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Every Other Day

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Every Other Day

Abstract

There is a problem on our campus—a problem of sexual assault and its perpetuation due to unnecessary silence. Current compulsory education on the topic through AlcoholEdu and First-Year Orientation are often turned into jokes because of course everyone knows not to rape and not to put yourself in a dangerous situation. The concept doesn't seem real until a Campus Safety Alert reports that one of our students has been sexually assaulted. But even then, we get those so infrequently that it couldn't be that much of an issue, right? [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, sexual assault, sexual violence

Disciplines

Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Women's Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

EVERY OTHER DAY

October 30, 2013

TRIGGER WARNING!

"He never told me he wanted to have sex, never asked me if I was willing to have sex with him, and didn't bother to use a condom. I was suddenly acutely aware of what was happening, and I experienced the most overwhelming feeling of helplessness. I felt like I had forgotten how to scream or talk." ~ anonymous Gettysburg College student 2012



There is a problem on our campus—a problem of sexual assault and its perpetuation due to unnecessary silence. Current compulsory education on the topic through AlcoholEdu and First-Year Orientation are often turned into jokes because of course everyone knows not to rape and not to put yourself in a dangerous situation. The concept doesn't seem real until a Campus Safety Alert reports that one of our students has been sexually assaulted. But even then, we get those so infrequently that it couldn't be that much of an issue, right?

Wrong.

The Campus Safety Alerts are meant to warn the community of crimes that ["pose a continuing threat."](#) If survivors are able to identify their attacker, the incident of sexual assault won't be communicated to the student body through an Alert. And even though that information may not be needed to protect us from a "continuing threat" in the sense that the law implies, this limited communication does contribute to the overarching threat of obscuring the problem, silencing survivors, and maintaining communal ignorance.

"I ran out of the house, faster than I ever have and went back to my room. I lay in bed for 2 full days without doing anything. I didn't want to talk to anyone, I didn't want to re-live what had happened. This campus almost promotes sexual assaults. No one cares if it happens, there is no support for victims. I never reported it because of that." ~ anonymous Gettysburg College student 2012

The underreporting of sexual assaults is a fundamental issue, especially on college campuses, where [less than 5% of college students who are sexually assaulted report the crime to the police](#). Survivors are less likely to report their assault when [the offender was someone they know, which is the case in 82% of sexual assaults](#). In such cases, victims fear that they will be blamed for their attack or that friends, family, or professionals will react negatively, so these fears act to further silence victims.

“Two years later, I am still forced to see him every day, and in order to keep my secret from our numerous mutual friends, I have to pretend like nothing is wrong. He still greets me enthusiastically and hugs me, which I pretend doesn't make me sick to my stomach as I relive the most painful experience of my life over and over again.” ~ anonymous Gettysburg College student 2012

These harrowing accounts of [sexual assault that have happened on our campus](#) reveal recurring images of helplessness, voicelessness, and silence precisely because sexual assault strips victims of their voice and disregards their will. Oftentimes disempowerment permeates from the incident of assault into the everyday lives of the survivors, taking away their ability to feel comfortable sharing their experience and bringing their attackers to justice. This in turn permits the continuation of violence.

Gettysburg College provides an [annual report with crime statistics and reported assaults](#), however few students dig through it. But by not knowing this information, we mislead ourselves about the scope of the problem on campus and we add to [the myth that sexual assault only happens in dark alleys](#). If the issue isn't visible, it won't be addressed. If survivors believe they are alone in their experience, they will have a difficult time seeking help. And, if offenders know that the culture of silence protects them, sexual assaults will continue.

What do we know about sexual assault on our campus? Last year, there were [five incidents of forcible sexual assault](#) (twelve if we include sexual harassment and exploitation) reported under the Clery Act. Only one of those was communicated to the student body via a Campus Safety Alert. But official reports severely underestimate the true numbers. If 95% of sexual assaults on this campus are unreported, as is the case nationally, then the actual number of sexual assaults last year was 100.

That's about one sexual assault every other day of the school year.

It's time to take a stand to stop sexual assault on our campus. Let's live with awareness and support, sympathy and understanding. Let's come together as a community during [The 14 Days to End Sexual Violence](#) to break the silence.

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Contributing Writer*

<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/10/30/every-other-day/>