

UI speaker: We've taught men to rape and not call it that

UI campus safety week addresses sexual violence on campus

Samantha Malott/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

The problem with sexual assaults on college campuses is most people don't realize when they are actually taking place.

That is the argument Dr. Keith Edwards, a national speaker on diversity, social justice and college men's issues, and founder the prevention organization Men Ending Rape, made at a presentation Tuesday night at the University of Idaho during the UI Campus Safety Week.

"The problem is the miseducation of hook-ups and sexual encounters," he said. "We have literally taught men how to rape people and not call it that."

According to statistics referenced in his presentation, 1 in 4 college women report surviving rape or attempted rape, and 84 percent of those women knew their attacker personally.

"Stranger rapes do happen, but they're a very small percentage," Edwards said.

Instead, the main issue is the game society has created out of intimacy and getting what one wants, he said.

It's like a stoplight, he explained. Green means go, red means stop and yellow means slow down. In reality, everyone thinks yellow means "speed up and get through it," and sexual encounters are seen the same way.

Yes means yes, no means no and maybe means try harder, Edwards said.

"What we've been taught is if you're not sure, go really fast," he said. "Lack of communication is a disaster."

The difference between rape and sex is informed consent, which can only be achieved through communication, he said. Sexual encounters are not going to be how the movies or TV show them, that is impossible, he said.

Consent must be given at every step of the way, unambiguous, affirmative and freely given, he explained.

"If you have to convince someone to be with you, that's a big red warning sign," he said. "We live in a rape culture, we just don't call it that. It is everywhere, and when it is everywhere we stop paying attention to it."

On college campuses the environment presents the ideal opportunity for the line to be blurred between what one person thinks is the consent, while the other doesn't.

"If you're drunk or high, you're not a good judge of how drunk or high you are, let alone someone else," Edwards said.

People who are young, mentally disabled, drugged or drinking cannot legally give the informed consent needed to define that line, he explained.

"We know that men rape," he said. "If we didn't know that men rape, we wouldn't be telling (women) how to protect themselves."

Women have been taught from a young age how to protect themselves from sexual assault. They are told to not walk alone at night, to not set down their drink and to carry their keys ready to defend, he said.

Men, on the other hand, have been taught they need to constantly defend their manhood, and degrading women is one of the easiest ways of doing so, he explained.

"We teach people that how you prove your manhood is by propping it up," Edwards said. "We see men engaging in behavior they don't even want to just to seem more manly and puff up their manhood."

But every man is perfectly capable of caring for women beyond their mother, grandmother, sister or girlfriend, he said.

"Men rape, that is a true statement. All men rape, that is not," he said. "I will never know what it is like to be a woman afraid walking through campus, but I do know what it's like to be feared."

Edwards said having someone afraid of him makes him feel little, nauseous, confused and angry.

"My anger is at men who do rape and make that fear rational," he said. "It's important for us to realize that women do not want to be afraid."

The evidence does not show that the number of sexual assaults on campuses are decreasing, it instead indicates they are actually staying the same, he said.

"I am not optimistic, but I remain a prisoner of hopefulness," Edwards said.

Optimism requires evidence that things are getting better, he said. Hope doesn't.

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