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Recommended Citation

Golde, Gaelyn, "Trouble in Paradise: Investigating Rape-Collusive Attitudes, Beliefs, and Practices on a Boarding School Campus" (2017). *Spring 2017*. 44.

https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2017/44

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TROUBLE IN PARADISE:
INVESTIGATING RAPE-COLLUSIVE ATTITUDES,
BELIEFS, AND PRACTICES ON A BOARDING
SCHOOL CAMPUS

Gaelyn Golde

Mentors: Jami Ake, Mary Ann Dzuback, and Kim Webb

In this exploratory study, I posited: how, if at all, are rape-collusive attitudes reinforced or perpetuated on a boarding school campus? Typically, adolescent and teenage students learn behaviors and codes of conduct within the family unit—at boarding schools, that responsibility is handed to the administration. What happens when an administrative body stands in for a parent? Does the boarding school environment merit focused, individual study separate from college or residential high school communities? Sexual violence preventative programming is often implemented at the college level, but students entering college are not blank slates. How are incoming college freshmen already products of their environment? Is there opportunity to intervene earlier and target rape culture more effectively?

Through a survey distributed through alumni and current student channels and follow-up anonymous interviews, I conducted a case study at a single Northeastern boarding school to gain an understanding of the current campus climate from the perspective of students and alumni. I focused primarily on three areas of student life: sexual education programming, administrative policies regulating student sexual practices, and student attitudes and beliefs surrounding sex and sexuality. Due to my small sample size, no conclusive findings could be asserted. Instead, I looked for emerging patterns in the responses, which could gesture towards opportunities for further research.

I found that boarding schools rest at a unique nexus of study: between adolescence and adulthood, and independence and dependence. The responses to my survey allowed me to conclude with narrower, finer-tuned research questions that could dictate further studies, and also illustrated a small piece of a larger rape-collusive epidemic within a population that is often ignored as its own inimitable environment.