

Students rethink abusive partners

Workshop has youths asking who's at fault in Rihanna beating

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The Journal News

PORT CHESTER — About half way into a dating violence workshop for teens and college students yesterday, the presenter asked how many of the approximately 50 participants believed the alleged beating from her boyfriend and fellow singer, Chris Brown.

At least a dozen raised their hands.

They are not alone.

In an informal poll reported by the Boston Globe on Friday, nearly half of the 200 Boston teens interviewed said the attack on Rihanna was her fault.

The high-profile assault may reveal some startling attitudes among young people, but such assaults are clearly not societal anomalies.

The intricacies of the Rihanna-Brown case were highlighted during the two-hour afternoon workshop yesterday at the Carver Community Center in Port Chester. The session examined what is a healthy relationship and what is an abusive one.

"Abuse has no race, no race, ethnicity, no socioeconomic status," My Sister's Place teen counselor Elke Perez said to the group. "That's why that happened to Rihanna despite the fact that she has money and confidence."

Perez was among three employees from My Sister's Place — a Westchester-based agency providing programming and aid to teens, battered women and their children — who facilitated the session, "Are You in a Healthy Relationship?"

The event was presented by the Westchester Alumnae and Pi Lambda chapter of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority in partnership with the Omicron Iota chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, the Carver Center, the Westchester County Youth Bureau and My Sister's Place.

Sharee Stephens, co-chair of Delta's program planning committee, said they had a successful domestic violence workshop last year and wanted to continue helping teens through their annual day of service. Stephens said it was happenstance their workshop coincided with the Rihanna-Brown event.

"But it's beneficial because we're looking to use it as a teachable moment," Stephens said.

Both Sade Amazan and Narissa Black, sophomores at New Rochelle High School, said they certainly learned lessons yesterday. Before the gathering, both teens agreed Rihanna was responsible for the assault.

"I thought that it was Rihanna's fault because she probably did something to make him mad," said Amazan, 15. "But after listening today, it changed my mind."

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Saw Mill River.

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Workshop focuses on abuse, blame

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story — both the victim and the abuser and how they both feel."

But, Amazan added, Rihanna should not be let off the hook because the singer allegedly had said Brown had hit her in the past. Reports continue to surface that the two are still together.

"She should have said something before," Amazan said.

Throughout the workshop, participants were engaged in several activities including figuring out who was to blame in a story that involved a boyfriend spitting on his girlfriend after a friend told him she had talked to her ex. The boyfriend had "ordered" the girl not to talk to him. Another game of "hot potato" allowed the group to speak out on what they would like to see in a relationship. Some answers included, "trust," "loyalty," "communication" and "respect."

The organizers also shared some staggering statistics such as that one in three teens report knowing someone who has been physically, mentally, emotionally or "digitally" abused by a partner before they graduated high school.

The workshop also explored "gender stereotypes" and posed some tough questions to audience members: asking them to agree or disagree; for example, on whether your partner has a right to check your text messages.

"We always hear 'Why didn't she leave?'" Perez emphasized. "What we never hear is, 'Why didn't he stop beating her?'"

Perez stressed abusers want "power and control," that they test boundaries and use tactics to keep someone in fear and trapped.

The gathering ended with ways to assist friends in unhealthy relationships. Perez advised to never tell a friend to stop seeing someone, but rather to remind them it was not their fault.

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