

The Badger Herald - Sexual assault examined from ethnic perspective

by Nancy Godinho

Participants in a sexual-assault panel Wednesday night opened new doors in a long-ignored discussion regarding sexual assault and its impact in minority communities.

Speaking to members of the UW community at the Lowell Center, the panel, consisting of six student leaders, facilitated dialogue on the challenges students of color and LGBT students face on campus.

“It’s our goal tonight to find out where the problems are and see what [solutions are] needed on campus,” said Angela Rose, founding member of PAVE: Promoting Awareness, Victim Empowerment and ASM Women’s Issues Diversity Liaison.

Jennifer Epps, co-chair of the ASM Diversity Committee, said it is time UW starts dealing with sexual-assault issues. Since January 2001, over 30 students have been sexually assaulted on campus.

“What’s happening here [tonight] needs to be applauded,” Epps said. “This is the first panel of its kind. Sexual assault among people of color is not talked about.”

The meeting represented the opening of communication networks for victims and an educational opportunity for members of the campus community.

One panelist, Nidhi Kashyap, said discussions such as these are “a way to work through personal things.”

But the first step in arriving at any solution, the panelists said, requires a definition. According to Epps, sexual violence is “unwanted anything with sexual implications.” Brandi Grayson, an ASM student of color liaison, said it is hard to decipher what is unwanted for all people, and that individuals must do this on their own.

“The main thing is to be assertive,” Grayson said. “Let people know what makes you uncomfortable. We must educate each other.”

Beyond defining the problem, the panelists said aggressive steps must be taken in a movement to combat sexual violence on campus.

“The only way to get things done on campus is to coalition-build,” Kashyap said. “All [students] should be included.”

Jaime Gamez of Men Opposing Sexual Assault said awareness is a key issue in preventing future assaults.

“We need to get the word out and educate,” Gamez said.

The panel opened up the floor for audience members to voice their concerns.

Coalition-building, said one female audience member, is ideal but not always easy, especially on this campus.

“The problem here is that people are singled out,” she said. “How can we make this big university small?”

Grayson said the issue is sometimes lost among other battles on campus. “A lot of times people of color can get caught up on race,” Grayson said. “Things don’t always have to be a race issue. Even people of the same race can never relate to one another one hundred percent.”

Overall, the resounding consensus among panel and audience members alike emphasized that sexual assault is a human issue rather than a race issue. “It’s a human issue,” Gamez said. “It could happen to you, to your friend or to a member of your family.”