



beyond the green: collective of middlebury voices

Dear Campus:

[trigger warning: sexual and institutional violence]

Dear Campus,

This semester, I decided to organize *middlebury unmasked*, a video-narrative project about reporting sexual violence at Middlebury College. To be certain, this project was deeply personal to me. During my freshman year, I was sexually assaulted at this institution. In the College's eyes, my rape never happened. The College claimed that there was simply not enough evidence, and my assailant received a not guilty verdict.

I'm an activist because I'm trying to make sense of the profound pain that sexual violence has left in my life. I'm an activist because I was unable to seek justice in my case against my assailant, whatever "justice" is anymore. I'm an activist because I know how painful reporting can be. I'm an activist because I want to celebrate consensual sex. I'm an activist because even if I can't avenge my own experience, maybe I can at least prevent sexual violence from happening to someone else in the future.

It is in this context that I organized *middlebury unmasked*. That project was nothing more than a group of people trying to make sense of the violence that they have experienced, both interpersonally as well as institutionally. And let me tell you, the process of making the video was **incredibly empowering**. In order to advertise the project, I did some chalking on the chalkboard wall in the Mail Center. At the time, the chalking contained the go link for *middlebury unmasked*, as well as a brief description of the fact that the project focused on sexual violence at Middlebury.

NOW TWICE, THAT CHALKING HAS BEEN DEFACED BY A MEMBER OF OUR COMMUNITY, WHO HAS OPTED TO DRAW PENISES ALL OVER THE STORIES OF SURVIVORS. The symbolism and hostility of this act could not be more clear.

But as mad as I am at the asshole who drew that two and a half foot penis, I'm angrier at **YOU**. I'm angry that the Mail Center was full of students, and that nobody thought to erase the vandalism of their peer. Sure, not everyone looked up and saw the penis. But I'm sure that some of you did. And rather than you being a good bystander for me, I was the one who had to erase the damn thing. Twice.

I actively choose to meet with administrators and organize video projects and IHH events. When I make those choices, I always take time to build in space for reflection and self-care. But what made those chalk penises so jarring was that I didn't have a choice regarding whether or not I engaged with that image. **Just like I didn't have choice or agency when I was raped in my freshman dorm.**

Being a good bystander is not just about preventing two people from going home together in Atwater on a Saturday night. Sure, that's part of it. But more broadly, being a good bystander is about promoting sexual respect in everything that you do. It's about a community standard. Being a good bystander is about calling out rape jokes and homophobic slurs. Being an advocate for sexual respect is about practicing consent in your own bedrooms. Being a good bystander is about taking three whopping seconds out of your day to erase a giant chalk penis so that I don't have to.

But because you didn't intervene, I was left to erase the penises on two separate occasions. I spent the better part of four days with a shattered sense of community. Because you didn't intervene, I ended up leaving my Spanish lecture in tears. Because you didn't intervene, I spent a week feeling incredibly triggered and dissociated. Because you didn't intervene, I was left feeling **violated by this community**. Because you didn't intervene, I spent this week in front of a counselor rather than in my classroom.

As a self-identified survivor of sexual violence, I should not have had to erase these images. I should not have had to write this letter. But here I

am, because of the costs of your silence. Plain and simple: **when you don't intervene, you're making this campus feel more comfortable to my assailant, and more hostile to me.**

This isn't about "protecting" me; I'm not some fragile egg that needs to be cradled. Far from it. I reject your pity. I wrote this letter because I want to create a community that is inclusive and resists these forms of violence. I wrote this letter because I want to make it painfully clear that **your silence has tangible costs.**

I'm not looking for an institutional response to this harassment; I'm looking to erode the complacency of this campus. That starts with you. And until you abandon your comfort and passivity and take a stand, even in some small way, you are no better than the person who drew those images in the first place. Quite frankly, you're not a whole lot better than my rapist.

-Maddie Orcutt '16