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MIT

Anonymous alumna pens column about allegedly being raped while at MIT

Posted by Matt Rocheleau February 3, 2014 11:53 AM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Boston.com Staff

The author of an anonymous column in the MIT student newspaper last week wrote that she was raped by an older, higher-ranked colleague in her research group nearly three years ago, when she was a junior studying at the Cambridge campus.

The woman, who wrote in [The Tech](#) that she has since graduated from MIT, said she did not formally report the incident for more than a year and a half.

When she did report, campus and local police and officials from an MIT sexual assault response program were supportive. But, she wrote that a prosecutor she met with was "unsupportive."

The woman did not name the prosecutor or which office the official worked. The woman wrote than an assistant district attorney told her: "I had merely had 'traumatic sex' and that the man was 'sick.'"

"But, 'it was not illegal for [him] to want sex,' she said. She told me that there was not a clear enough of a struggle, and that 'consent is not like signing a contract' (that my standards for consent were too high)."

The Middlesex District Attorney's Office in a statement to Boston.com Monday acknowledges it investigated the alleged assault and defended its handling of the case and its decision not to file charges.

"The Middlesex District Attorney's Office conducted a coordinated investigation with the MIT police and a local police department regarding an allegation of sexual assault involving an MIT student," said the statement from Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan. "Based on that investigation, we determined that the matter would be closed without the filing of criminal charges. The specificity of the assessment, and particular reasons that led to this determination, remain confidential due to the nature of our obligations and responsibilities under the law."


"We understand how difficult the process can be, especially when it comes to closure without the result a complainant might seek and believe to be warranted," Ryan added.

"We do not minimize this writer's feelings, but the question prosecutors must determine in every investigation is whether the allegations and evidence support the prosecution of a crime and in this case they did not."

A spokeswoman for MIT said she could not comment on specific cases involving sexual

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assault.

The MIT alumna wrote that she was a virgin at the time of the assault.

“A dinner that I thought was going to be about discussing science turned into something extremely wrong,” she wrote.

The woman wrote that her assailant was 10 years older than she and a higher-ranked colleague in her research group.

“As an opening to the night, he bragged that only weeks before had he “helped secure” a multi-million dollar grant, which he described over an uncomfortably overpriced dinner that he insisted on buying me,” she wrote. “It was because of his work, he said, that people could do much needed-research, probably in things like cancer. Here, he was the true ethical hero, he said: focusing on the big picture and what really mattered.”

“I viewed the man as a mentor and close friend, and I felt a great deal of respect and trust for him, as a mentor,” the woman wrote.

She said later in the night the man raped her.

“I had asked him to stop multiple times and tried to push him off of me,” she wrote. “I knew this. He ignored me, but who was to blame? I had not spit in his face or tried to claw his eyes out.”

“When he didn’t listen, my brain failed to believe it was actually happening and shut down,” she added. “I felt deep guilt and shame that my subsequent silence was interpreted as a waving white flag: mistaken for consent.”

He said the man later wrote to her: “I can’t help but feel that I took advantage of you and it’s not really fair.”

“That was as close to an apology as I would ever get,” the woman wrote.

She said for more than a year, she was numb and confused, had trouble eating and sleeping and suffered “deep depression” while she remained primarily silent about what happened.

“My grades and focus suffered tremendously, but I was too embarrassed to tell any of my professors or teachers, or even most of my friends and family, what I was going through,” she wrote.

“I was afraid of reporting, for not being believed, for making the man who had done it to me angry, for potentially ruining a former friend’s life (when all I wanted to do was protect other students), and even for the ungrounded fear of losing all respect from my research advisor,” she added.

She wrote that she still feels traumatized and has nightmares about what happened.

But, “After years of therapy, the love of my family and close friends, travel, and self-care, I am beginning to feel whole again,” the woman wrote. “I am sharing this story here, because I want to give hope to any individual — male or female — who may currently feel voiceless, confused, worthless or hopeless, due to sexual violence. You are not alone and your amount of worth is infinite. Be gentle and patient with yourself.”

This story was updated Monday, Feb. 3 at 2 p.m. to add a statement from the Middlesex District Attorney.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus pages](#).

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