

44% OF VICTIMS
ARE UNDER THE
AGE OF 18

EVERY TWO MINUTES
ANOTHER AMERICAN IS
SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

VICTIMS OF
SEXUAL ASSAULT
ARE 3 TIMES MORE
LIKELY TO SUFFER
FROM DEPRESSION

LOL?

93% OF JUVENILE
SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS
KNOW THEIR ATTACKER

PICTURED MODEL IS NOT
AFFILIATED WITH THE STORY

THE RAPE

JOKE

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SURVIVING RAPE IN A CULTURE THAT WON'T LET YOU

"I PUSHED HIM AWAY A COUPLE OF TIMES. I SAID 'I HAVEN'T DONE THIS BEFORE. I REALLY DON'T WANT TO DO THIS', BUT HE KEPT SAYING, 'IT'LL BE FINE. IT'LL BE OKAY.'"

Sarah, whose name has been changed like all other students in this story, stayed silent about her rape for nine months. For nine months she struggled with the confusion and guilt that still haunts her today. For nine months she dealt with the betrayal of an individual she once considered to be a friend. For nine months she was plagued by a consuming sense of self loathing. For nine months Sarah stayed silent because for nine months she did not know that what had happened to her was rape.

"I didn't know it was rape because there weren't any drugs, and we weren't at a party," she said. She stares at the black nail polish eroding on her fingers, refusing to make eye contact, she continues to pick at it. With every word she speaks, every painful sentence she utters, it becomes obvious that Sarah is being transported back to the day her innocence was stolen from her. "I didn't know it could happen to me," she begins. Sarah was in eighth grade when she went to a gym to work out and ran into a close friend she hadn't seen for awhile. It was when she entered the locker room that he raped her. She remembers pushing away, saying no, and resisting the best she could. She remembers her friend persuading her, coercing her, and eventually overpowering her. Upon being penetrated, her body went into shock.

After the incident Sarah started eating less and going to the gym for several hours a day. She spent the entire summer trying to come to terms with what had happened to her. In her mind, the very idea of what she had done conflicted with her moral values. Being a catholic, Sarah believed in waiting until marriage to have sex. Her guilt over betraying her faith remained a key factor in her silence.

While Sarah struggled to overcome the horror of what had happened to her, her rapist bragged about his conquest to members of the sports team he was on. Thinking the sex was consensual, the boys on the team would often make remarks to Sarah in front of her friends in an attempt to be humorous. They would come up to her repeating his name over and over again or even make comments alluding to their sexual relationship. At the time, to escape the curiosity of her friends, Sarah lied and told them that they had just made out. She broke her silence when a comment someone made went too far and caused her to cry.

“My friend -- who was my best friend at the time -- told me it was consensual, and so I believed her,” she said. On one of the first days of high school, a transition that did not lack difficulties of its own, Sarah was called down to speak with the police officer. The mother of the friend whom she confided in had reported the incident. At the time, the officer was under the assumption that the sex was consensual. (However, since all sexual activity under the age of eighteen is illegal, police officers are required to investigate them.)

After being informed about the incident, Sarah’s parents were upset with her. They accompanied her to the police station where she was forced to tell her story to a female officer. That was when the officer announced that Sarah had been raped.

RAPE CULTURE

According to popular online media outlet buzzfeed.com, “Rape culture” is a culture in which sexual violence is considered the norm — in which people aren’t taught not to rape, but are taught not to be raped.” In a survey conducted on randomly selected Fond du Lac High School students, 80.3% believe there is a culture of “victim blaming”

or “slut shaming” here at Fond du Lac High School. By that definition, there is largely a rape culture here at Fond du Lac High School. And Fond du Lac is not alone. High school and colleges nationwide have taken action to address issues of the perception of sexual assault.

“We need a more supportive culture,” said Julie Rehfeldt, a social worker here at Fondy High, who believes the lack of acceptance in society keeps many victims silent. “When a girl has sex, she’s considered easy or whatever derogatory term. When a guy has sex there is not as much of a stigma attached to it.” Many of the students Ms. Rehfeldt sees admit to have being shunned by their friends and family after opening up about their abuse.

“A part of rape culture is victim blaming,” said Courtney Kolb, an ASTOP prevention educator. “If he or she hadn’t been drinking so much.’ ‘You know they’re asking for that when they wear that.’”

ASTOP is a non-profit organization dedicated to aiding victims of sexual assault through multiple facets. Courtney believes that teenagers live in a society that is saturated in victim blaming, in addition to being extremely sexist -- all conditions she said are largely contributed to by the media.

The first thing Courtney asks students when she visits their classroom is how they hear the word rape used. Now more than ever, students have told her that they hear rape used to describe things such as a difficult test or the defeat of one sports team to another.

“I make them think. ‘What really is rape? What do you think it’s like for the person a few lockers down who really has been raped?’ What do you think it’s like when they hear that come out of your mouth?’” she said. Though Courtney’s question is rhetorical, it is not uncommon for survivors of sexual abuse to hear rape jokes and have to react.

“They could be the nicest person in the world,” said Sarah, “and they will still make a joke like that. Sometimes I just play along.” Sarah keeps her sexual assault very private, a result of being alienated in the past. Today, aside from ASTOP and her family, only three of her close friends are aware that she was raped. A casual acquaintance, ignorant

of her past, hardly has any realization of the pain their remarks cause. The fact of the matter is, this is no random occurrence. Rape jokes aren’t nearly as taboo as the issue they are mocking; nearly 80% of Fondy High students said they had heard a rape joke in the last month.

BLAMING THE VICTIM

After confronting the truth, Sarah’s life became increasingly difficult. Finding out she was raped was only the beginning of her journey. She decided to reach out and get help. That’s when she found ASTOP.

As a result of counseling and meeting with client advocates, Sarah took the bold step toward making sure her rapist was brought to justice. She had prepared herself to face him in court and give a testimony. For reasons still unknown to Sarah, the case never went to trial. Instead her rapist, who was no stranger to violating the law, was sent to a halfway house and allowed to remain at school.

Though he was required to maintain distance from Sarah, her rapist still found ways to harass her. He would call her and even make face to face contact by asking her if she really believed he had raped her. Many of his teammates still teased Sarah about the incident. Even her own friends believed the sex was consensual.

Aside from being alienated by her peers, the hardest part of Sarah’s situation was knowing that she wasn’t the only one who had fallen victim to her rapist. She was working on an assigned group project during class one day when her rapist was casually brought up in conversation. At that moment, a girl working on the group project got up with tears in her eyes and ran away.

“I knew those tears,” Sarah said. “At that moment I knew what had happened to her. One of her friends turned toward me and said, ‘Oh, they had sex.’”

Sarah was never able to offer that girl any comfort. She could not reach out and explain to her how she understood the pain. Even today it is extremely difficult for her to share her story.

“I didn’t know how to tell my story until I came to ASTOP,” she said. “I lost a lot of friends after this because so many of them did think what had happened was consensual.”

Today she is on the path to healing. Yet, something she struggles with on a daily basis is trying not to blame herself.

"I keep thinking I could've stopped or pushed him away even more," Sarah said.

A large proponent of her therapy at ASTOP focuses on getting her to stop blaming herself. She has tried mechanisms like horse therapy, in which an individual is exposed to horses that are able to sense their emotions, and individual and group counseling. She has also promoted many ASTOP events like Denim Day. (Denim Day is a day in remembrance of an Italian girl who was raped by her driver's ed teacher but lost her court case because it was ruled that her jeans were too tight, concluding that she must have aided him in taking them off.)

In addition to healing, Sarah looks at the future. She is involved in many extracurricular activities, loves to write, and hopes to be a teacher one day.

STILL HEALING

"I've been assaulted multiple times in my life," Emily, a current Fond du Lac High School student, states matter of factly, "ranging from not wanting to have sex anymore, just not being in the mood, and being pressured, to flat out rape."

She wastes no time telling her story. She has had ten years to process the abuse inflicted upon her and finds a sense of power in blatantly speaking about it. She rarely uses euphemisms or allows room for imagination in her accounts of the events. It is clear that Emily has no intention of being rendered a victim but rather a survivor of sexual abuse.

From the ages of 2 to 7, Emily was molested by her uncle.

"The sexual acts varied from fingering to exposure, fellatio, and full-on penetration," she said. "There were many times when it was painful, other times where it was even pleasurable physically, but oftentimes it was more painful than anything. I felt like there was something that wasn't right, but I never spoke up or said no. At the time, it felt like a huge burden of guilt. I thought it was supposed to make me feel good, about myself." Her grandmother was aware of the ongoing abuse but never did anything to protect

her. Emily, too, stayed silent for fear of being blamed.

"As a child, I was brought to believe I wanted it," she said. "And although I thought it was normal, I definitely knew something wasn't right, and I was afraid it was my fault."

Even to this day, as her uncle stays at a medium security prison for other charges, Emily's parents are still unaware of what happened to her. She is still unable to escape from the nightmare that began ten years ago. Emily claims that she often has panic attacks while engaging in sexual intercourse, and she has suffered from depression leading to self harm and several failed suicide attempts. Most recently, two years ago, to cope with her abuse, Emily became a heavy smoker of cigarettes and marijuana and even turned to alcohol. She said that doing so caused her to be taken advantage of on multiple occasions.

Despite all of this, Emily does not want to go through the hassle of reaching out to her family.

"Besides the fact I don't want to have to deal with it, it's also the aspect of being pitied and having to go through court," she said. "I don't want the trouble, I want to move on with my life."

However, moving on with her life will be extremely difficult for Emily, as her uncle is set to be released from prison in 2015 or 2016. She seems confident that he won't harm her again but remains nervous about other females put in his care. She confesses that she knows he molested his sisters as a teenager.

But Emily's pain lives beyond her uncle. It lives on through her physically and emotionally. Not a day goes by that she doesn't feel the effects of what happened to her.

"I actually have had scarring on my genitals, which has caused me pain in the past," said Emily. "But mostly, the effects are emotional. I have a lot of trouble connecting emotionally with people who approach me romantically, and I oftentimes end up using these people as entertainment in the moment, without feeling regret when invariably 'break their heart.'"

One thing Emily has made very clear is that she does not want anyone's pity. For this reason, she has avoided talking to organizations like ASTOP, dedicated

to empowering victims of sexual abuse.

"For a long time, I've felt organizations [such] as ASTOP focus too much on 'healing' and other mushy sounding things instead of facing the cold, often cruel facts," said Emily. "I see organizations such as that as more of a glorification of self-pity; I do not enjoy the idea of it."

Yet, Emily is still finding a way to cope with what happened to her in a way that does not involve harming herself. She has taken the recovery process into her own hands.

"I'm still healing, but I'm better everyday," she said.

IGNORANCE IS NOT BLISS

Emily was walking home from work one night when a man on the street groped her and tried to isolate her in a secluded area. She confided in a friend about what happened her; his immediate reaction was to blame her for walking home at night. Also, during the period in her life when she turned to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism, people would tell Emily that if she hadn't drank she wouldn't have been taken advantage of.

"When people are ignorant, they are very ignorant," she said. "There's still stigma around that somehow, only poor people or these types of people are sexually abused and that many people make up abuse to get back at an ex or family member."

Mary, another Fond du Lac High School student who shared her story, is no stranger to being alienated for what happened to her, either. She told the first boy she dated what had happened to her as a child. When they would get in fights, he would use that against her by saying things like, "Well, at least I didn't take my clothes off for someone just because they asked."

She was very young when the son of a family friend made her undress in a closet so he could look at her. Today, confusion lingers in Mary's mind surrounding the question of whether or not she can call what happened to her sexual abuse. She believes calling what happened to her sexual abuse is "a bit much" since there was no physical contact.

"I definitely wasn't old enough to have the cognitive ability to consent to anything," said Mary "And by the way he behaves now --expelled from his school for having sex on school property and sending nude photographs of other students --I would say on his behalf it wasn't an innocent act like I felt it had been at the time, and because of that I feel like I am a victim of a sort." To Mary, what happened to her was more of an insight into the world of victim blaming rather than sexual abuse.

"I feel that the first step to putting an end to rape culture, victim blaming, and the frequency of sexual assault, as a whole we need to accept that sex is a part of life and stop shunning others for it," said Mary. "Slut shaming is such

a huge role in victim blaming. People assume that because a woman has sex with other men, she must want to have sex with them. You're a 'slut' if you have sex, so if someone has sex with you while you're drunk and unable to consent then you're still a slut. People toss around words like whore, slut, and tease like having sex is such a forbidden act. I understand that from a religious aspect, sex should only occur after marriage, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that concept; shaming others for not following your religion and abiding that rule, is not alright. Everyone is entitled to what they do with their own body. What they do does not affect you. You call a woman who has sex by their name, not a slut."

"NO" MEANS "NO"

A chip of black nail polish falls to the floor; Sarah watches it hit the ground and blend in with the monochromatic carpeting.

"I want everyone to know, that no means no," she said looking up for the first time. "It doesn't matter how many times you say no -- even if you say it once. And silence means no, too." Sitting across the table, Courtney notices the tears glistening in Sarah's eyes and shoots her a supportive look.

"You're going to be okay," Courtney said, "You are so strong, and you're going to be okay."

The Punchline: A Letter from the Editors

We live in a world where powerful men like Woody Allen and Julian Assange can be accused of sexual assault and never be brought to justice, in a world where people can sing songs about the blurred lines between a yes and a no and reign over the Billboard Top 40.

Sarah did not know that what had happened to her was rape. She stays away from the party scene and is extremely cautious of her surroundings because she knows once you've been sexually assaulted once you are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted again. That's the rape joke. Emily makes distinctions between "not wanting to have sex anymore, just not being in the mood and being pressured, and flat out rape," rather than classifying them all as the same thing. That's the rape joke. Mary admits that she was exploited, but does not believe she

has the right to say she was sexually assaulted. That's the rape joke.

Only 46% of surveyed students believe that sexual abuse or harassment is an issue at Fond du Lac High School, but 80% of them have heard a rape joke in the past month. That's the rape joke. One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually assaulted before their eighteenth birthday. That's the rape joke. 60% of sexual assaults are never reported to the police, and 97% of rapists will never spend a day in jail. That's the rape joke. While reading this article you saw words like penetration, genital scarring, felatio, fingering and incest and did a double take. By the time you will have finished reading this, 11 people will have been sexually assaulted. That's the rape joke.

Now ask yourself-- did you laugh?

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

National Sexual Abuse Hotline

1-800-656-HOPE

ASTOP Crisis Line

920-921-7657

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

1-800-273-8255

WHAT YOU SAID

DO YOU SEE SEXUAL ABUSE/ SEXUAL HARRASSMENT AS AN ISSUE HERE AT FOND DU LAC HIGH SCHOOL?

YES - 46% NO - 54%

HAVE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW BEEN HARASSED AFTER OPENING UP ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE?

YES - 28% NO - 72%

HAVE YOU OR ANYONE YOU KNOW CONSENTED TO SEXUAL INTERCOURSE WHILE UNDER THE INFLUENCE?

YES - 63% NO - 37%

HAVE YOU HEARD A RAPE JOKE IN THE PAST MONTH?

YES - 80% NO - 20%

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT EVERY INDIVIDUAL HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM BEING RAPED BY NOT WEARING REVEALING CLOTHING OR NOT DRINKING AN EXCESSIVE AMOUNT?

YES - 59% NO - 41%

HAVE YOU HEARD SOMEONE USE THE WORD "RAPE" TO DESCRIBE THE EFFECTS OF A DIFFICULT TEST?

YES - 79% NO - 21%

DO YOU BELIEVE THERE IS A CULTURE OF "VICTIM BLAMING" OR "SLUT SHAMING" HERE AT FOND DU LAC HIGH SCHOOL?

YES - 80% NO - 20%

HAVE YOU HEARD THE WORD "RAPE" USED TO DESCRIBE THE LOSS OF ONE SPORTS TEAM TO ANOTHER?

YES - 76% NO - 24%

HAVE YOU HEARD THE PHRASE "IT'S NOT RAPE IF YOU LIKE IT?"

YES - 97% NO - 3%

Getting Help in Fond du Lac: More about ASTOP

ASTOP, which stands for Assist Survivors, Treatment, Outreach Programs, was created in the 90's after a girl named Victoria committed suicide after being sexually abused by her father. Though Victoria had reported it, sexual abuse was not taken as seriously then as it is now. Her case was a true wake-up call for the citizens of Fond du Lac. They discovered that it often takes a child seven times to speak out about abuse before they are taken seriously. The city decided that they no longer wanted victims of rape and sexual abuse to have to wait several weeks for counseling, so they began ASTOP, which now serves a large portion Ripon and Greenlake, too.

In 2011 the four largest categories of victims seeking were adults assaulted as children (27%), victims of incest (21%),

victims of non-stranger rape (16%), and children who were sexually assaulted (14%)

Today, in addition to counseling, ASTOP provides client advocacy services. Client advocacy comes in two forms: medical and legal. Medical advocacy often entails accompanying a person to get a SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) exam done. The primary purpose of the SANE exam is evidence collection. There is always a police officer called.

"We sit with the victim," said Courtney Kolb, ASTOP prevention educator. "We talk to them and listen to them. I got in for a sexual assault exam and the girl just wanted to talk about her grandchildren." However, the support of ASTOP does not end with the evidence collection. If the victim decides to press charges legal

advocates will go to court with them. Having support in the courtroom is especially beneficial, according to Courtney. Victims will often have to see the person who sexually assaulted them.

Prevention education is also another aspect of ASTOP's work. Courtney Kolb will give talks at multiple venues including schools, prisons, and colleges to discuss sexual abuse.

"We feel like if you don't have those hard, awkward conversations nothing can happen," said Courtney. She also said that ASTOP is moving from a position of awareness to a stance of action. She said, whether it is the first time or the seventh it is very important for people to report.

"What I always tell people is that 'if you come to me I will believe you, and I will get you help,'" she said.