

THE STORY OF JANE

PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE:

The purpose of this exercise is to address possible stereotype's when thinking about sexuality in all it's forms. It also addresses the emotional motivation when social workers respond to cases of sexual harassment.

TIMING:

30' or more, dependant on the time you spend for the discussion.

NEEDED MATERIAL:

Copies of the cases.

HOW TO CONDUCT THE EXERCISE:

The teacher gives the following case to all students.

Jane explains:

He regularly attacks me, for instance he demands that I lower the sound of the computer and then raises the volume of the TV. Or he demands that I pay the bills, for his expenses as well. And if he doesn't find things to his liking, he starts to shout, but also to hit. He doesn't simply hit my shoulders, no, also my belly, my face... He even gives me a knee bar in the groin. He knows well enough where it hurts.

Talking about it afterwards doesn't work, I always get the blame, I've always done it. He reverses the facts, calls me a liar, turns me into the bully. He keeps bringing up old matters to show that he just reacts to what I do, even if he started the row this time.

When he becomes aggressive, I just want to go for a while, to wait till it's over. But then he goes to stand in front of the door, so that I cannot leave. Or he throws stuff at me, vases, glasses, he even threw a knife at me. A couple of times I have finished up in the hospital... but no one believes me, I train in martial arts, he is so friendly and is always ready to help anybody. I am being labelled a liar when I tell what he does. And for me it's so difficult to admit it or even to talk about it with someone else...

The teacher then asks: "Which emotions does this testimony raise with you?" The teacher emphasizes that – for this exercise – it is important to really feel and express the emotions the case raises with the reader, even if these emotions lack subtlety. "This is not the time to be politically correct... but to be expressive!" The teacher notes the reactions on the blackboard (or simply rephrases them).

The next question is: "what would you like to do when you are confronted with this testimony?" And: "how would you deal with this situation?"

Now the teachers hands out the second case:

Ian (or Jan) explains:

She regularly attacks me, for instance she demands that I lower the sound of the computer and then raises the volume of the TV. Or she demands that I pay the bills, for her expenses as well. And if she doesn't find things to her liking, she starts to shout, but also to hit. She doesn't simply hit my shoulders, no, also my belly, my face... She even gives me a knee bar in the groin. She knows well enough where it hurts.

Talking about it afterwards doesn't work, I always get the blame, I've always done it. She reverses the facts, calls me a liar, turns me into the bully. She keeps bringing up old matters to show that she just reacts to what I do, even if she started the row this time.

When she becomes aggressive, I just want to go for a while, to wait till it's over. But then she goes to stand in front of the door, so that I cannot leave. Or she throws stuff at me, vases, glasses, she even threw a knife at me. A couple of times I have finished up in the hospital... but no one believes me, I train in martial arts, she is so friendly and is always ready to help anybody. I am being labelled a liar when I tell what she does. And for me it's so difficult to admit it or even to talk about it with someone else...

The teacher again asks: "Which emotions does this testimony raise with you?" The teacher emphasizes that – for this exercise – it is important to really feel and express the emotions the case raises with the reader, even if these emotions lack subtlety. "This is not the time to be politically correct... but to be expressive!" The teacher notes the reactions on the blackboard (or simply rephrases them).

The next question is: "what would you like to do when you are confronted with this testimony?" And: "how would you deal with this situation?"

The teacher now explains that the latter case is the real case. Teacher and students try to find any possible differences between both cases.

SUGGESTIONS:

For the exercise to work in the best way, the teacher needs to choose the names of the cases concerning his/her cultural background: Jan and Jana, Jane and Ian (names that have the same stem).

For this exercise, the teacher needs to be very attentive for the feelings of safety within the group. The case shown, may connect to earlier experiences of students, and therefore may be painful for students to read and talk about as well as listening to the thoughts of fellow students. However, everybody should feel the freedom to express their emotions and thoughts!

BACKGROUND:

Students react in a different way to both situations. The first case will probably raise more intense emotions. If this is the case, then the teacher can indicate that both cases are equally harmful. And deserve the same approach and care. This is a possible way to address the risk of stereotype thinking towards sexes when they are faced with aggression.

The second learning goal of this exercise, is to show that we – as a social worker – are not free of emotions when we judge situations and that these emotions may guide our reactions. Emotions like anger, disgust, not believing, are common human emotions, and therefore not wrong to be felt by a social worker. But a professional reaction should not be led by emotions but by our professional considerations, our training, our view on care. Whenever a social worker finds that he/she is being led too much by emotions, he/she should try and find a way of dealing with this within his/ her team, or look for guidance from his/her coach.

REFERENCES: the story of Jan is a translation of a testimony on <https://1712.be/verhalen/id/236/jan>, Consulted on February 25th 2018

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