

How We Move Forward After ‘The List’

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD

As our campus entered finals period a month ago, a list, inspired by the #MeToo movement, was published on Facebook. This list cited many male students, approximately 35 of them, as being complicit in gender-based violence, describing each of their behavior in parentheses next to each name. The list looked like this: “John Doe (rapist), John Doe II (sexual harassment, emotional abuse), etc.”

The Facebook list has spurred further dialogue about sexual assault, patriarchy and sexism on campus. #MeToo, among many efforts in Hollywood and other spaces to empower women to come forth and speak out against abuse they have experienced, puts the list into context.

The time is apt, and long overdue, for society, and our community specifically, to critically assess the ways we tacitly condone sexual assault and violence against women. For too long, women have suffered abuse from men and few systemic steps have been taken to name or address it.

This paper’s fall editorial, “It Happens Everywhere,” touched upon how our community needs to do more to prevent harassment and abuse done onto women. Clearly, sexual assault happens on our campus. Regardless of how we feel individually about the actions of the person who published the list, that choice highlights the broken nature of situation on campus.

Someone in our community felt compelled to compile this list of men who are allegedly guilty of sexual violence on multiple occasions, not to mention all the unnamed men. It’s also important to note that not all of the aforementioned survivors consented to having their stories shared, a fact that demonstrates yet another troubling aspect of the situation.

One common critique of the list is that the publisher did not authenticate claims because survivors who spoke out against the listed men were not named, nor was an accompanying narrative about the incident. It is unfair to ask survivors to make themselves so publically vulnerable and risk their health and safety. They do not need to reveal themselves. They did not ask for the abuse they experienced; they are not required to publicize their pain.

No doubt it was jarring for all of us to see the names of those we know on that list. As members of this community, our indignation is colored by the anecdotes of our friends and peers who say the college's legal system has failed them.

While we understand that the legal framework (particularly Title IX) is central to the operation and responsibilities of the administration, we are frustrated by the way in which it prioritizes careful legal-speak over empathy. Issues of sexual violence are treated like legal complexities, as ambiguous gray areas, and often eclipse the actual experiences of survivors.

Though the school has advocated its judicial processes and reporting procedures, these are not for everyone. There are other roads to healing for victims of sexual violence, including Parton's counseling center and MiddSafe. To speak of one process as the predominant form of support fails to accommodate the nuance of these situations.

The way society reproduces notions of patriarchy and bestows young boys with sexist, problematic understandings of sex and intimacy needs to be part of the framework. These same notions of patriarchy persist at the college, so the college could help students unlearn these insidious lessons through more thorough sex and consent education for first-years. Once such work is incorporated and built upon, then perhaps Middlebury can better support those who have experience sexual violence, and prevent it in the first place.

But the college's orientation program cannot be the only place where this issue is addressed. Students have a responsibility to end rape culture on this campus. We need to set new standards for how we uphold ourselves in our interactions.

We already have such a framework for understanding microaggressions and cultural appropriation. Many of us come to Middlebury without a sufficient understanding of these issues, but we quickly learn what actions or statements are offensive. Calling out these instances is a part of our campus culture. Indeed, we students have the collective power to establish norms and to hold each other accountable when they are broken.

Much of the dialogue surrounding the list has been raw, in part because it affected, directly or indirectly, so many people on this campus. As we decide where to go from here, our campus should move forward with nuance and intentionality. Let's believe and listen to women, acknowledge when and how we're complicit, and work hard to bring justice to this issue.