greater understanding of intersectionality and sexual violence

How Your Organization Can RISE to the Challenge

- Support diversity with your organization on all levels
- Understand how activism relates to service provision
- People and organizations really want to be actively engaged in your agency- open up new ways to do that.
- Give survivors of sexual violence multiple opportunities of expression and healing
- Every community has places, a school, library, welcome groups that can be used as an area of connection

Daily Collegian April 16, 2010

- **Caitlin Burnham**
- With a deep, soulful voice, Terri Parker sang about rising above obstacles at the RISE program Thursday night.
- Parker was just one of many performers and speakers who showcased their talents in hopes of raising awareness of sexual assault in the colored and LGTBA communities.
- Singers, dancers, poets, musicians and speakers performed at RISE for about 100 students and community members in the Paul Robeson Cultural Center's Heritage Hall
- "I hope people are inspired to take action. I hope people walk away saying 'Wow, I did not know this has such an effect on my community,' whatever their community happens to be," said Shani Robin, one of the directors for the program and a legal advocate at the Center County Women's Resource Center.
- Robin gave the opening remarks and said that while there are many reasons people stay silent about domestic and sexual violence, it does not help solve the problem.
- "There is a place for outrage. If harnessed into action we can change the world," Robin said. "The fight begins tonight. In solidarity we rise above the silence."
- Parker, who works for the resource center, said she hopes people leave inspired by her song.
- "It's an encouraging song," Parker said. "I hope someone is encouraged to rise above their circumstances."
- Jeremy Wilkinson (senior-sociology) performed a poem he wrote titled "Mural Support." He said the poem was inspired by events in his life and the lives of people close to him.
- The poem contains lines like, "Your voice is baby pink/ A wolf in sheep's clothing/ A hawk with peacock feathers/ I'm exploited by your exterior."
- Michele Hamilton, one of the directors for RISE and a shelter counselor at the Center County Women's Resource Center, said the event was personal for her because she was a victim of abuse during her time at Penn State.
- "I know what it's like to be on campus and feel very isolated and not know there are resources available," Hamilton said.
- Alexis Pitcairn (junior-Spanish and health policy and administration) said she hopes that a conversation about abuse, sexism and racism spurs from the event.
- Organizations like the Justice League and the National Organization for Women, among other groups, had set-up
- tables around the room to give out information about their organization.
- **More about [Rise](#)**