



Sexual misconduct not just a problem on college campuses

by Claudia Levens

Note: Most of the identities of the people involved in this article have been kept anonymous. This is something that the New Trier News tries to avoid, since we are aware that it complicates the perception of credibility. However, we hope to bring light to a deeper aspect of our community that deserves thoughtful dialogue by lifting the voices of individuals who are personally affected by it. The people's names are anonymous as are the names of everyone involved in their stories simply to protect them.

"I remember most that I started to get sweaty, and I remember my hands shaking so much that my ring started to move along my finger. I remember thinking that there was no way this situation ended well."

The anonymous student had planned on stopping at home before hanging out with some friends. She took the bus to where it stopped closest to her home, and when she got off, a guy she knew from school was there. They started talking and walking in the same direction, until they passed a park.

"I sat on one of the benches for a moment to do something, and he sat down next to me and started making physical advances. I told him to stop, I think I specifically remember saying 'no thanks I'm good.' But he kept trying to kiss me, touching me all over, and I was panicking. I didn't know what to do. I remember getting up with some excuse, walking towards my house hurriedly but checking and going around the block twice so that he'd not see where I live. I got home, took a shower and cried," she said.

"I see him in school sometimes, and each time, I get this panicky feeling in my chest."

Earlier this year, senior boys and girls advisories paired up to discuss the movie "The Hunting Ground," which every group watched the prior week. This marks the second year the film which portrays the realities of sexual assault on college campuses, has been shown to all senior advisories as they prepare for their eventual NT departure.

During the extended period, AP Psychology students gave presentations on various psychological elements pertaining to sexual assault, including the bystander effect, mob mentality, and altruism.

Assistant Superintendent Timothy Hayes said, "The purpose of "The Hunting Ground" is to help educate students about sexual assault on college campuses before they go off to college. Our goal is for students to walk out of here after health class, after the movie, after the conversation, understanding what positive, compassionate relationships look like.

A second anonymous student said she truly appreciated that discussions surrounding sexual assault and harassment were being conducted within NT and felt proud that our school was providing the opportunity for that in the first place.

"But I also felt throughout the film and discussion this nagging feeling that something really important was missing. It was all focused on this idea that it's something we'll have to experience once we leave this area," she said.

"It was all focused on the hypotheticals of college and slightly relevant issues, but I just kept thinking about what I'd been through two years ago, and all the girls in our school I know who've had similar experiences."

The second anonymous student had been repeatedly subject to unwanted touching and emotionally manipulative comments over the course of multiple months.

"When he wanted me to move

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he wouldn't say it, he'd just hit me on the [butt]. I told him to use his words. He kept doing it and I turned around and told him that if he wanted me to move, he'd need to tell me. He threatened me saying that if I told people no one would believe me because everyone loved him."

While discussing with her friends during a class after "The Hunting Ground," it became clear to her that she wasn't the only one who felt that way.

"It stuck out to a lot of us that this really feels like an issue that isn't so distanced from our own community or that it's only relevant when talking about college and in health class."

The second anonymous student said she feels guilty that she never pushed harder to report the harassment to the point where he would be held accountable.

"I know he has done things to other girls. I didn't realize at the time that the unwanted touching consisted of harassment. Most people picture this violent circumstance, but there's a lot more that needs to be fixed."

Hayes said that providing support and education is something the administration cares deeply about prioritizing.

"There are multiple avenues that are available. First of all, sexual assault is a crime, so there is an avenue through the police department that allows for investigation and seeking justice. There are reporting policies in place that include investigations and support. There are also resources here for the individual students through social work which is always available to anyone. Our health curriculum covers consent and an entire section focused on sexual assault, consent, and healthy relationships to educate students," he said.

Reporting policies and processes are outlined in the student guidebook.

Specific details pertaining to the reporting process can be found on page 2 in the section headlined "How to report sexual misconduct at NT."

The second anonymous student said "the policies are important, but there's a discrepancy between the amount of people who experience things and the amount who report it and seek help. If everything were perfect here, then there wouldn't still be this discrepancy."

According to the second anonymous student, this is a result of residual fear and stigma regarding reporting but also a lack of awareness, specifically among our student body about the processes in place to help them. She also believed there was a general feeling among other girls she knew that nothing would even be

done if they do report it.

After the first anonymous student had been assaulted at the park by her house, she initially didn't report it due to the fact that she didn't have a lot of faith that anything would be done to help her situation or punish the person who'd assaulted her.

"I knew I could report it, but I also thought, what's the point of saying anything to anyone if I don't believe they're going to do anything about it. I felt that way because I'd heard stories of people telling an adult in the school and nothing happening or very little resulted and nothing changed."

A third anonymous student who'd been verbally harassed over the course of multiple weeks in one of her classes said that she was frustrated with the fact that the teacher of the class didn't do anything to help her even though it was clearly audible and the anonymous student had gone to her for help.

Aside from these inconsistencies, it's also a reality that students at our school don't always know about the policies and resources in place that can support them.

A fourth anonymous student said that both times she experienced sexual harassment, she had no idea that reporting was a viable option for her.

One of the boys she sat with at lunch started making advances--smaller ones at first such as locking his arms around her shoulder and chest area. She told him to stop and that she was not okay with that.

'How many girls experience things like that and continue to tell themselves that it doesn't matter? It's not the actual violent assault or harassment that's much clearer that people can clearly be punished for, but these small things matter.'

"I tried to brush off the situation and ignore it and move on. I just thought he's a stupid guy, it doesn't matter."

He'd remove his arms at first, but as the days went on, he continued to touch her in uncomfortable ways that she told him she didn't want.

"I was mad, so I stopped talking to him. I stopped sitting with him and those friends. It sounds minor and it's not the worst thing that can happen, but I had repeatedly told him that I didn't want that, and it didn't

matter, he kept doing it. I don't think he thought he was doing anything wrong. And I wish I would have had the skills to be able to say in that moment 'hey you're creeping me out, leave me alone' and explain what he was doing and that he was making my really uncomfortable. But I'm also conflicted, because I felt like that wasn't something for me to say and that it wasn't my job. I had told him to stop multiple times, too. Shouldn't that have been enough?"

He was in her math class throughout the rest of the year, and every time she saw him, it'd make her uncomfortable.

The sexual assault she experienced the summer before

but these small things matter."

She acknowledged it as this "greyer area" of the sexual conduct conversation.

"I think it's [the grey area] is a cultural symptom of the same problem. It's still behavior that doesn't feel right. I think we should address it and try to show people how weird this is. It's such an interesting thing, specifically for this area. There's this expectation that New Trier is so perfect because the grades are good, the sports teams are good, the building is beautiful. But there are so many shady cultural issues that aren't only at New Trier, to be fair, but that don't really get addressed fully and thoughtfully," she said.

1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives

1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will experience contact sexual violence at some point in their lives

20-25% of college women and 15% of college men are victims of forced sex during their time in college

National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2017

her sophomore year involved the same guy who'd assaulted the first anonymous student at the park.

"I'd never really thought that they were situations I could bring to the school. I really just had no idea," she said. "I definitely think there's some work the school can do to make sure people know from the beginning of high school what the reporting process is, who they can go to, those types of things."

What concerns her most, however, are the socially acceptable aspects of our culture that culminate in sexual misconduct that she believes are present in our community as they are throughout the world.

"I think the problem is a lot more complicated than it's portrayed to be. My friend told me about how someone had grabbed her [butt] on the bus one time. That's happened to me while walking up the stairwell."

She explained that both her friend and she had tried to tell themselves that 'it wasn't a big deal.' But the more people, girls especially, she'd hear talk about like that, the more frustrated she got.

"How many girls experience things like that and continue to tell themselves that it doesn't matter? It's not the actual violent assault or harassment that's much clearer that people can clearly be punished for,

After "The Hunting Ground" was shown, a group of students, including senior Izzy Cox, sent a letter to advisories and administrators hoping to change the way sexual assault is discussed in our school.

Since then, they've participated in meetings with administrators, the KW Chair, and Adviser Chairs to discuss the concerns and extend the conversation.

They've also worked on clarifying and updating the resources posted online, editing some of the questions on the YRBS survey to collect the best data. They hope to institute a conversation or handout outlining the reporting process in advisery at the beginning of the year.

"There are juniors who have promised to continue encouraging the school to have these conversations and to have them productively," senior Izzy Cox said.

"There are tangible actions our community could take to change those factors that enable and encourage sexual misconduct. At the very least, prevent these experiences from happening."

Where to find help:

In case of an emergency, call 9-1-1

National sexual assault hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

Text-A-Tip: Text NSHELP912 to 844-823-5323

NT Social Work offices:

Winnetka--Room 225

Northfield--Room B230

Visit online.RAINN.org for 24/7 one-on-one online support
Resources for Counseling on the NT Social Work Website: provides information regarding local counseling services