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compelling testimony and criminal convictions, the closing arguments carried laments from the defense attorney regarding the victims' believability. She argued the girls were not credible witnesses, citing inconsistencies in their testimonies.

This distrust is why many women do not come forward. Owings recently wrote on "The Reality of Sexual Assault in the Cocktail Community" blog: "The thought of speaking up didn't really cross my mind. If I fought for myself or spoke up – as much of my experience in this industry has taught me – I'd be disregarded as dramatic, a liability, emotional, attention-seeking, pathetic, a trainwreck, alcoholic, etc."

Taking action

Of the women Street Roots interviewed who worked in the Portland bar scene, all of them had at least one – some had several – personal stories about being on the receiving end of sexual assault or harassment while working in the service industry. Each of the men reported having at least seen it a few times; one said it was

"widespread and disgusting."

But now, several groups of service industry workers are trying to change that. Bartenders Against Sexual Assault, or BASA, formed in 2014 to stand against sexual assault using education and awareness to train bartenders and bar professionals to recognize these dangerous situations and intervene. Its public Facebook group has more

than 4,700 followers from around the U.S. and Canada, many of whom work in Portland's bar and restaurant industries.

BASA hopes to transform society through things like educating bystanders, compelling lawmakers and believing victims.

"We have a duty in our work environments to watch for signs of sexual predators and take action when necessary," said Stacey Wright, co-founder of BASA. "It's time to end the silence and the shame in the cocktail community. This is how we create change."

The blog about sexual assault was quickly shared in BASA's Facebook group, where it sent shudders through its wide readership and beyond. Perhaps more importantly, it sparked a series of conversations about awareness, prevention and the continuation of victims sharing their stories. The man accused on the site was a prominent individual in the Los Angeles bar scene, who guest-bartended repeatedly in Portland, which is how several Portland women came into contact with him. No one has pressed charges, which is why Street Roots isn't naming him. The victims' message, though, is not simply to harpoon the perpetrator; it is more to shed light on the rampant harassment that occurs daily throughout the service industry.

One of the women wrote on the blog: "We need to continue the dialogue about recognizing, reporting and not condoning inappropriate or illegal behavior. We need to continue this conversation because we have allowed a predator to attack his colleagues

for several years due to our acceptance and celebration of excessive drinking and drug use."

Owings, in agreement, said, "Liquor is a drug. If we're giving someone the legal ability to deal drugs, they should be trained in how to deal with the repercussions."

Alcohol is present in about half of all sexual assaults in the United States according to the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, though the study is quick to point out that these numbers are difficult to determine because so many women and men do not report. Additionally, at least 80 percent of sexual assaults occur between people who know each other. Furthermore, alcohol consumption by perpetrators and victims tends to co-occur, which means both are consuming alcohol in a socialized setting, like in a bar or at a party. As a result, a victim might feel shame and give the perpetrator what another woman on the blog calls "a drunken pardon."

She elaborated: "I keep telling myself that if the person who attacked me had been a stranger, I would have gone straight to the police. But what would you do when your friend attacks you while he's under the influence of alcohol? I pretended it didn't happen."

Wright, of BASA, said she was saddened but not surprised when the blog appeared in the BASA Facebook group.

"When one victim speaks out, it tends to create a watershed moment for others to come forward. Telling our stories creates a space for others; it pushes shame into the shadows where it belongs," she said.

According to Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, 88 percent of workers who experienced sexual harassment said they'd be more likely to talk to their supervisor about it if they had the support of co-workers.

Through BASA and other resources, fed-up servers and bartenders are organizing around the country to foster solutions and educate bar owners and managers in an effort to prevent sexual harassment and assault in the service industry, for both workers and customers.

The Orange County Bartenders Cabinet and Long Beach Bartenders Cabinet in California called for a special meeting on the subject in December. In Canada, the Toronto cocktail community has rallied in support of a sexual assault victim with a protest and campaign called "I Believe Her."

And in Portland, three women – Rosengrant, Vaughn and Danielle Verbus – have created a nonprofit called Not OK PDX that will provide low-cost training to local bars to educate service staff on the dangers and prevention of sexual assault and harassment. They are calling the educational program SaferBars.

'We hit a nerve'

Rosengrant came across the flagship program, Safer Bars, while visiting Washington, D.C., and thought, "Why don't we have this in Portland?"

Safer Bars uses innovative bystander education strategies to empower staff to stand up to sexual harassment and assault when they see it. This empowerment, they believe, will save women from potential aggressors who prey on bar employees and women who have had too much to drink.

"The way I was treated by my peers (after being assaulted) made me snap into perspective. Bartenders feel the need to stay quiet because we're just so subjected to this atmosphere that we internalize it," Vaughn said. "We hope that with these trainings we can not only provide a source of comfort for both staff and patrons, but also build awareness if an issue that has long been ignored for way too long."

A 2014 study from the University of Toronto and the University of Washington found that 90 percent of sexually aggressive incidents involved male initiators and female targets, and almost all involved aggression that was either intentional or probably intentional.

Targets mostly responded with evasion, and staff and third parties rarely intervened, according to the study. The study stated, "Initiators' level of invasiveness was related to the intoxication of the target, but to not their own intoxication, suggesting intoxicated women were being targeted."

The study's conclusion suggests, among other things, that prevention must focus on better management of "highly sexualized and sexist environments of most bars."

The study's lead researcher, Kathryn Graham, told NPR, "There should be training for staff on how to intervene."

This set the stage for Safer Bars, launched in Washington, D.C., in 2013 thanks in part to a \$20,000 grant from the NFL. The NFL, which has faced scrutiny for going easy on athletes who perpetrate assault, has responded by investing in sexual violence prevention initiatives.

"It's a huge, enormous problem, unwanted sexual aggression," said Lauren Taylor, Safer Bars co-director. "Alcohol and sexuality come together to create a culture of closeness among bar staff that often leads to harassment. Safer Bars wants to engage the whole community; we all have a responsibility to create a setting we want to live in."

Once the program began, Taylor said, "we hit a nerve. People want to step in and interrupt but don't have the skills and tools. Once you provide that, they're off and running."

With the help of Safer Bars, Portland's own Not OK PDX has created a curriculum that "should be used as the industry standard," Rosengrant said.

It incorporates educational materials, personal stories and role-playing to raise awareness. Once the staff is certified, the establishment receives a decal for their window and social media pages, as well as posters to hang in the restrooms that establish it to guests as a safe place. Additionally, Rosengrant said she hopes that "people who are creepy will know they are unwelcome."

The women behind Not OK PDX hope their program can help Portland have one of the first bar scenes in the nation where bartenders and servers don't feel like putting up with sexual harassment and assault is just another part of the job.



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KELLY VAUGHN,
BARTENDER, MANAGER AND
CO-FOUNDER OF NOT OK PDX

Not OK PDX training

Bar and restaurant managers and owners who are interested in offering a Safer Bars class to their staff can reach Not OK PDX at info@notokpdx.org to set one up. The cost is \$50.

Resources

Bartenders Against Sexual Assault (BASA):
www.basa.bar

Safer Bars: www.saferbars.org