

Beyond misbehavior

painting by Ondine Cella



Misconduct increase poses concern

More students fall victim to rise in misbehavior post-pandemic

OLIVIA KIM

Editor-in-Chief

**name changed for confidentiality*

The first thing sophomore Joseph Rickher witnessed when walking into the mens' bathroom was the sight of other male students emptying out the menstrual product dispenser, peeling open the products and throwing them onto the ground.

"I didn't know what to say. I was dumbfounded," Rickher said. "I felt really uncomfortable ... I felt as if I didn't belong there."

As a transgender man, Rickher says that this occurrence pushed him to use the gender neutral bathroom even though it's located all the way adjacent to the nurse's office on the first floor. He naturally finds it frustrating to make the trip, but not doing so isn't worth the risk — he doesn't feel safe using the gendered ones.

This wasn't the first nor the last case of trans-phobia Rickher has experienced at Prospect. These instances have occurred not just in the bathrooms, but also the stairwells and even in classes — where he'll hear students misgender someone on purpose and face no reaction nor repercussions from the teacher.

Having faced bullying in middle school, Rickher stayed closeted, but he hoped that his peers would display more maturity now that they were all coming back to school as high school sophomores — unfortunately, he realized that his expectations were too optimistic.

In addition to the trans-phobic comments and actions, Prospect has seen nearly a 100% increase in behavior referrals this year compared to years pre-pandemic, according to Dean Nic Olson. These behavior referrals include a variety of misdemeanors from parking violations to hate speech. But the referrals that stand out are those for bullying and vandalism.

In a typical year, freshmen and sophomore boys are found to be responsible for most acts of mis-

conduct, however, this school year, there has been a significant rise in those populations' misbehavior.

This increase drove administration to schedule a 45-minute long assembly on Oct. 19 for each graduating class to address the issue and 25 minutes in school on Oct. 21 dedicated to smaller classroom discussions on the topic.

Principal Greg Minter says that coming back out of remote learning, the faculty and staff were prepared to deal with helping students academically and through mental health struggles; one way they did this was by implementing tutoring groups. But they didn't predict the impacts of the lack of socialization last school year.

"We've never experienced this before," Minter said. "We've never had to have these meetings [addressing behavior with the student body]. We've never had these kinds of behaviors [at this level]."

Olson and Dean Adam Levinson have already caught about 20 students who vandalized the building. Some even posted videos of their misconduct on TikTok, and Olson said one student told him about how many likes it got and "how good it made him feel."

Despite the positive affirmation from social media, students must go through a police investigation for vandalism and theft since it's a crime chargeable up to a felony and often leads to suspension from school. As for using hate speech, the direct consequences can be suspension or even expulsion on top of completing an educational project on why that behavior is wrongful.

While there may be some digital validation promoting certain actions, a number of students at Prospect are disappointed by the rise in misbehavior. The most targeted groups of harassment are transgender students and students of color, according to Minter.

Senior Valeria Navaro* is one of those students of color that has noticed and even been victim to instances of racism on campus. For Navaro, her boots are a symbol of her Mexican culture, and they help bring her closer to her family. With

the recent passing of her grandfather, she felt more encouraged to embrace that part of her culture, so she decided to wear her boots to Prospect.

Not long after, she heard a number of people making comments about her shoe choice, asking why she wore them and adding that they were ugly. People she knew even started notifying her that other students were making distasteful comments about her attire.

"I feel like having that ... taken away from me ... I can't be myself, and I can't express myself as a Hispanic," Navaro said. "I was really hurt when people were talking about my boots, because they come from Mexico, and I think they're so beautiful; they helped me feel

water. At that point, this activity on the bus was normal, and she decided to email administrators about it along with her enraged parents. The next few days after she reported it, there was a lull in the discord, but the bus resumed to its perpetual water park-state a week later even after a number of those students had been suspended.

Patyk, Navaro and Rickher were all happy that the assemblies happened and that administration specifically mentioned certain behaviors, but they do fear that not much change will come out of it if it isn't repeatedly discussed or followed up on.

It wasn't a surprise to Patyk to hear students laughing about the assemblies either — it just reaffirmed her fear that she may need

"For them, the worst part ... is the disappointment [from others]," Olson said. "When they're in here with their family [with] that embarrassment, and they're crying and feel horrible, you know [they regret it]. Good kids make poor decisions at times, and that's OK. That's what we're here [for] — to help them learn."

At the assemblies, administrators stressed the importance of notifying the school about misbehavior and have placed QR codes on fliers around the school providing a link to an anonymous tip line. Olson recognizes that it's difficult to speak up and understands that most bystanders don't, but he hopes that students realize that it will make a difference.

Navaro is the type of person to stand up for others, and she has in the past, but she does admit that it's hard sometimes to do so. One time, she was told that she was a "snitch" and a "p*ssy" for using her voice. But in another instance, she saw a freshman boy walking through the cafeteria as other freshmen made him their target to throw food at.

Navaro asked if he was OK, and he said he wasn't — and that they had been tormenting him since middle school. She went to the deans to report it, but sometimes she passes him in the halls and still sees other students laughing at him.

Even though Navaro may not see immediate resolutions to these situations despite her intervention, she still advocates for herself and others because she doesn't want to stop trying. Rickher, Patyk and Navaro all know fully well that change doesn't come easily, but learning to talk about it and help others is the very first step in that process if there is hope for any shift in behavior.

"I just feel like we all shouldn't be scared to speak up. There's people that ... [know what they are observing is wrong], but they still won't do anything," Navaro said. "But .. we should all stick together and take care of one another." 🦋

THIS YEAR, THERE HAVE BEEN

NEARLY 2x

AS MANY BEHAVIOR REFFERALS AS YEARS

PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC*

**according to Dean Nic Olson*

beautiful. And then hearing negative things said — it hurts."

Even off campus, it's a struggle for some students to get home unaffected by other students' behavior. Nearly every day, without being a target and solely a bystander, junior Noemi Patyk is hit by either food or drenched in water being thrown across the bus that she takes to go home.

"It's just really frustrating because after a day at school, you're tired — you just want to go home, but then [those kids] just start screaming and throwing water everywhere," Patyk said. "It's just chaos."

Patyk remembers having to walk home from the bus stop just for her parents to see her soaked in

to start finding a different mode of transportation to school by next month. And for Rickher, he worries that he won't be able to use the bathroom most convenient for him. For Navaro, she is uncertain that she will be able to display her heritage proudly without receiving negative comments from her peers.

Olson acknowledges that many of the perpetrators don't realize the magnitude of their actions until they end up in his office to be investigated. At Prospect, depending on the gravity of the violation, a student may face losing the ability to participate in an extracurricular or even expulsion.

One student, Olson recounts, was mortified about the possibility of his coach outside of Prospect hearing about his behavior, knowing that he would barely be able to face the fact that he let down his team.

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Homecoming dance starts discussion

After claims surface, students ask: what's next?

Staff Editorial

Senior Allie Winkler remembers hanging out with her friends in the middle of the football field at the homecoming dance when she saw a small, young girl's dress getting ripped down the front, and she soon realized that it was not an accident. The girl was visibly distraught, but the crowd was loud, and the scene was dark as colored lights flashed on and off.

The following school day, Winkler went to voice her concerns to Prospect's administration about the situation.

"Just to experience something like that would be incredibly traumatic," Winkler said. "I think that was the one [scene] that got me the most [outraged]."

This was not the only situation she witnessed at the dance. She also observed an incident that wasn't sexual assault but was still extremely distressing: a tall male student grabbing another petite girl's waist and throwing her into the mosh pit unwillingly.

It's been over a month since Winkler saw this incident at homecoming, and over a month since students reported cases of sexual assault and harassment from the dance to the school.

According to Principal Greg Minter, only two students came forward to report incidents, so he is unable to get a complete picture of the scale of the number of students impacted and the number of cases that occurred. Because of this, he said, he didn't want to send out a communication to the school and community which would put everyone on "high alert."

Minter specifically mentioned the claims of assault and harassment at the Oct. 19 class meetings to discuss general acts of misbehavior in the community. Minter also approved the establishment of a club for discussing sexual assault that is being initiated by juniors Hannah Lifton and Juliet Aquino. The club will be supervised by a counselor, so that there is someone knowledgeable on how to discuss those topics appropriately.

"I certainly don't want anyone to think that we're sweeping something under the rug,

because we follow up on everything," Minter said. "We have an obligation to [follow up on reports], and we do so. But at the same time, I have to balance that with creating some level of alarm."

We, Knight Media, thank administration for mentioning the sexual assault and harassment from homecoming at the assemblies and for allowing students to start a club to spread awareness about the issue. However, we believe that the school should not end the discussion here.

Now that the unfortunate events from the dance are being talked about among the student body, administration should take this chance to evaluate how students are taught about sexual assault during a school year. Sexual assault is defined as "sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim," according to RAINN, an anti-sexual assault organization.

It is foolish to believe that even if only two students reported these instances formally to the school that it doesn't need to be acted upon further.

The school has a place to educate students in a safe environment and should take action to teach students about how to talk about sexual assault and harassment, how to report it and how it can impact people.

We understand that the school is dealing with other behavioral issues at the moment, but discussing the topic of sexual assault shouldn't be only addressed by a guest speaker or solely as another one of the behavior problems overall.

The two brave girls that came forward shouldn't be the only reason the school plans to address this behavior, and it shouldn't be addressed only once. This should be taken as an opportunity to review how the school has been educating students about sexual assault and harassment and how they can promote more safe discussions. The sooner the issue of sexual assault is addressed with a safe discussion, the sooner students can feel safer at school and in

their own bodies.

Within the required health class that sophomores take at Prospect, there are two days afforded to discussing the topic of consent and sexual abuse. Children's Advocacy Center, an organization that works to prevent child abuse and assists victims, comes in to speak for one day within that semester long course.

Health teacher Aaron Marnstein says that there are a number of topics the state requires the health unit to cover in the human sexuality unit from pregnancy to anatomy, so they only have so much time to teach each topic.

However, Marnstein does think that two days in a four year curriculum is not enough time to teach every aspect of the topic let alone enforce an appropriate mindset about it. Whether it's coming from a guest speaker assembly or studying the topic within another class like an English or social science course, he thinks that it's important for the topic to be taught about in a structured environment.

"The more ... [a topic] ... is put to the forefront, the more it's likely to change [attitudes around it]," Marnstein said. "I think that we can't talk about it enough to be honest."

In order to bring the topic of sexual assault to discussion, Marnstein organized for a guest speaker to come talk about sexual assault nearly a decade ago. He thinks that it was important to have someone send out a message about a serious topic.

At the time, the guest speaker gave a speech to the students who were later split into smaller groups within their classes to discuss. Marnstein says that it was a successful session, but there hasn't been one to speak on the topic since.

Repeated education, however, is important. A Columbia University study found that women in college were half as likely to be sexually assaulted when they took sexual education classes before college. But sexual assault isn't a women's problem when most perpetrators of the act are male.

However, education for everyone is clearly important, and it's clearly needed if any change is expected to happen.

Marnstein sees that increasingly younger kids are getting the wrong information from the

wrong sources because their first encounter with information about sex is not through parents nor schools but through pornography. Especially now with the internet, there is more access to misguiding material. This leads Marnstein to think that how sexual assault is talked about and viewed is a societal issue.

"I think we're really far from getting to where we need to be, so I think the constant thing to do is to keep talking about it, to keep addressing it [and] to keep talking about what's acceptable behavior," Marnstein said.


Winkler observed a number of students displaying inappropriate behavior first hand when being educated about the topic in health class. She remembers

walking through the Clothesline Project display, in which victims of sexual assault anonymously write their stories on t-shirts to be hung up during health class, and hearing a few male students in the back making jokes.

While Marnstein understands this behavior is inappropriate, he believes that it's often the result of students not emotionally knowing how to deal with learning about the topic. If he sees those kinds of responses from students, he will discuss with them why it's harmful to act that way.

But even feeling that humor is the only way to cope with processing that kind of information just reaffirms the realization that most students don't know how to talk about this topic. And the only way to solve that problem is to discuss it more across the board — not just in health class and not just in a voluntary extracurricular club.

Minter says that the school hopes to implement some form of education on the topic in the coming months but states that many of the school's resources have to be allocated to addressing the other behavioral issues in the school at the moment.

"There's a lot of people that are pretty upset about [the events from the dance] and ... feel as though their school isn't helping the situation. And that's just scary," Winkler said. "When you see reports of sexual assault going up, and you see so many young girls like literally scared to go to school, or scared to wear a dress to homecoming because they think somebody is going to grope them at your school ... you need to do something about it." 



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SOMEONE IS SEXUALLY ASSAULTED EVERY

98 SECONDS

HOWEVER, ONLY

28%

OF THOSE REPORT IT*

*according to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center



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