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Everyday Feminism Podcast Episode 11 More Than 'No Means No': Strategies for Engaging Sexual Violence Prevention on College Campuses, with Jamie Utt¹

SANDRA: I'm Sandra Kim, Founder and Executive Director of Everyday Feminism, and today we're talking with Jamie Utt about strategies for engaging sexual violence prevention on college campuses. Jamie is a sexual violence prevention education and diversity and inclusion consultant based in Minneapolis. Welcome Jamie!

JAMIE: Thanks; I'm so glad to be here. I'm excited to be able to have this conversation with you today.

SANDRA: Yes, and this is a super important conversation. As we know, we've been seeing in the news sexual violence is something unfortunately really prevalent on college campuses. A lot of colleges have not been very good in how they responded to cases that have come forth from students. I've seen statistics like 1 in 4 women and 1 in 8 men are being assaulted while in college and these facts are just astounding! So, I kind of want to learn a little bit, what had you get involved in working in sexual violence prevention?

JAMIE: For me it was...I got into the work sort of out of necessity for myself in some ways. It was a very personal entry into sexual violence response and prevention work. When I was in college, I had a few different friends come to me seeking support after they had been assaulted. I felt like I wasn't well equipped to help them. I felt like I didn't know the right things to say, and I didn't know how to make sure they had what they needed. I felt in some ways actually, that I was doing it wrong. I was really lucky to go to a small liberal arts college called Earlham College and at the time it had a nationally recognized program for training sexual assault survivors advocates. So it was peer advocates who were confidential resources. Essentially we were there, we were on call as support for students who were sexually assaulted, or other members of the community who were sexually assaulted. In going through that training, it not only equipped me with the tools that I was looking for personally, but it helped me to find my place in the work, in that over time I realized that the direct work of sexual assault survivors advocacy which was so vitally important was really hard for me to do long term because it's really sad work.

I really admire survivor's advocates who are able to do it for a long time because it's so important. It's the kind of thing that really requires a lot of self-care, because you're helping people carry this tremendous burden and hurt. So after my time working as an advocate, I wanted to stay involved in sexual violence response and prevention so I started getting involved

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more on the educational side of it. Nowadays I work with colleges to help them improve their practices and improve their education around sexual violence prevention and response.

SANDRA: Wonderful, we definitely need more and more people becoming aware and becoming involved, so that's great to see that trajectory that you have in your own personal experience from having friends to where you are now, where you're supporting colleges and universities across the country. This has obviously been a problem for decades now. More recently, we've seen a lot more colleges and universities making headlines about how poorly they've been handling sexual assault on their campuses. Can you tell us a little bit why you think it's getting more attention now than in the past?

JAMIE: Yeah, I think there's a lot of things going on, and some of them are really exciting, as to why there's more attention in the media. As far as the research is indicating, there hasn't really been a decrease in rates of sexual violence on college campuses, but as you mentioned it is getting more attention. There have been more cases in the news. I think among the many factors that are going on, more than anything else, at an unprecedented level right now, survivors and their allies are getting organized. They're really really getting organized. At institutions all over the country, whether it is Amherst College, Swarthmore College, or the University of North Carolina or the University of Southern California, survivors are organizing with one another. They're sharing resources, and they're taking it to their institutions to hold them accountable. It's really incredible to see.

You're starting to see online communities, whether it's in Tumblr or on Facebook, where students are sharing resources, about how you go about making a Clery Act complaint, or this is what your rights are under Title IX, or this is how you create a student advocate program. It's really cool to see the way that even though the Internet can bring about a lot of nasty, yucky stuff, it also can be a really incredible tool for organizing. You can see that in the way that survivors are getting organized. And there's this really cool resource I encourage people to check out called "Know Your IX," and I think the website is knowyourix.org. One of the things that's cool about that resource is it essentially came out of survivors who were sharing resources. A number of survivors and their allies who wanted to make sure that people knew their rights under Title IX and that people could make sure to hold their institutions accountable. That's one of the aspects that I think is important.

But then there's also this more institutional reason that I think there is more attention. Part of it has to do with that is often referred to as the "Dear Colleague" letter, that came out in April of 2011, which was a letter by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. It went out to institutions all over the country and essentially it made the bold statement that hadn't been made this way from the Federal level before, that sexual harassment of students, including sexual violence – this is a direct quote – "sexual harassment of students, including sexual violence interferes with student's rights to receive an education free from discrimination." That really shined the light for college campuses that, okay, the Federal government is paying attention, we will hold you accountable to your responsibilities under Title IX and the Clery Act, so that was a big change. But then, in addition to that, one thing that is really encouraging for

me, is that when I work with institutions in the United States I'm seeing more and more that there are people in leadership positions in colleges and universities that don't simply see things like the Clery Act and Title IX as liability issues; but they really see them as things that they care very deeply about because they really truly want to keep their students safe. I think that's one of the successes that we've seen of feminism, is helping get people into leadership positions who are thinking about sexual violence and the need to protect all students, which is incredible to see.

SANDRA: That really is! For folks who aren't terribly aware or haven't been reading the articles highlighting how certain campuses have been not responding well and how some are shifting in their responses. Can you breakdown what are some common or traditional responses campuses have had towards sexual assault and what's problematic about and why you're trying to shift to another framework?

JAMIE: Well, what you can end up seeing is a wide variety of things. I think when institutions which traditionally has been the way of approaching it, treat sexual violence solely as like a "oh well this is a liability issue..." then to some degree what they end up doing is sweeping survivors and their stories and their experiences under the rug, and not giving them the services that they need. So, for instance, the University of Southern California (USC) recently got in trouble because it was reporting sexual assault as "other types of crime" in order to not make themselves look so bad. And that's what they were essentially accused of and what they were found accountable for, is reporting them incorrectly. As a result, survivors weren't getting justice if they were seeking justice, they weren't getting support and help in healing, and perpetrators were essentially getting off without any consequences. It was creating and still is creating, incredibly unsafe environments on college campuses. The responses that approach it in that way, are the ones that I think in some ways are more traditional and the work that needs to be done. More and more we're starting to see institutions that are responsive, because like I said the administrators want to be more responsive, and in other cases students are standing up and saying this is unacceptable, we need campuses that protect us.

SANDRA: You've written a number of articles about addressing sexual violence on campuses for Everyday Feminism. You speak about two different approaches, preventative and responsive. Can you explain the different between them and the importance of each one?

JAMIE: One of the things I think is really importance to stress is you have to have at least a two pronged approach if you're going to address sexual violence well on a college campus. The more common approach, which tends to be more robust on college campuses is the more responsive approach. Meaning, that after sexual assaults have taken place, this is how we are going to respond to what happened. And the essential goal of the response is, or should be, supporting a survivor after an assault and holding perpetrators accountable – legally, and/or within the student code of conduct – making sure that perpetrators are held accountable. Its far more straight forward in the sense that it's like "ok this happened, how are we going to respond in X, Y, and Z ways to this terrible act that's happened?" So it doesn't necessarily require a huge change in culture and climate on campus, it just requires more of a change to

“okay so how are we going to enact our policies?” In some ways, it’s seen as the easier thing to tackle, even though I don’t know that it necessarily always is. It’s seen that way, that it’s easier to tackle a responsive approach. And it’s important that we have good responsive approaches that support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable.

The other side of the coin is prevention, preventative approaches. It’s a lot harder to figure out what that should look like. Preventative approaches require a lot of different things that get at culture and climate in institutions. So, changing how we talk about assault, who are the survivors? Who are we including when we talk about survivors? Are we including all people who might be survivors and making sure that not only are we serving female identified survivors, but we’re also serving transgender survivors or male identified survivors? Are we making sure there’s resources for lesbian, gay and bisexual survivors and so on and so on.

It also has to do with raising awareness, making sure that there’s strong education programs about what sexual violence is. I think especially young men get really messed up messages about what actually is sexual violence. And I think that was one of the things that was really notable in the Steubenville case. Whether or not they were telling the truth, the two young men who were convicted of rape in Steubenville said we didn’t think of this as rape, we thought of rape as being one thing and this was something different. So education and raising awareness is important.

And then the other side of just understanding of what sexual violence is, is consent education, and making sure that people know that consent is vitally important in every single relationship, even non romantic relationships its important that we’re thinking about how we interact with each others bodies and personhood. But also that we can make consent really engaging, we can make it fun, and we can make it sexy, and those are other things that we can do. And then also, prevention involves training bystanders to see themselves not as somebody who will stand by, but as “upstanders,” somebody who will stand up and intervene. There’s really great programs out there for that. My favorite is the Green Dot training program, the website for that is livethegreen.com. It’s a great training program for helping people have tools for knowing what it looks like to stand up to violence in their communities and to prevent it.

There’s also aspects like transforming masculinity. Men working with other men on campuses, since men are the primary perpetrators of sexual violence, the vast majority of sexual violence is perpetrated by men. Talking to men about what healthy relationships look like, what inclusive masculinity looks like. And then finally another thing that I just think is really fun to talk with college campuses about is what it looks like to transform party culture. A strong percentage of sexual assaults that happen on campus can be traced back to parties in one way or another. So creating party culture where kids can have fun, where young people can go and have a great time, but is also geared towards prevention of sexual violence is within that. So the idea of prevention, of preventative approaches is harder for campuses to tackle, because its big, and sometimes it feels amorphous even though there are a lot of things you can do. It feels a lot harder and a lot scarier, and frankly, it requires more resources; it requires more time and more money to do it, so institutions aren’t being more proactive aren’t going to do it.

SANDRA: I think what stands out for me as I listen to you about the range of approaches, particularly preventative ones is that sexual violence exists on a spectrum. I think we often think about rape as the only type of sexual violence that can occur, but there's this whole range from healthy masculinity, how we interact and get consent, from people we are in relationships even, to how we engage with friends, our partners, around "littler things" perhaps, but that's all around this concept of making things consensual, making things safe. It's not only restricted to this one type of sexual violence. Is that correct?

JAMIE: Yeah, I use the term sexual violence and don't refer simply to rape, because so often, especially when you look at legal definitions, rape is a really restrictive term that only refers to certain types of sexual violence, and sexual violence can be a lot of different things. I was working with some middle school students recently and they were talking about how its really common for them to 'pants' each other, to pull each others pants down in public. That is a violation, that's sexual violence in the sense that it is violating that person's personhood and that person's privacy and that person's desire to expose themselves in their own ways. It has to be seen as more than that, and that's where you get into the whole idea of culture and climate, that you're looking at how can we encourage healthy relationships all over our campus? In the public spaces, in the bedrooms, in our bathrooms, whatever it might look like.

SANDRA: The other thing that stands out, as we are talking about this with students, and we help them stand up and feel like they have a right to stand up to the pantsing, or to feeling intimidated sexually or to street harassment that they'll have practice of saying no in those arenas that are a little less scary for them potentially, and when it comes to the more physically intimidating and dangerous situations such as rape, they'll have more practice perhaps. If we don't teach them to stand up to micro-aggressions, how do we expect them to stand up to the larger ones? I think it's really great to see you working at it from more of the everyday aspect of intimidation and violence to what we traditionally think of as being awful. They are on a spectrum but they can all create this environment where a person feels very unsafe and can influence their life from a lot of different ways.

JAMIE: Precisely.

SANDRA: Obviously, in college campuses there is a huge party culture. As the first time people are away from parents, there's a lot of alcohol involved, and as you mentioned alcohol is very much involved in people who commit rape. I think the statistic that I've hard is that around 74% of perpetrators are under the influence when they commit assault, and then 55% of survivors on college campuses were also under the influence of alcohol. And the gut reaction has been to tell women primarily to not drink, and then blame them...

JAMIE: And watch their drink, and protect...and all that kind of stuff.

SANDRA: Yeah, I mean I got very clear instructions from my sister before I went to college about all these things about how to protect my drink to prevent this. And thankfully we're

seeing a shift, to not just saying don't get raped, we're seeing more don't rape, and that the responsibility is thankfully being more acknowledged on the perpetrator. It's still kind of negative messaging. I know you talk about transforming party culture in a positive way that keeps it fun and is actively trying to keep it safe. What does that look like? What do you mean by that?

JAMIE: Well I think it's really important that most institutions these days recognize that our students are partying. I don't think there's any institutions where students aren't partying and aren't partying hard. The important thing to recognize is that students should be able to go out and have a good time. They should drink if they want to drink if they're so inclined, they should dance, they should hook up if that's what they're looking for. All of those things have room to be okay and healthy, but we have to create parties that are simultaneously really fun but also preventative of sexual violence, considering that a strong number of sexual assaults are related to party culture and related to alcohol. So often the approach is one that is blaming and shaming of people who have been drinking who were assaulted, and instead we need to shift the culture.

What I often do when I'm working with colleges is that I work with the students and I ask them to start by telling me what are all the characteristics of a really awesome party. That's where we start, we get a list of all of the things that make a party the best party that you would want to go to, the one that everybody is going to show up for and have a really good time at. And then, talking about the concept of positive sexuality. The definition that I use when I'm working with students in referring to positive sexuality is "of or relating to positive, affirming consensual sexual relationships, characterized by open, honest communication and attention to the needs and desires of oneself and ones partner." Within that definition, generally students I work with think that sounds awesome, because it means you're going to feel really amazing, your partner is going to feel really amazing, this is positive, affirming, awesome sex, essentially. And that might be positive sexuality in thinking about kissing someone, or it might be any sex act.

So then I ask them what does positive sexuality look like? Lets brainstorm ideas of what positive sexuality looks like based on that definition and I ask them to come up with all sorts of ideas of what positive sexuality looks like. Then I ask them to reconcile those two lists. How can we make sure that parties are really fun like this list over here says, and also encourage sexuality if people want to partake in any form of sexuality, from the range of holding someones hands or dancing with somebody to any sex act that they might be interested in. How can we make sure that it is encouraging of positive sexuality. And what's really cool about that process is that students come up really awesome and creative ideas, about how we can encourage positive sexuality through our party culture. So the point here is not that by transforming party culture that's going to be a one and done, like that solves sexual violence, that's not going to happen anymore because we created this checklist of what happens at our party. Instead we try to create safer environments through our parties, and get people thinking about positive sexuality and healthy sexuality.

I take them to some research, which is done by A. Ayres Boswell and Jones Z. Spade, and they published an article in *Gender and Society* in 1996 that was a really interesting article. It looked at parties that are higher risk versus lower risk for sexual violence. They did it through the lens of fraternities and collegiate rape culture. What they did was they tried to link reports of sexual violence to specific parties and look at ok what were the characteristics at that particular party, what was it like? And then also asked people about parties where there is not an association with sexual violence.

They came up with a list of characteristics that make a party higher risk versus lower risk, for sexual violence. I think one of the things that is interesting about this research, is that essentially what it is says, is that we need to find ways to encourage people who are at parties to humanize each other. To look at the other people in the party as human beings, autonomous human beings, because it's a lot harder to look at a person as an object and sexually assault that person if you've had a whole conversation and humanized them. Now I'm not saying that there are not predators out there who still wouldn't commit sexual violence, but it might help solve a certain segment of sexual violence that is occurring that has to do with terrible messaging around sexuality and consent and healthy relationships.

Some of the things that their research talked about is, if the music is so loud that people can't have conversations with each other, that creates a higher risk for sexual violence because people can't humanize each other. If there's only room, if there's only like a dance floor, and there's no room for people to stand around and talk or sit around and talk, or those kinds of things then it would be higher risk for sexual violence. It looks at when drinking is spread out over time and more casual, versus when drinking is binge oriented. It looks at some things which I think are really interesting, which I've had a bunch of young women on college campuses...something that I never even would have thought of but that they pointed out before I showed them the research, is that something that would encourage positive environments on our campuses would be clean restrooms; and having a women's restroom that has an attention to cleanliness. Something that they actually highlighted in the research is that a higher risk party would have less attention to cleanliness in general, but particularly have a filthy women's restroom. As opposed to where there's attention to cleanliness particularly of a women's restroom. And I think what that communicates is that the people who are throwing the party care about the well-being in simple ways of the people who are there.

So the idea here is that it's not meant to be a one and done that fixes the whole problem, but its meant to get at that culture and climate stuff that I was talking about. If we are intentional about throwing a party, if we are intentional about creating structures that get people thinking about positive, healthy sexuality, and also in passive ways encourage people to humanize one another, that can lower the risk of sexual violence. And then you pair that with education, and you pair that with some of the response oriented stuff, and you pair that with bystander intervention training, then you start to see a change in the total environment on campus.

SANDRA: That's really fascinating, particularly around the bathrooms. I can very much see that happening...especially when there are these kind of smaller, micro-aggressions that can

escalate that are done in public, when that kind of behavior is normalized and nobody bats an eye because it's not in their consciousness or through the messaging that this kind of behavior is okay. When you intentionally create an environment where you are caring, you care about the people are coming to the party, and you have an active orientation about how might we make this safer and prevent sexual violence. That's kind of understood in the culture of people who are coming and entering that party space, when they see something that might cross that line, they're much more likely to flag it, notice it, do something about it. It makes a lot of sense. It might not be the obvious approach that people on campus administration might want to take, but focusing on shifting on what is considered normal and what are people's expectations going into parties and how they're going to be treated, that makes a lot of sense. Now those things are anomalies and are going to be flagged more instead of being like "oh yeah, what do you expect?" That's really powerful.

JAMIE: One of the things that that research highlights is that one of the things that makes a party a higher risk for sexual violence is when there's tolerance for jokes or conversation or behaviors that degrade women. When I talk to men on campuses doing positive masculinity stuff we talk about well why is that happening and how can we change the culture so that's not acceptable. Because if jokes, conversation or behavior that degrades women is challenged, or where people express discontent when that is happening, that is one of the characteristics of a lower risk party. It's all about trying to convince more people to stand up and do that. The other thing that I thought was really cool is that students started coming up with their own ideas. One of the ones that was my favorite, I was at the University of Arizona, and students were talking about how if there's someone at the door whose checking ID's...what if in order to get into the party you had to demonstrate in a fun and creative way what it would look like to ask for consent. And I was like "yes! That would be hilarious, and fun and sexy!" It's meant to be something that lightens the mood but also gets people thinking about it. It's really fun to see the ideas that students come up with.

SANDRA: And I think that's a really important perspective to have, is that people, particularly students, the vast majority do want the campus to be safe for folks. There's wonderful ways to engage with them so they aren't just being told here are the rules and regulation policies and blah blah blah. To have this be effective it has to be an ongoing conversation with the very people who are being impacted by sexual violence. So I think that approach is really great. You've mentioned a lot of different approaches. What might a campus look like if they're doing a really good job at preventing sexual violence and responding to it when it does happen? In a nutshell...

JAMIE: Again you take those two things separately. One, when thinking about response, approaches that listen to and believe survivors; and put survivors in the drivers seat, giving them autonomy to decide what is the best course of action moving forward, whether they want to press charges or they don't, and giving them autonomy. But that also make sure that any punishments that are doled out or consequences that are doled out are just and fair punishments that actually hold people accountable. That's important on the response side because so often you see institutions that don't do that, they don't hold people very well

accountable. There was a story at the University of Colorado about a student who was convicted within the campus judicial system of sexual violence and he had to write an essay.

On the prevention side, I think any time an institution is willing to put in the time, money and energy into those things that we were talking about before, into prevention that is changing how we talk about who's assaulted and what assault looks like, consent education and raising awareness, actually training a large percentage of the student body in things like the Green Dot program and bystander and upstander programs, having conversations about transformative masculinity. Those things are...if an institution is committed to doing that, you will see a shift in culture and climate because its about totally transforming how we think about this problem, and not treating as a problem of oh well, you should have changed how you dress and you shouldn't have been drinking or whatever, which is the standard approach to sexual violence.

SANDRA: Wonderful. If there's one take away that you want our listeners to have, what would it be?

JAMIE: The thing that I think is most important is that we recognize that leadership on this issue can't be seen as a top down thing. We can't just expect our institutions to be responsive, and we can't just expect our student government or whatever to handle the problem. That's whats been exciting about those survivors getting organized that I mentioned. So the one take away that I would say is we all need to see ourselves as agents in this problem.

We need to realize that our social spaces, when we think about our parties, and our campus events, those social spaces are actually the spaces on our campus where we need to be more engaged than anywhere else. So often we think about, well I'm going to engage in class, I'm going to use all of my brain energy on all of my studies or whatever and then this weekend I'm going to forget about everything and just let loose. And that's great to do; we need to be able to forget about everything, to some degree at certain times. We also need to recognize the space that needs our leadership and our attention more than anywhere else, is where everyone is saying I'm forgetting about everything and letting loose, because we're not thinking about each others livelihoods and we're not thinking about each other's autonomy, and we're not taking care of one another. So that's my one take away – if we think differently about how we take care of one another, by recognizing that we need to be more engaged in our social spaces more than anywhere on campus, that is going to have the power to make a big difference.

SANDRA: Thank you Jamie, thank you so much for being on the show and for all the work that they do. We'll definitely be including links to all the resources that you've mentioned in our show notes. If people want to learn more about you and your work where should they go?

JAMIE: If you're interested in my work I'd encourage you to check out my website www.jamieutt.com, and to look at some of the programming that I offer. But also check out Everyday Feminism. In addition to all the writing that I've done on there, there's all kinds of really cool resources for transforming rape culture and building more positive and inclusive

environments. So whether its looking at my writing on there or any of the other authors, there's so many good resources there.

SANDRA: Definitely, we'll be including some links to those articles as well. If you liked this podcast please let us know by giving us a rating on iTunes. If you know someone who works on college campuses around sexual prevention or students who are interested in getting something happening on their campus definitely don't forget to share this with them as well. So thanks again for listening to the Everyday Feminism Podcast.