



12-10-2018

In the Wake of a Report

Rebecca L. Holden
Gettysburg College

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Holden, Rebecca L., "In the Wake of a Report" (2018). *SURGE*. 334.
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In the Wake of a Report

Abstract

**TW: Sexual Assault

Earlier in the semester, many students and professors gathered in the Junction from 10 am until well into the evening to watch as Christine Blasey Ford and now Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh were each questioned at length. In all that has happened in the past two years, the looming feeling that spread through campus on this day was the closest rival to that which invaded campus on the morning of November 9th, 2016. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Brett Kavanaugh, Christine Blasey Ford, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Sexual Assault, Survivors, Title IX

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement

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

IN THE WAKE OF A REPORT

December 10, 2018

**TW: Sexual Assault

Earlier in the semester, many students and professors gathered in the Junction from 10 am until well into the evening to watch as Christine Blasey Ford and now Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh were each questioned at length. In all that has happened in the past two years, the looming feeling that spread through campus on this day was the closest rival to that which invaded campus on the morning of November 9th, 2016.

Emails were sent out to students making us aware of the events of the day and inviting us to be informed and watch the hearings. Students were a mix of infuriated, scared, and confused on what to think. As commentary came on during each of the all too frequent hearing recesses, the Junction erupted with discussion. The day marked a painful moment in our nation's history and yet, at the same time, it was inspiring to mark the interest and engagement of Gettysburg College students.

One of the emails the student body received on this day came from the Women's and LGBTQQA+ Resource Center, inviting students to the Resource Center to watch the hearing in a more private setting. This email ended with the following paragraph:

"Regardless of where you tune in or IF you choose to watch the hearing today, please take care of yourselves. Do not feel pressured to tune in because others are...the choice is yours. It is important for all of us to recognize that many survivors of sexual assault are reprocessing trauma they may have experienced each time they turn on the news right now, especially today. Let us be sensitive and aware of the likelihood that someone in very close proximity to us has most likely experienced some form of sexual violence." – Valentina Cucuzza

The message was a comfort for those who have experienced sexual assault, and it was a reminder for all others to be kind and understanding to everyone on this difficult day. For me, it created a bridge from my narrow view on a national story to one that has been unfolding on campus under the nose of many students in the past few months.

At the end of last semester, one of my friends, a First Year student at the time, became a survivor of stalking, fondling, and attempted sexual assault. Unlike so many, she chose to report her experiences to Department of Public Safety. The subsequent investigation took place throughout this semester, leading to intense and continuous questioning by employees at the Department of Public Safety and the Office of Violence Prevention and Title IX.

Sharing details repeatedly has, in itself, been overwhelming for her. I've seen her fight to stay involved in organizations, maintain friendships, and ensure her personal mental health. While this has been stressful and difficult, she still remained hopeful that the investigation would lead to repercussions for the accused.

Instead, I've watched the burden fall squarely on her. Although a no-contact order was instituted, she knows that in order to avoid the alleged perpetrator, the responsibility is hers. She carefully chooses which events, clubs and activities to attend in order to avoid contact with him. I know this must be exhausting, anxiety-producing and nearly impossible as they share a major and class year, therefore sharing the same spaces on a regular basis. As I freely move through classes, social events and new opportunities, I am struck by how constrained and fearful she must feel as she tries to survive at Gettysburg.

If enduring the assault and coming forward to report it is not hard enough, the fear, rumors and constraints are making it difficult for my friend to heal. Having to navigate a semester of coursework and activities should be enough without additional emotional meetings with college officials, being questioned by friends, and the stress of a possible unwanted encounter.

In light of the Kavanaugh hearings, I was struck by the ways in which we do not have to look to a national news story to see the impact of sexual assault. The emotional turmoil that comes with being a survivor and reporting an assault is more than a person should have to cope with, but for both Christine Blasey Ford and survivors here on campus, moving on and living "normally" is nearly impossible.

The hearings ended over two months ago. Kavanaugh is now a Supreme Court judge. Dr. Ford has yet to return to her home or to her work as a Professor at [Palo Alto University](#). She still receives death threats and maintains a private security detail at all times, an expense for which she has had to fundraise. Similarly, after a semester-long investigation, my friend's case has been closed; the accused found not responsible. And, in order to move through college with less fear and uncertainty, my friend has decided to transfer to a new school.

These two examples are not unique. Survivors regularly shoulder the emotional, physical, financial, professional and mental burden long after making a report.

Rebecca Holden
Contributing Writer '19