

Guilford exposes homophobic vandalism, lack of respect

Maybe you received a couple of sheets under your door when you got back from break. Look at them. They represent the reaction of some of your queer classmates

Gwynn Guilford '00

to the homophobic abuse and general ignorance that pervade the Middlebury campus. Our campaign is a call to deliver Middlebury from the morass of ignorance and hate and to help our school evolve into a dynamic and diverse environment.

Many have asked us to define our terms regarding exactly what type of treatment we receive as gay students. Allow me to elaborate:

1) Students using hateful slurs: how many times daily do we all hear the words "faggot" and "cock-sucker?" Well, during each of those five or so times every day, the utterers of these words have degraded our nature, self-respect, and our sense of friendship and love.

2) Petty vandalism: several examples—people have written and drawn graphic obscenities on my whiteboard on several occasions; all of the MOQA posters

put up in September were torn down by late October; prior to the posters' complete obliteration, some students leapt at the opportunity to write "suck my cock" or other such fine suggestions on several MOQA posters in Heppburn. Such practices send a message not only to openly gay people but also to closeted members of the Middlebury community. The message is: gay is not okay.

3) Large-scale vandalism: let's clear the closet controversy up once and for all, okay?

The closet was constructed on the Sunday of Coming Out Week in front of McCullough by queer and ally students, as well as a carpenter from town who volunteered to direct the construction. The closet was a symbol for the "closet," believe it or not, that many of us hide in for quite a while. The artwork and photography displayed inside represented the repressive atmosphere that we all feel inside the closet. People worked hard to build this structure, and people also donated their personal belongings in order better to illustrate what the closet means for

those who have been lucky enough not to have to hide in it. The closet was damaged on Tuesday night of that week, but students stabilized it again. However, on Saturday night, the closet was damaged beyond repair: the windows were smashed, the wood was splintered, and the foundation was permanently ruined. Contrary to what

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many people claim, the perpetrator(s) of this ugly incident were most likely not merely enjoying some drunken stupor and vandalizing the nearest Middlebury structure (which is, of course, a venial sin); all evidence suggests that the closet's destruction was a MALICIOUSLY CALCULATED exploit of the homophobes next door. First of all, the vandalism took place between 4 and 6 a.m., when only one security guard is on duty. Most drunken carousers have long-since passed out by five in the morning. Furthermore, the damage done to the closet was executed with heavier tools than mere hands—we're talking hammers and baseball bats. In any case, this hate crime precipitated absolutely no disciplinary action. The people who destroyed our hours of hard work which we considered to be a valuable contribution to Middlebury made certain that we realized that some charming Panthers out there hate us, and that we have reason to fear for our safety.

4) Physical abuse: although students on a Coming Out week

panel confidently expressed their beliefs that direct physical homophobic abuse was out-of-fashion at Middlebury, this January we had to come to the realization that some things never go out-of-style here. One night, an openly gay Middlebury Union student who was also active in MOQA was attacked and thrown in a snowdrift by three unidentified white males in North Face jackets on South Main Street. The dialogue allegedly occurred as follows: "Haha, we thought you were wearing that dress because you were gay, but...you're just doing that for a party, right?" "Um, no, in fact I am gay." "Well, you know what we do to fags, don't you? We throw them in snowdrifts!" No disciplinary action taken in this case, nor did Middlebury even seek to take action.

5) Ignorance: misconceptions of these events and the general atmosphere at Midd thrive to the point where most of this information is news to many students. It is also worth pointing out that

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members of *The Campus Staff* apparently felt that Thomas Marks' article that blatantly trivialized homophobic abuse in his parody of Professor Richard Cornwall's article represented enough of a common viewpoint to be placed in the features section. Richard Cornwall is the foremost authority on his particular field of micro-economics in the world, as well as one of the most persistent champions of gay rights on this campus. He is a faculty member whom Middlebury students ought to feel

honored to claim as a mentor. The flagrantly disrespectful nature of Marks' callous article proves beyond a doubt the pervasive lack of awareness and concern for queer issues in the student body. This sort of ignorance, however harmless as it may seem, is the catalyst that allows students to partake in homophobic abuse of others.

That's why we queers need a house—by serving as a beacon of visibility, a Gender Studies Living and Learning Center will place gay issues into an arena in which they can no longer be ignored or sported with. The house will be a resource for all students to learn from queer students and allies how to cultivate open, educated minds. Because it will be residential, queer and ally students can serve as readily accessible role models for other students—a luxury not currently afforded by the Middlebury residential system in which the majority of the out students choose to live in the safe spaces found primarily on the

periphery of campus. In a central house like DKE or Centeno, prospective students will recognize

Middlebury's commitment to celebrating diversity and openness. All students will have a resource for learning about issues of sexuality found both in the residents and faculty adviser of the house and in the library and classroom spaces. Students will be able to interact socially with queer and ally students because the house will be allowed to register parties focused on bringing gay (see *Guilford page 16*)

Graff praises student and faculty demonstration

I left the Proctor terrace during Monday's lunch a minute or so behind the mass of excited agitators, and followed them down the hill to Old Chapel. It was a glori-

Sarah Graff '99

ous and inspiring sight to behold on a glorious day: a throng of noisy college kids moving down Mead's great sidewalk in unison, and descending

upon the administration cheering, signs held high. By the time I reached

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the destination of this rally, the lawn in front of Old Chapel, the rebel cry, "Silence is Violence," was quieting, and people started sitting down to listen to each other speak.

Many great things were said in the course of the afternoon. People who had never spoken out before did so, while those whose voices have never been shy rose to inspire the rest of us. The television cameras were there, making the event seem even more unprecedented, and cheers of support followed every brave soul to and from the "podium" that was nothing more than slightly flattened grass in front of us.

I was proud to be a part of the group, more proud than anything else to be witnessing and supporting this outcry for truth on a campus that seems to be so good at passive indifference in a world that is possibly even better at it. People were talking about the

need for more diversity, for tolerance, for mutual acceptance of each other. One girl read a beautiful poem by Adrienne Rich. It felt real; it felt like spring in Vermont, welcomed as something long-awaited and beautiful.

President McCardell showed up after a while and stood on the sidelines with a camera smile. Little did he know he was about to receive a thrashing. He went up

and spoke a few words that most of us probably did not believe or take seriously, realizing the air was full of rebellion and skepticism toward the administration. I

have to admit that I, too, was saying to myself, "yeah, whatever, John." Before he was able to finish and escape to a quiet office, a few of the angriest folks started in on him, some asking what I thought were legitimate questions, others seeming irrational in the anger. I must admit that I don't know the extent to which President McCardell deserves such anger pointed directly at him. I don't know just how insensitive he has been to certain issues of homophobia and racism in the past. But I do know that I agree with those who got up after he left to suggest that we aren't going to change anything if we let our anger undermine our purpose. The second we start spouting off and acting irresponsibly, no one, and especially not our very conservative administration, is going to take us seriously. That only gives them back the power, for then (see *Graff page 12*)

Middlebury lacks rape awareness

This past week at Middlebury has been, in few words, an eye opener. And with the beginning of Take Back the Night Week on campus, we are in for a long haul. It seems to be the general consensus on this cam-

Kate Landis '99

pus that we are exempt from many things; from crime to racism, from unpleasantness and conflict. This may be because we are pushing it all under the rug, hoping to avoid these "taboos" until we enter the "real world." Yet the fact of the matter still remains that in order to prepare ourselves for what we will face beyond the reaches of the Middlebury town limits, we must recognize those bits and pieces of reality while we are still here.

The issues of race have hit home, and with much discussion. Yet I ask us to look at all of the issues that lie under the rug, not as separate, but as a mandate to act. The purpose of this article is to raise an issue that, I feel, is imperative to be understood: the issues of safety on the Middlebury campus for both men and women alike. One in four women will be assaulted by the time they graduate college. This statistic is widely accepted by institutions and individual members of society. Until you hear the voices of women

at the Speak Out, which takes place during Take Back the Night Week every year, do not decide that this statistic, like everything else, escapes rural Vermont or Middlebury College.

This week, April 13-17, is once again Take Back the Night Week sponsored by the Coalition for Feminist Consciousness (check the posters for details). But more importantly, try to understand why we have "Take Back the Night." We as the women's issues group on campus, aim to educate the Middlebury campus on the issues of sexual violence: rape, domestic violence, sexual assault. In a nutshell, we hope to get everyone talking about the fact that sexual violence does, in fact, happen here. It is to get all of us, women and men, involved and send a message to those who have survived these tragedies. In the words of the name, it is to give survivors an empowering experience where they can essentially "take back the night" when they were assaulted.

You may, as we heard many times last year at this time, think that "there's no problem here," but it is just because we are not educated about these issues and do not discuss this problem. This due in part to the lack of programs, large and small, that the College provides. Ask

women who have been followed home late at night from the Science Center, ask the women who jog on Cider Mill Road. Ask a woman who is a survivor of date rape on this campus. Ask their friends, their roommates, their brothers, their boyfriends. This is not just a survivors' issue; it is everyone's issue, and it must be addressed.

We are all victims, men and women, of sexual assault, and must fight together to stop it. Yet Middlebury unfortunately does not provide us with the education to understand how to do this, unless we seek it ourselves. Call friends at other schools, rural and urban, big and small. You will find that more often than not, they have blue lights/emergency phones. More often than not, they have a required orientation program about the issues involving sexual assault taught by peers. More often than not, they have students who are widely known as volunteers trained to handle these issues and who know how to give support. More often than not, the numbers of these incidents are published because the school uses anonymous reporting. Yet, according to Middlebury, we don't need these services because, according to the latest statistics (which took me three tries to actu-

(see *Take back page 17*)