Changing Attitudes
By Marty Marsh Jacobs

College life isn’t just about classes, books, papers, and exams. It’s also about learning outside the classroom by experimenting and developing who you are and who you want to become, not just what you want to do for a living. You may decide to be part of Greek life, become involved in causes or activities related to your interests/career goals, make new friends, or try something new.

Something new like…. testing limits.

If you try to see how drunk you can get or, more importantly, how drunk you can get someone else in order to have sex, something’s wrong with that picture. The image or myth that anyone who commits sexual assault is a stranger in a ski mask threatening the victim with a weapon is inaccurate. Yes, this can happen, but the attitude and influence of peers can lead to inappropriate behavior including sexual assault. This has been reported repeatedly in the news in recent months.

Tragically, if you engage in such behavior you may not even realize how it can affect another student’s life. If you act like a sex offender, you are a sex offender. If you take advantage of someone, you’re adding another victim to the statistics. If you have to carry them or help them walk, sex isn’t consensual. Unlike the stranger in the ski mask, the weapon can be alcohol or drugs. Making a mix of sweet punch and strong alcohol is setting the stage. This isn’t scoring or hooking up. It’s assault. Bragging about what happened later to friends who voice no objections leads to the belief that this is normal college behavior when it is, in reality, criminal behavior.

It’s no secret that bragging happens around peers. It is a secret that you may feel uncomfortable with what you hear and say nothing or pretend to support the behavior. The attitude is “not me, not my problem”. The attitude is “I can’t change what happened”. The reality is you can change what might happen in the future. You can make a difference by setting an example through your words and through your actions… by changing attitudes. Attitudes can be changed if people are willing to confront; if people are willing to intercede.

Consider this. How would you feel and what would you say or do if someone you care about was raped… if it happened to your sister, mother, or girlfriend? Would you stay silent or take action? Everyone who is sexually assaulted has at least one person who cares about them. Sexual assault can happen to anyone. Sexual assault happens to males as well as females, older people and the young. It crosses racial lines, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, educational level… Rape doesn’t discriminate.

Students don’t always report what happened to them because of feeling too ashamed to speak up or confused about what happened due to a blackout. Students who prey on others don’t realize they did anything wrong. Sexual assaults on college students are rare, but they do happen. Make a difference by setting an example through words and actions. Change attitudes.

If something happens to you or someone you care about, don’t hesitate to contact the Counseling Center, 204 Halladay Student Services Building, 903-889-5145.