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Writing

Our Home Away From Home: Putting a Stop to College Campus Violence

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When prospective students first tour the University of Missouri-Columbia's campus, they are thinking about academic programs, Tiger football, and the incredible recreational center. The last thing that crosses a student's mind is being in danger, and tour guides are not likely to mention campus violence. When parents bring up safety issues, the emergency call system and campus police force assures them, and the problems Mizzou faces with assault, rape and robbery can be ignored. In accordance with the Clery Act, the University of Missouri must send students emails every time a violent act occurs on campus (Evaluation of Green Dot 777). For most MU students, this is the first they hear of campus danger. Many factors such as gender roles, alcohol use and societal norms lead to violence on Mizzou's campus. These crimes cause not only physical, but also emotional and mental damage to victims, and students are beginning to protest. The Maneater published an editorial urging students to take a stand against violence, and former MSA president, Xavier Billingsely, sent a mass email in November 2012 urging the same. Current university prevention programs are simply not producing enough results. It is time for students, faculty and community members to change how violence is addressed.

College campuses can be a breeding ground for violence, and a place society expects to be a learning community can become extremely dangerous. The American College Health Association calls violence a “serious college campus health issue (Carr 305)”. Statistics from 1995-2002 show that college students are victims of more than 479,000 crimes annually; these include robbery, simple and aggravated assault, and rape and sexual assault (Carr 305).

Recent clery releases from the University of Missouri Police Department shed light on the types of violence occurring in Columbia. Since 2005 the MUPD has reported eighteen robbery cases, ten assault cases and thirteen cases involving sexual violence. In many of these robberies, perpetrators are armed, including the two most recent on December 11th and 13th. Sexual assaults are occurring in parking lots near the Hearnes Center, as well parking garages like Virginia Avenue (“Clery Release Archive”). These are places where many students are required to park their cars, often working late hours after class; this forces them to walk back to their dorms alone during the hours most violence occurs.

Sadly, even when they arrive back in their dorm rooms, residents still cannot feel safe. Multiple reports have been filed for assault, robbery and sexual assault in dorm rooms. In March of last year a woman was raped outside her dorm in Laws Residence Hall. Other cases of men entering dorm rooms and showers in dorms have also been reported recently on campus (“Clery Release Archive”). College dorms are students’ home away from home and should be a safe place to study, make new friends and enjoy their time here at Mizzou. Unfortunately, violence has turned it into a place in which many students cannot feel safe.

In order to prevent violence from happening, it is important that we investigate why these incidences are occurring in the first place. College campuses are known to attract alcohol consumption, which is a huge contributor to the problem of violence. Being under the influence of alcohol in no doubt puts students in a position to encounter violence. Their judgment is clouded and they are less in control of how they behave and the decisions they make. In 41% of violent crimes and 79% of rapes against students, the offender is perceived to be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs (Carr). Physical fights at house parties, bars, and fraternities are also large contributors to campus violence. It is no secret that alcohol leads to violence, however, it is not the sole cause and this issue cannot simply be written off as teenagers having too much to drink. Gender roles and cultural norms also play into the problem. For example, male college students are twice as likely to be victims of violence overall than female students (Carr 305). This can be contributed to society teaching men to value strength and power and to attach fighting to masculinity. Men are more likely to fight in public as a way to prove they are in power. They often consider winning a fight to be in the degree of injury to the other person involved, which can be very dangerous for college males (Multiple-Precursor Scenarios).

Society and the media also show college age men that hooking up with a lot of women is expected during their college years. This expectation sets the stage for date rape, as male students expect female students to always consent to sexual advances.

In response to this problem, society should be examining the gender roles we are teaching. Instead, we have begun blaming the victims of sexual assault instead of the

perpetrator. In a study published in the *Journal of College Student Development*, women repeatedly mentioned being blamed and/or blaming themselves for assaults against them.

"What pissed me off was people, they didn't —they didn't even care. They were just like, 'why didn't you lock your door?' Like it was my fault," said a woman in the study, Olivia, about her experience telling her friends of her assault. It is projected that 20-25% of college women will experience either rape or attempted rape during their college years (Carr 305). These are life-altering crimes that severely damage a woman's psychological wellbeing (Evaluation of Green Dot). The victims of these crimes can only recover if they receive help; facing skepticism and humiliation only makes it harder for them to report an assault.

Lack of reporting results in very few prosecutions for these crimes, while one in three women are assaulted in their lives and minuscule number of men are actually convicted ("Editorial: It Takes Everyone at MU to Stop Rape Culture"). This creates an understanding among women that little may be done by the authorities to keep them safe, leaving them living in fear of violence. According to the study, 55% of women avoided parking lots, and 27% even avoided libraries in the evenings because they felt they were in danger (Kelly 32). It's no wonder that women don't feel safe in their college homes. Stories of assaults, rapes and even murders circulate through the air like a disease, constantly reminding college women of the danger they are up against. This account from the study illustrates just how frightening a college campus can be: "Freshman year, a boy came into my room and got into my bed with me and I didn't know who it was...and just—I don't know. I just don't like dorms"

(Kelly 28). In any other residential neighborhood, people do not usually wander into other people's bedrooms unannounced, and if they do they are sure to be addressed by the police. However, most cases of campus violence are not reported, only 35% to be exact (Carr 306). This shows a distinct difference between campus violence and violence in general. This difference is negatively affecting all college females, even those who have not experienced assault, by causing them to live in fear.

While women reported worrying about their safety on a regular basis, research has shown that men rarely experience safety concerns. This could be why campus programs tend to focus much more on sexual and relationship violence against women, and less on violence against men. One highly regarded resource at Mizzou is the [Green Dot Initiative](#). Dr. Dorothy Edwards from the University of Kentucky developed Green Dot in order to reduce violence using bystander intervention. A Green Dot is described as any act that helps to prevent violence. This could be speaking up when a friend is getting out of hand, offering to drive a drunken friend home, or calling someone out for making excuses to justify rape (Evaluation of Green Dot 780). Green Dot uses detailed information about perpetrators in order to better identify high-risk situations and is implemented first with a speech and then with small group training (Evaluation of Green Dot 781). The speech is designed to raise awareness and promote violence prevention, while training is designed to teach students to notice situations and know how they can intervene. While this program sounds promising, research at the University of Kentucky showed that only 46% of students had heard a Green Dot speech and a measly 14% had actually

attended the training (Evaluation of Green Dot 777). The program cannot be effective if it is not reaching students. The University of Missouri also implemented the One Mizzou campaign in response to incidences of racial violence on campus. However, this program hasn't exactly gone the way it was intended to. By encouraging respect and community, One Mizzou should have greatly impacted racial violence, as well as physical and sexual violence on campus. Unfortunately, today new students have no knowledge of the violence that started the campaign and only know of One Mizzou as a stream of obnoxious television commercials promising a safe, united campus that they have never witnessed.

While students acknowledge that the university has made attempts to reduce violence, it simply is not enough. After an incident with Mizzou basketball player, Michael Dixon, caught nationwide attention, students began speaking out about the troubling issue of violence, specifically rape and sexual assault. Cases like this not only reflect poorly on the university, but also on students, the city of Columbia and all of its community members. On November 30th, *The Missourian* released an article in their "From the Readers" section. That same day *The Maneater*, a student-run publication, released another article about putting a stop to campus violence. During the 2012 Fall Semester Xavier Billingsley, Missouri Student Association president, even sent out a mass email asking students to "speak up for a safer Mizzou."

The Maneater article reads, "We are sick of writing about the rape culture on this campus. We are tired of being disappointed in members of the MU community who, despite frequent instances of sexual assault and constant degradation of the sense of

security here, refuse to acknowledge sexual violence as a serious problem with a broad definition." Students at the University of Missouri should be demanding a change.- While victims can find comfort and counseling within the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center on campus, taking advantage of these resources requires victims to share their stories with strangers. Due to society telling them they are at fault and/or refusing to believe them, many survivors don't feel capable of opening up.

The [Missourian article](#) agrees saying "We are taught that women are crazy, emotional and vengeful. We teach women to not get raped instead of teaching perpetrators not to rape." Increasingly, students are unsatisfied with how prevention programs are speaking about rape and demand that something be done. Xavier Billingsley finishes his email saying, "It is our civic and personal responsibility as Mizzou students, staff and faculty to take a stand on issues like this. When victim blaming occurs, another victim is less likely to report." All of these quotes point directly at our reaction to the crime. By blaming the victim and accepting the actions of the perpetrator as something that "just happens," we are feeding into rape culture and allowing violence to continue.

The community of Columbia can no longer settle for university-run initiatives alone to stop violence. The university faces a moral dilemma with trying to prevent violence and attract parents and students as it is. Drawing attention to the problem the school has with rape and assault is certainly not going to help attract donors and win over parents and students. This is why students and community members must take a stand. It is important to remember that the reputation of the University of Missouri is a reflection on all

of its students as well as the city of Columbia. The same can be said of other universities in other towns. Campus violence is not a small problem, and it is not a problem solely the responsibility of the universities. American society must change its views on rape and all forms of violence on college campuses. People must stop blaming the victim and stop accepting violence as the norm. We must change our reaction to violence before students can finally feel safe and secure on The University of Missouri campus, and campuses everywhere.

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