

Sisters are doing it for (and to, and with, and at) themselves

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Date rape a danger for South Asian women

by Gurbir Jolly

South Asian students are finding ways to face the problem of date rape in their community.

Because dating is traditionally discouraged in most South Asian cultures, many women with families from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh find their family or community unable to provide adequate support for victims of date rape.

Since conventional restrictions on dating aim to preserve the "purity" of South Asian women, for marriages which will be arranged or semi-arranged, those assaulted on secret dates may fear judgment from their family or community for leading a "deceptive" and "rebellious" lifestyle.

"It's a loathsome case of blaming the vic-

tim, and only part of a complex process of denial," says Gurpreet Malhotra, executive director of Dixie Bloor Neighborhood Drop-In Centre and founder of York's United Indian Students.

"If the victim is to blame then there's no need to take legal action, no need to risk spoiling a reputation in front of the community," he said.

Most South Asian women interviewed believed that South Asian men, who generally face far less community pressure than females, can exploit a woman's fear of judgment and punishment from her community.

"Sneaking around, seeing a guy and lying to your parents, puts a South Asian woman in a vulnerable position. South Asian men know they can call the shots in these situations," said

Ameeta Nagar, a fourth year English major.

South Asian victims of date rape have heard, "If you tell anyone about this, I'll tell your parents you slept with me," according to Dale Hall, York's sexual harassment officer.

Worse still, others are told, "Unless you give me what I want, I'll tell your parents we've been sexually involved," said Malhotra.

This fear of judgment which obstructs communication between parents and students is not unbeatable, suggests Raman Grewal, a first year student.

Many South Asian students agree, believing problems involving dating and date rape can be faced when parents and students share perspectives as a community.

Last year the United Indian Students at York produced a play — for both parents and stu-

dents — dealing with problems of sexuality and arranged marriages.

This year the club has scheduled a parent-student debate for February, and South Asian students may discuss issues in their community, like date rape, in the recently founded South Asian Social Issues Students Discussion Group.

These larger events expose the community to issues which women may feel uncomfortable discussing with parents individually, said Rajit Khanna, president of York's United Indian Students.

"A daughter is raised to behave like a devi [goddess], and it's tough for her to deal with family expectations if she's been raped [on a

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Students persuade York Senate to cancel classes for vigil

by Pat Micelli

Students won't have to skip classes to attend a Dec. 4 vigil in memory of 14 women killed at L'Ecole Polytechnique three years ago.

York's Senate, its academic body, decided recently to cancel classes from 12:30 to 1:30 so students, faculty and teaching assistants would be free to take part in the annual Women's Remembrance Day event.

"If we can't guarantee the safety of the women who come here to learn, I'm not convinced we are committed to accessibility," said Nikki Gershbnain, president of student federation, in an appeal to senators last month.

Gershbnain cited examples of threats to female students at universities, including a September incident at York where a man shouted "Long live Marc Lepine. All the 15,000 women at York should be killed," in front of a bookstore line up.

Although no one voted against the proposal to cancel classes for an hour on Dec. 4, many faculty members complained there wasn't enough advance notice.

"It's not fair to students and those planning courses," Prof. Sydney Kanya-Forstner told the meeting. "If we want to send a message we should do it properly. It should be announced in advance, permanent and official," he added.

York registrar Gene Denzel also spoke against the proposal. Denzel said he was concerned that canceling classes would affect students' opportunity to learn.

"Fees and funds are largely centred around classroom learning," he said.

Michèle Chai, a vice-president of the federation, was



• graphic by Lori Bellissimo

prompted to disclose a personal experience in order to convince the senate of the importance of the vigil.

"As a woman who has been a survivor of sexual assault on this campus in my second year, I find it frustrating to listen to thoughtless, by the way justifications for not supporting [the cancellation of classes]," said a visibly angry Chai.

How can I learn if I don't feel safe going to school?" she added. Chai said steps have to be taken in order for women to feel safe about organizing in the face of violence.

"An hour off so women can empower themselves, mourn and deal with the reality is not a lot to ask," said Chai.

A similar proposal was introduced last year, but failed

to win support. The senate executive was instead given the responsibility of creating a policy but did not follow through.

"I assumed that what they were discussing was a permanent arrangement in place for Women's Remembrance Day, and then it disappeared," said Kanya-Forstner.

York's Women's Centre and the federation introduced this year's proposal, which was supported by York's Advisor to the President on the Status of Women, the Graduate Student Association, both student representatives on the board of governors, York's Advisors for the Race and Ethnic Relations Centre and the Sexual Harassment and Complaint Centre, the Canadian Federation of Students, and the senate's student caucus.

To commemorate the deaths of the 14 women, Queen's University cancels classes for the entire day.

Anyone interested in helping to organize events for Women's Remembrance Day can attend a meeting on Thursday November 5 in the Women's Centre.



MacLean blasts off

Canadian astronaut and York alumnus Steve MacLean gets ready for the space shuttle last month.

Macedonian, Greek students in cultural tug-of-war on campus

by Susan O'Flinn

Over two thousand years of history and 30 feet of space separate Greek and Macedonian students at York University.

Clubs representing both groups have offices a few paces away from each other in the Student Centre, but both argue about their respective cultural heritage.

During a club fair in September a group of eight Greek students spent over an hour at the Macedonian table arguing with Chris Boseovski, a Macedonian Students Association member.

"They kept asking me questions about what I considered [to be Macedonian]. I told them that we are not a political organization but a social one, trying to promote our heritage," Boseovski said last month.

"They were more or less telling us that we

shouldn't have that right."

After the incident, some Macedonian club members felt the booth needed to be staffed by more than one person. This angered Mirka Nitsis, a member of the club.

"Why should we [have to do that]? This is a Canadian university campus," Nitsis said.

While the Macedonians students insist they are simply trying to express their ethnic roots, Greeks students in the Hellenic Students Association at York say they feel Macedonia has territorial aims towards Greece.

"[Macedonians at the club table] had a map of Greater Macedonia showing all of Northern Greece annexed. That is an insult," says Nicholas Parakatis, a member of the Hellenic club and a member of the group that spoke to Boseovski.

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