

# WESPEAK:

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## Wesleyan University's Real Policy on Sexual Assault

NICOLE LI '95

Some people advised me to withhold my name from this. They are concerned with further harassment I might receive along with notoriety. I respect this as legitimate grounds for others to seek anonymity, but I have chosen otherwise for many reasons. I do hope my name is recognized with this account. This is not my shame and I refuse to have it treated like my secret. Secrets imply something private and personal.

Rape is perhaps the least private thing that can happen to a person; it is my pain that is personal and of that I will not write here. I wish to draw attention to the problems of trying to press charges of rape at Wesleyan University.

I was raped in my dorm in December.

I reported the crime to Public Safety in mid-February. Before the crime, I had considered the man who had raped me to be among my good friends. Up until I reported the rape, he would often come into my room and seeing him frequently was unavoidable. These were among the many factors that prevented me from reporting the crime sooner.

The police were mentioned as an option; however, no one actually told me where the Middletown Police Department was, if I would have to go there alone, or what the procedure would be. It had taken a lot of my energy to go to Public Safety and I just decided that continuing through these channels would be easier. I do not blame Public Safety for this—it is the Administration that created their policies in whom I find fault. The Public Safety employees I came into contact with were kind.

There is a variety of University methods for dealing with crimes on this campus and I selected the most severe one I could, a full hearing of the Student Judiciary Board. It was daunting to realize that it is left up to the victim to decide how crimes are dealt with. Any avenue I chose would require me to be actively involved throughout all steps taken by the University. Unless I oversaw the procedure and continually pressed for action, the University would not pursue the charge and nothing would be done. Rape is a serious crime and there ought to be a consistently severe method of dealing with it which the University follows as soon as the charge is brought. They should not place their responsibility for securing campus safety on the victim. No one on this campus offered to do any more for me than I was willing to do for myself. This attitude does not treat me as a victim of a crime, but as a perpetrator of justice who is disrupting peace. By treating me as if I could handle this alone, Wesleyan treats rape lightly.

Before going to Public Safety, I called Wes\*Safe, looking for a support group. No such group exists on campus, I was told. I had had the impression from Wesleyan that there was a support group for everyone. Appalled, I called Mental Health with the idea that I would start one if I could find a trained therapist to help me organize it. The woman I spoke with at Mental Health said that last semester a few women had started such a group and that they should be having a meeting soon. The University did not help to begin this group. It had been initiated and run solely by students. Although Mental Health was aware of the group's existence, they did not inform Wes\*Safe so that other women would be able to know it. The woman I spoke with took my

name and my box number and assured me that I would receive a notice through campus mail and also phone call to inform me where I could go for help. I was never contacted. When a person turns to an authority and plainly says that she is in pain and is looking for help, to be given an empty promise and/or silence is not only incredibly negligent, it is dangerous. Student-run Wes\*Safe was kind and offered to help me when I told them I had been raped; the University left me alone to deal with it.

Later, I happened to see a poster about the Sexual Abuse Survivors Peer-run Support Group in the Campus Center. It was gone the next day.

Dean Darrigrand was among the many University officials I spoke with. I had been told that she was "interested" in the case because (the University claims) my experience as a whole was unique. This woman created the SJB system for sexual assault cases. She explained to me the process and what the hearing would be like. She assured me that the system worked and would be as kind as possible to the person pressing charges. I asked her what the precedents had been like, what most decisions in such cases were. This Dean, the creator of the system, could not recall any one case where the system had been used. She could not give me information of any such past hearing. Many people had asked me why I was taking my rapist to the SJB, Dean Darrigrand among them. Authorities, the people who created the system, were asking me why I was using it. Campus rapes occur in frighteningly great numbers and if they are not being reported, the University should realize that something is wrong with the system. Upon hearing that other women had not pursued their claims as far as I had already, I have to admit that I wondered if I wasn't just being stupid and self-destructive.

The next question I was asked, after why I was pressing charges, was what I wanted to get out of the hearing. That frustrated and angered me. What I wanted would not be accomplished through official channels. What I wanted was for it never to have happened, what I wanted was revenge; but what I wanted was not rational and I dealt with that. I certainly did not want the hassle of pressing charges and testifying. I reported the incident because that is the logical consequence to crime. In a court of justice is where what my rapist started must end. My reporting of the crime is simply a continuation of what he did; my own actions as an individual begin here, in writing this.

I asked Dean Darrigrand if I would be able to get an excuse for turning in my Latin homework late—I had missed one class in order to be at North College. She told me my classes were my own business and that if I was falling behind I would have to talk to my professors myself. Again, the University left me alone to handle the rape and its repercussions. (My professors have been absolutely wonderful.)

At the end of our meeting, Dean Darrigrand opened her office door, indicating it was time for me to leave. She was shuttling me out into the hallways of North College, crowded with other students, without giving me time to compose myself after crying, to wait for my eyes to clear or even to find a kleenex. No room or respect was given for my emotions. Later, I found out that Dean Darrigrand is listed as a Confidential Advisor Concerning Sexual

Abuse.

For the three weeks preceding the hearing, many University officials asked me if I was seeking therapy. No one actually offered to help me find a therapist, but everyone was anxious to know if I had been successfully put into someone else's hands. I had not met one-on-one with a trained therapist and told them so. They did not pursue the issue. No one offered to pay for doctor's fees and disease testing. This was treated as my problem, one I had to deal with alone.

Often during the considerable amount of time I spent at North College, I was in tears. I would have to tell someone all over again about the rape and they would send me, crying, to another office. No one checked to see if I was actually going to the next place they sent me; no one checked to see if I didn't just cry in the bathroom or go to bed for the rest of the day. Hiding in both places was an attractive alternative to having to talk to yet another North College employee. They ought not to assume that all women are so stubborn or strong as me. No one called to see if I was eating or going to classes or getting out of bed in the morning. In trying to ignore me, Wesleyan University tried to ignore rape.

Three weeks after filing the report, I was given a date for the hearing. I was told that three weeks was a short amount of time and that the SJB had graciously agreed to hear me before those who had inappropriately set off fire alarms. During this time, I was still unable to avoid seeing my rapist frequently. I was told that I could move out of my dorm if I wanted to lessen contact with him. Public Safety did, however, tell him to stay away from me until the hearing.

Pressing charges through the University is convincingly authoritative. The process of pressing charges seemed so officious and I was quite taken in by it all. Bureaucracy does have a distinguished tint to it. There is a sheaf of paperwork on the crime, replete with red stamps and signatures, in a filing cabinet. Locked doors and intercoms surround the Public Safety offices. People seemed to be very busy and I often had to wait to speak with them. This all made me feel as if the system had the power and competence to deal with my charge. It was a shock to see it boil down to five kids my age sitting across a big table from me with legal pads.

The SJB hearing was a farce of justice. The fact that sex occurred was not in dispute. The fact that my rapist was sober and that I was so drunk I didn't seem able to stand up was not in dispute. The fact that, when sober, I had said that I would not have sex with him was not in dispute. For over three hours, they questioned me mainly on how I act when I am drunk. Federal law treats this as irrelevant. Having sex with a mentally impaired person is a federal offense; however, federal law did not pierce that stuffy room in North College.

The SJB is a joke. They took copious notes on their own irrelevant questions but when an important flaw was detected and proven to exist in the Public Safety report, the correction was not noted. My counselor asked the members of the Board if the error would be changed since she had noticed none of them recording it. Still not writing anything down, we were told condescendingly that it would be taken care of. A large microphone sat in the middle of the table and about three and a half hours

of tape was used. When I got up to leave, I heard the Chair of the Board laugh as she realized that no one had thought to mark the order in which the tapes had been used.

The only restriction applying to whom one may choose to act as one's counselor in a hearing is that it must be a person within the Wesleyan community. I selected a student friend from Wes\*Safe. At the hearing, I found that my rapist's counselor was a member of the administration. The conflict of interests this man may have had between his post and my allegation was not addressed. During this hearing, it seemed that he was granted privileges due to his position that my counselor was denied.

After the hearing closed and my rapist and I were allowed to leave, Dean Montero said that I could remain in the room for a few moments so I would not have to walk out of the building with the man who raped me. Throughout the entire hearing, I had had the feeling that the Administration and the Board did not fully try to understand and appreciate my situation. This proved that impression. Walking out of North College with my rapist cannot really matter to me since *I see him frequently*.

Three hours later, at 11:30 p.m., the Chair of the SJB called to inform me that the man who raped me had been found not in violation of the Code of Non-Academic Conduct due to insufficient evidence. She added that this did not mean that the Board did not believe me. There was enough evidence to allow the recognition of truth in my statement, yet there was not enough to do anything about the crime. I understand that in the court systems of this country, one needs concrete proof in order to convict. As I also understand it, part of the purpose of the SJB is to hold students not only to US laws but to the more demanding and strict ideal of honor. Thus, the system supposedly does not have the loopholes through which criminals may slip. In the outline of the Student Judiciary Board Procedures, it states that "...the SJB is guided not by the elaborate procedures of the civil courts, but rather by a common-sense standard of fairness..." Where is the common sense and honor when the one who tells the truth is told by authorities, "We believe you...but we can't say it too loud"?

This telephone call was the only contact I had with the University in which they did not tell me to seek counseling. No longer can they advise me to see a therapist, for to do so would mean that they are admitting that I have undergone some trauma that warrants treatment. They will not admit this openly because, officially, they revoked the rape.

Wesleyan has offered me a cure to the ill I suffer: pretend it didn't

happen. I am supposed to take that and get better. If I swallowed that, regardless of who proscribed it, I would gag.

I am transferring. What I have written here is not the only reason for my wanting to leave. This space has been used before to enumerate Wesleyan's many and unique flaws and I will not restate them. I think one may sum up Wesleyan's situation generally with two statements: the atmosphere here is weird and the Administration seems to be sending the University to hell in a handbasket.

Although this will not be my school next year, I still recognize the need to write this. I write this because I would hate to think that the Administration will be able to breathe easier with me gone. I write this to introduce a Wesleyan University that cannot be found in its propaganda. I write this to entrust you who have recognized the injustice and potential for change here to take action and not allow your school to mistreat and ignore any woman in pain who turns to them. I write this out of respect for all the women who have gone before me and were silenced and I write this to those who will come after. I cannot stop rape altogether, but I can do a lot to stop the injustices that happen afterwards. We all can. This is your school and you have the power to change it.

My frosh year has not been what I expected or dreamed it would be. Here, I have only written of the injustices my case received from the Administration. I have written nothing of the cruelty and alienation I received personally. Here, I have only tried to enlighten you about the defects of the system. I have written nothing of the humanitarian defects in many Wesleyan students. You know who you are—even if you pretend not to know who I am anymore.

I have had to edit much of what I first wrote here.

I have said that Wesleyan is in need of change but I have not mentioned how I feel the system ought to be renovated.

I have also not mentioned the name of the man who raped me. This has been left out because I want to mimic openly Wesleyan's policy of protecting men who rape and assault. The reality is that the Administration at Wesleyan University withholds important information about crime from its students, their parents, and alumni. They are protecting their reputation and their financial interests above their students. Due to the silence surrounding rape, one cannot know who is dangerous. But in making this point, I do not intend to continue the silence. If anyone wishes to have any more information about my case, has any questions, or wants to hear my suggestions for improving the system, call me. 638-0527.

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