

“Sexual Assault in the John Muir College Residential Life Handbook: A Reading”

A recent article in the Los Angeles Times flaunts the headline “Three decades before the #MeToo movement, UC San Diego led the way against sexual assault.” In the article, Teresa Watanabe looks at the history of the Sexual Assault Resource Center on the campus. As early as 1979, Watanabe writes, “members in UC San Diego’s student life and residential offices broke new ground on the campus when they began printing up information about safety and pushing for better campus lighting.”

Promotional and community-produced materials from the archives of the John Muir Residential College at UCSD from 1978 to 1984 reflect a definite shift in the framing and phrasing of problems of sexual harassment and assault on campus. According to the “Tenth Year Study” that the college produced about itself in 1978, John Muir College “opened in Fall of 1967 with about 425 undergraduates, most of whom were freshmen.” John Muir was the second of two residential colleges.*

The John Muir College at UCSD prepared a new Residential Handbook every year. These brightly colored and creatively-designed brochures contain an alphabetical listing of terms that might help a prospective undergraduate understand the jargon of college bureaucracy, followed by short definitions. In the 1978 handbook, for example, the entry “Privacy Act” is followed by this definition:

The University recognizes each student’s right to privacy. This policy is covered by the Buckley guidelines. The university will not release non-public information from your records without your consent except to persons engaged in university duties. You have a right to inspect, review and challenge an information in official records (from January 1, 1975 on) which directly concerns you, provided your request is made in accordance with established procedures.

It’s a pedagogical sort of document, which is sharing not only a set of potentially necessary terms with future students, but also has a distinct disciplinary function. The experience parents and students would have reading such a document might not be unlike reading the fine print in an employment contract. There are clearly specific ways to act, specific limits on the circulation of information due to the university’s status as a protective and paternalistic institution, and proper procedures for finding things out. In these brochures, the potential student would encounter strong recommendations to manage their own safety. For example, in the section “Responsibility for personal items” the entry explains

The University cannot assume responsibility for personal items that are lost, mislaid, or stolen in the residence halls or apartments. Unfortunately, community living has the potential for providing irresistible temptations to some residents and occasionally, to non-residents. We strongly urge you to help prevent the possible loss of your property by keeping suite, room and apartment doors locked whenever the area is occupied.

What gets illustrated here is the college administration’s rationalization of its own paternalism. The communal living situation that the residential college provides also provides “irresistible temptations”. What temptations are being alluded to? The temptation that might arise, in a communal living situation, to view property as communally rather than privately owned? The student is called on to police the enclosure of their own sphere of private property. The “suite, room and apartment doors” are not referred to any possessive pronoun. “Your property” is what the student must learn to protect, from their own naivety and the “irresistible temptations” that such property might present to other residents (or even “non-residents”, using the generic spatial categories as containers: “suite, room and apartment” are interchangeable safes to which each resident holds a key.

Here, in 1978, emerges also the rhetorical threat of the “non-resident” lured to the college campus by the irresistible temptation of the unguarded property, or the unguarded student. This same rhetoric which Jennifer Doyle illustrates as underlying the report made by an outside security firm on behalf of the University of California Office of the President regarding the use of extreme police force on protesting students at the UC Davis Campus in November, 2011. In this report, Linda Katehi, the chancellor of UC Davis at the time is cited stating “We were worried at that time about that [non-affiliates] because issues from Oakland were in the news and the use of drugs and sex and other things, and you know here we have very young students... we were worried especially about having very young girls and other students with older people who come from the outside without any knowledge of their record... if anything happens to any student *while we’re in violation* of policy, it’s a very tough thing to overcome” (Doyle, 15-16). What Doyle goes on to articulate is that “the administration’s paranoid rape fantasy mirrors the geometry of the university community itself—what is a campus but older people, working with younger people?” (Doyle, 16) And, in fact, the Residential handbooks go on to articulate how the policing of the boundaries of one’s private property provides a model for how to “prevent” sexual assault. The irresistible temptation of student’s naivety, having been lulled into complacency by communal living, is also a sexualizing of the student that university administration can’t help but perform. As Doyle writes, “violation is in fact embedded into the campus, as a part of its structure. The administration worries about that which makes rape imaginable.” The administration itself can’t help but make rape imaginable because it can’t help but conceive of itself paternalistically.

The 1983-84 Student Handbook’s paragraph titled “Rape Prevention” is brief and direct. “There are things you can do to increase your personal safety,” it states. “Refer to the section on ‘Crime’; contact the Police Department’s Safety Office; speak with resident Dean... and stop by or call the Women’s Center” it suggests. The section referred to, entitled “Crime, Crime Prevention” states “UCSD unfortunately is not a safe haven from crimes common to the real world, including theft of property, assault, rape and so on... You, too, can help: lock your car and your dorm room; don’t walk alone at night; and take other reasonable precautions.” Here forms of property crime (theft) and assault (rape and so on) are explicitly connected in terms of the individual student’s ability to prevent them, and not fall prey to some kind of transcendental illusion, namely, that “UCSD” might be a “safe haven” and not “the real world”. The handbook’s language suggests that this illusion might be a natural one, that students might come to college expecting the difference between university life and the “real world” to be so unconditionally guaranteed by the university’s form of enclosure and generous extension of the possibility of “community living”, that they might forget to anticipate the presence of “crimes common to the real world”. All this despite the Residential Handbook’s significant effort to foreground the possibility of crime for incoming students. Come to college, the handbook seems to say, and make sure to protect yourself from the inevitability of crime, but don’t be fooled, the university is not a “safe haven”. Maybe it wasn’t the prospective student so much in all this, who was in danger of forgetting the distinction between UCSD and the “real world”, but the administration.

Between 1983 and 1988 there is a slight change in the Residential life handbook’s definition of Sexual Harassment. In 1984 it is defined as “behavior that should nor, nor need not, be tolerated”. Rather than defining the term, as it does with every other term, the handbook for 1984-85 suggests that perhaps the term itself need not even exist. By the time of publication of the 1988-89 handbook, the tolerance (or lack of it) has been attributed to someone. It states, “Sexual Harassment is behavior that you should not have to tolerate in the residential life complex or, for that matter, anywhere on campus.” Here the document finally admits that sexual harassment might happen to someone in some place, and even extends its own initial determination of where that place might be. It goes on to offer a much longer and even by today’s standards helpful articulation of sexual harassment as a form of coercion: “When

submission is made a condition of instruction, employment or participation in any university activity, or when such conduct has the effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's life." It also directs the reader, in the case that he or she might need support "(either informal or formal)", to the resident dean, in "correcting the situation."

It is clear, especially from the student-produced monthly, sometimes twice monthly, publication of the John Muir Residential College, the *Muirall*, that sexual assault was something that was happening on campus, whether or not it was tolerated. The *Muirall* from October, 1981 states "Personal safety is becoming a serious matter on campus. Last year at least one woman was raped, and several assaulted, at UCSD, and this year already two Muir students have been assaulted. While the incidence of violent crime is low compared to the general community, we need to warn you that such incidents can and do occur here." Again, the distinction between the "general community" and the university community is the condition for registering sexual assault as something to be observed. And, again, with the input of the police chief, some safety precautions are listed, such as "Avoid isolated places, day or night. Avoid working/studying alone at night, on weekends, or holidays in unlocked rooms, offices or labs, or in out-of-the-way places." Further injunctions are made, to recognize who belongs on campus and who doesn't, and to report burned out lights. The connection between burned out lights and rape here and in other contemporary advisories speaks not only to the radicalization of the crime of rape through its connection with failed infrastructure or urban blight, but also to the apparently operant conception of rape and assault as things which occurred due to the contingency of environmental factors (fixing a light might prevent an assault) rather than structural problems endemic to the university community and exemplified by the administration's paternalistic tone.

Clearly, the Women's Center and an "Active Rape Prevention Education Program" were in place as early as 1979 and 1980, respectively, and working hard to "raise consciousness about and reduce the potential for sexual assault in the University community", adopting a more structural approach, according to the *Muirall* published on November 14th, 1980. Some of the workshops and exhibitions offered by the program tackled not only sexual assault, but also "sex and aggression and campus safety". These programs seemed to be doing the work to address problems for which the nighttime escort service provided by "Community Service Officers" ("dial 452-HELP") in line with the police chief's suggestion not to be caught alone, might have provided a temporary solution.

But if the Women's Center and the Active Rape Prevention Education Program were working to address the students' need for psychological support, sexual education, and a more comprehensive approach to the social and cultural conditions that precipitate sexual harassment and assault (and where besides a women's center might you find a workshop on aggression today?) these efforts and conversations hardly make it into the John Muir Residential College's Tenth Year Study, published in 1978. Dedicated to the faculty and students of John Muir college, the first page of the document claims that it will offer both "A Review" and "An Evaluation". It also contains an epigraph, loosely adapted from Book 3 of Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "... at their second bidding darkness fled, Light shown, and order from disorder sprung." The adaptation here is that the pronoun "his", referring to God's bidding, has been changed to "their", presumably marking the godlike effort undertaken by the authors of the document to generate order out of something hardly resembling it.

The study takes the form of two volumes, a report, and a study, including a survey which was taken during the academic year of 1977-78 of 186 undergrads and 21 faculty. The form in which the survey is presented is not assumed to be self-explanatory. After each question, an editorial paragraph is added explaining the question's results and its significance. Question number 16 is marked for "(women only)" and asks "How serious is the problem of rape on campus?" For the multiple choice answers

provided by the survey's authors, 72% of participants responded "serious" and 28% "not serious". This is the last question in the "Muir Attitude survey", the 9th appendix of the document, and the editorial paragraph following the question and results does not address the question or participants' responses. Instead, it seems to respond in prose form to a different question. "Only 25% of students report that they intend to live on campus next year," it states, "The reason they primarily cite for return is 'convenience'". "Of 75% who report not intending to return", it goes on, "a variety of reasons are given, including wanting to be outside of the school environment and being more independent. A few mention noise as a factor." Presumably, then, none mentioned the problem of rape on campus, deemed serious by 72% of respondents, though practically non-existent by the tenth year study's failure to address it, to be a factor in choosing not to return to on campus living the following year.

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* The formation of a third residential college would eventually spark controversy, generating a series of protests over the name and focus of this future college, led by the "Lumuba-Zapata" coalition.

- Doyle, Jennifer. *Campus Sex, Campus Security*. Semiotexte, 2015.

- Watanabe, Teresa. "Three decades before the #MeToo movement, UC San Diego led the way against sexual assault". <http://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-me-uc-sandiego-sexual-assault-20180430-story.html>

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