

# Life

**“i refused to be  
SHAMED  
by my school”**

Words like *slut* get jokingly thrown around every day, but what if the person who said them was hired to teach you about sex? Katelyn, 18, decided to fight back. by ashley mateo

# West Virginia Student Stands Up To School's Abstinence-Only Sex Ed

If someone called you a slut—judging you and challenging who you are without ever having met you—you'd be upset, right? I know I was when Pam Stenzel, a pro-abstinence speaker, gave an assembly at my school on April 7. She apparently told students, "I could look you in the eyes and tell if you're going to be promiscuous," and "If you take birth control, your mother probably hates you." Even just recounting her comments makes me *pissed*. **Who was she to shame girls about something as normal as our sexuality?**

I've always been the kind of person to stick up for what I believe in—it might be why my classmates elected me as student body vice president. So when I was given a heads-up about Pam's extreme views by a teacher the night before the assembly, I went straight to YouTube to see what she was talking about. That's where I came across videos and links to articles where Pam was saying things like "Condoms almost never work!" and "No one has ever had more than one [sexual] partner and not paid [for it]!" Her lectures were so demeaning, **I couldn't believe my public school would let her speak!** My health classes taught abstinence only, which I don't agree with, but it's true—if you don't have sex, you don't get pregnant or catch STDs. But Pam's talks were full of false information and a mean tone that seemed to specifically target girls. I didn't want to sit through someone yelling at me about sex, and I didn't think my friends would want to either, **so I posted about the assembly on Twitter and Facebook and encouraged my classmates to skip it with me.**

The next day, around 200 students and I refused to attend the assembly, but those who went tweeted things like "WTF?" with quotes from Pam. After, I saw girls sobbing in the halls, and people were saying Pam made them feel worthless if they weren't virgins.

I listened to Pam's speech on my friend's iPhone—he had recorded most of it. Even though I hadn't

heard it firsthand, I was fuming. West Virginia, where I live, has one of the highest teen birth rates in the country—clearly, teens are having sex. **Pam's message felt not just wrong but dangerous.** School is where we should learn to make our own decisions, not be humiliated. I decided skipping the assembly wasn't enough—I had to make sure other students didn't go through such a traumatic experience. To get my message out, I contacted a newspaper and told them what had

## “I saw girls sobbing in the hallways.”

happened. It wasn't just about my school; I wanted girls at every school to get a real sex education.

### the fallout

In class the next day, I heard my name over the PA system. My stomach dropped—I'd never been called to the principal's office. It *had* to be about the e-mail I'd sent to the reporter. I was nervous to confront Mr. Aulenbacher, my principal, since he was the one who had invited Pam to speak in the first place.

Turns out, I was right—the reporter had called Mr. Aulenbacher for a comment, and **when I got to his office, he was furious.** He asked why I went to the press without telling him, then he asked how I would feel if he told my college that I had bad character. I tried to speak, but he just kept talking over me, which was so frustrating, I actually started to cry. Finally, I walked out, and in the hall, it hit me—I had worked so hard to get accepted to Wellesley College, my dream school; **would he really try to take that all away?**



I couldn't risk my college career, so I hired a lawyer to help me. Practically overnight, more news outlets picked up my story and my message started to spread. I couldn't believe people cared that much about what I had to say!

### standing tall

Don't get me wrong: Not everyone liked that I was speaking out against Pam's presentation. My town is pretty conservative, and at school people would go silent as I walked down the halls, like they were just talking about me. A football player even *spat* on me. Maybe that's why it was such a relief when Wellesley tweeted me, saying "Excited to welcome you this fall," and alumni and students at the college **started a petition supporting my mission to give girls better sex ed.** More than 2,000 people signed it! Knowing that so many people cared about this issue made me realize, Wow, I could really have an impact on how sex ed is taught!

This experience proved that if you see a problem, you can't wait for someone else to solve it. I'm just one girl from a small town, and I'm proud that I had the power to fight for the kind of education my classmates—and students everywhere—deserve. Sure, it's scary to speak out when you're not sure who will have your back, but **I knew I had a responsibility to stick up for all the girls who were scared or ashamed.** Now I want girls everywhere to know that no matter what the issue is, you can make a difference! 17