

Middlebury lacks rape awareness

By Kate Landis '99

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 campus 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 is 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 actually see Take back page 17)

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ally get a hold of, although it is required by law that security has them ready and available), rape occurred a mere four times in the past nine years. I think not We have some programs, but I ask, how many of us actually use them or know about them? I am relatively well-informed, and I am still confused.

Some say blue lights may destroy the college community, that they will ruin the aesthetic look of our beautiful campus. I want to know how a single blue light bulb with an

emergency phone in the unpopulated areas of campus will offend anyone. I want to know why a policy that will create a protocol for the process of reporting a sexual assault offense, will preserve the rights of both the survivor and the accused, will provide a detailed outline of what the options are, and will not mandate counseling is intrusive. Most colleges and universities have policies like this, as the Sexual Assault Policy Task Force and the Safety Task force discovered in the past. What happened to our policy which began its formation two years ago, was created to be one of the most extensive policies, and became a mere half column in the handbook that nobody knows about? Read the policy. What does it create that wasn't in place previously? We're not talking radical, we're talking reality.

I ask us all to take a moment and think. Do we want to wait for something worse to happen than what occurred this fall, or for more assaults to happen behind closed doors before we do anything? We hope these things do not happen and that these provisions do not get used. Yet what if the victim was your friend, your roommate, your girlfriend? We need to begin to educate ourselves and look for the signs of danger. We need to stand up against these acts, for it is the only way we can stop them. Silence is not a defense, but an open door. To not openly reject rape is to accept it, and to openly address these issues is the first step in prevention.

So grab a "blue light button" at

the Take Back the Night Week table in Proctor, and read what else is on the table. Attend at least one Take Back the Night Week event. Join us as we walk the campus by candlelight at 8:00 on Friday night. Talk to your friends, and you'll probably find out that more people than you think are affected by this issue. It is not that the blue lights will stop all forms of violence against women, its not that a policy will end the problem. It is that these commitments will bring the issue out into the open, and shows that we, as a community, understand the problem and are willing to act against it. Think about it, because it begins with you.

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