Maier

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In this podcast we talk with Ashley Maier, Prevention Program Coordinator at the Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force, about branding prevention.

Q: What drew you to prevention?

A: So, my story about what drew me to prevention actually isn’t anything big and exciting for me. It’s really my community psychology class, freshman year in college, I learned this story which I think some preventionist will find funny that this really worked for me. But it was this idea of a river, and there were bodies floating in a river and the way my professor described it was he really talked about in the terms of psychology and the different types of psychology so for example; a clinical psychologist would look at those bodies and say bodies why are you in the river. Let’s figure out why you’re there and everything. But community psychologist is going to go ahead of that river and figure out why are those bodies falling into the river in the first place. And I just immediately just got so excited and thought, I want to go to the head of the river! I want to go there! I want to, you know, rebuild that bridge and figure out why bodies are falling in the river. So, it was kind of a funny thing I think we talk a lot about that analogy, that river idea, and sometimes we talk about that being over used. But I have to say, when I hear it I always think about the experience I had freshman year in college and how that got me into this work.

Q: How do you think sexual violence is going to end?

A: I think sexual violence is going to end when we promote the opposite. When we have a world that is full of sexual health, healthy behaviors, well-being and that really when we think holistically about this whole idea that, you know, me and those like me are better and more important than you I think if we can overcome that and instead it might sound cliché but really focus on equality and equity and the fact the might does not make right, really looking at shifting norms so just because you have power you’re able to take power doesn’t mean that it’s ok. And so where we really have a world that reinforces these positive attitudes and behaviors and it’s that thing that we talk about a lot is we know what we’re against, what are we for and if we can really promote that to the extent where what we’re for is really what becomes cool then I think that’s going to change the world.

Q: How do you see effective branding furthering prevention efforts?

A: I see effective branding furthering prevention efforts through really what I’ve heard others call kind of the science of cool. It’s the idea that we figure out what individuals, what’s cool in a community, in a sub culture within individuals and we use that. And we really honestly you know kind of sell which is not necessarily a work I want to be using but I think that’s what I mean, the positive behaviors that we want to see happening and branding does that. Branding really identifies what is it, that aspect of that individuals identity that makes up that sub culture that people really resonate with and how can we use that to make the positive behaviors that we want to see happen really fit with their identities. So they therefore then do those behaviors.

Q: Can you give some examples of successful social branding strategies?

A: I can, and you know what’s interesting for successful social branding strategies is that a lot of what I see as successful, I’m not necessarily a fan of. So, I think things like the Keep a Breast Foundation, so we’re getting outside of the sexual violence prevention and the sexual health promotion movement, they have really branded this idea of I heart boobies which I’m not necessarily the biggest fan of that. But what I have seen actually going into the sub cultures with whom that really works is that the folks really identify with that whole branding of that issue and it’s not for sexual violence prevention and I would also argue it’s not necessarily for breast cancer prevention. It’s branding awareness, really. But people have just taken that on, particularly some sub cultures I know. I was recently at warp tour and it was everywhere. I mean, it was the coolest of the cool was to have an I heart boobies bracelet. So, you know, I had some issues but it’s really successful because they figured out, good or bad, what people identify with and what they wanted to say hey this is me, and they used that for their cause. I think other successful strategies, I’d really look to some anti-tobacco marketing and one organization, and I actually believe they’re a marketing firm, they’re called Rescue Social Change Group and they do a lot of anti-tobacco work. And they really, really always start with identity research and so I’ve seen some of their campaigns and they change based on the state, based on the community, based on sub-community and sub-culture. And so one example would be this “Why Do You Think” is a current campaign that they have going on in a community where they really went in and figured out ok, you know, what is the identity of this particular sub-culture we’re working with, what’s the message that’s going to work, and lets work with them to craft something that’s going to work. And they have numerous examples of that, particularly around tobacco prevention where you know they’ve done some work in Las Vegas, I think at one point you know they had like a crunk party that was part of this thing. So it’s really working with what is the identity here and how can we work with that to really take these positive behaviors they want, in that case not smoking, and make that core to who these people you know in this community or sub-culture are.

Q: What’s the first step to building a brand?

A: I think the first step to building a brand is identity research. I really believe that it’s kind of that assessment piece, is who are we targeting for the behavior change and what’s core to who they are. You know, we really have to know our audience. It’s the same principle I think for other work, you know - giving a presentation. Same thing, who is our audience here because it’s not going to work if we go in kind of with this kind of inside out approach like we’re in our organizations and we’ve decided this what you need and we’re going to take this out to you. You have to do that research. Who is it we’re working with? Whose behaviors are we trying to change? And what is core to who they are because that’s the only thing that’s going to get us there.

Q: What is one thing someone can do to take part in sexual violence prevention?

A: You know, I think a common answer for what is one that someone can do to take part in sexual violence prevention is everyone can stand up and speak out and these really individual things. And I think that’s great and I think that building community. Things like building community, strengthening relationship, things that we might not think, “Oh, I’m talking about sexual violence and how it’s bad right now”, right or “I’m promoting healthy behavior.” Certainly those are very important. There also this piece of simply building community, it’s about community health so work to bring people together in your community. Work to strengthen relationships. Work to make businesses and organizations in the community a true strong part of that community, really is sexual violence prevention work because it’s really working toward community health.

For more information on the National Sexual Violence Resource Center please go to 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 for Disease Control and Prevention.