



VIOLENCE  
**AGAINST**  
**WOMEN**

WOMEN AND SOCIETY



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# IMPORTANT EVENTS IN WOMEN'S HISTORY

**1915**

Women from the United States and Europe gather in the Netherlands for the first International Congress of Women.

**1977**

The White Buffalo Calf Women Society is founded at the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in the United States. It's the first nonprofit for American Indian women who are victims of violence.

**1871**

Alabama is the first state to rescind men's legal right to beat their wives.

**1967**

One of the United States' first women's shelters for domestic violence victims opens in Maine.

**1890**

**1910**

**1930**

**1950**

**1970**

**1911**

In March, the first-ever International Women's Day is celebrated.

**1946**

The United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women is established. It mandates that standards be set for women's rights.

**1978**

Both the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence are formed in the United States.

**1972**

The first rape crisis line in the United States is opened in Washington, DC.



## CHAPTER TWO

# WHAT TYPES OF VIOLENCE DO WOMEN FACE?

Being sexually assaulted or raped is a heavy load to carry. Just ask Emma Sulkowicz, a graduate of Columbia University in New York City. After allegedly being raped the first day of her sophomore year in August 2012, Sulkowicz was reluctant to file a complaint. But after learning that other women had had similar experiences, she decided to file a formal complaint with the university in April 2013. Later, she was shocked to learn that her alleged attacker was not going to be kicked out of school despite having three similar complaints against him. In fact, according to the *Columbia Daily Spectator* student newspaper, the university found him “not responsible” for all three allegations.<sup>28</sup> In May 2014, Sulkowicz filed a report with the New York City Police Department. However, police did not pursue charges in the case.

To protest Columbia University’s handling of her situation, Sulkowicz decided that she wanted to make a statement about what was happening to not only her but to women on college campuses across the country. As a result, she decided to carry a twin-sized dorm mattress everywhere



**Emma Sulkowicz carried a mattress around Columbia University's campus every day as part of her *Carrying the Weight* project, a response to the university's handling of her rape report. Columbia did not discipline the student accused of raping Sulkowicz, who was also a Columbia student.**

she went. Her plan was to lug it around until her alleged rapist was kicked off campus. She called it *Carrying the Weight*. She also used the mattress project as part of her senior art thesis project.

Sulkowicz said the idea came to her while working on an art piece at the Yale Norfolk Art Residency. "I had to move a mattress out of a room to make a video," Sulkowicz said. "The image of me moving a mattress got stuck in my head. I think it was because I was raped in my own bed—it was a place associated with a lot of pain and hurt. The idea of me having to carry around my pain everywhere I go was reflected in me bringing the mattress, which is kept in a safe place, out into the light and into

## UNIVERSITIES NOT HANDLING SEXUAL ASSAULT PROPERLY

Siding with an alleged perpetrator of sexual violence or brushing a complaint under the rug is not that uncommon among colleges and universities, according to a report in the American Psychological Association journal *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*. According to lead researcher Corey Rayburn Yung, a law professor at the University of Kansas, the norm is for universities to downplay the situation and the number of incidents.

“Colleges and universities still aren’t taking the safety of their students from sexual assault seriously,” Yung said. “The study shows that many universities continue to view rape and sexual assault as a public relations issue rather than a safety issue. They don’t want to be seen as a school with really high sexual assault numbers, and they don’t want to go out of their way to report that information to students or the media.”

This lack of intervention can have serious consequences. “The result is students at many universities continue to be attacked and victimized, and punishment isn’t meted out to the rapists and sexual assaulters,” Yung said.

*Quoted in American Psychological Association, “Many Universities Undercount Sexual Assaults on Campus, Research Finds,” ScienceDaily, February 2, 2015. [www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com).*

the public eye. That mirrored the situation I was in and I felt like it was a good metaphor.”<sup>29</sup>

In addition to carrying the mattress every day, Sulkowicz and more than twenty other students filed a federal complaint against Columbia University alleging the school failed to protect victims of sexual assault. Together, the students filed the complaint with the US Department of Education, alleging violations of Title II, Title IX, and the Clery Act. Title II, which is part of the Americans with Disabilities Act, is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in all areas of public life. This includes everything from jobs and schools to transportation. Title IX is part of the Higher Education Act and requires any school receiving money from the US Department of Education to not discriminate based on a person’s sex. The Clery Act is a federal law that requires

colleges and universities across the country to disclose information about crime on their campuses.

Since Sulkowicz and her classmates filed the federal complaint against Columbia University, the *Columbia Daily Spectator* has reported that the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights is conducting five investigations into the university's handling of sexual assault cases. This is the highest number of concurrent investigations that the university has ever faced. What's more, with five open investigations, Columbia tied for second for the highest number of active Title IX complaints in the nation, according to reports from the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. "Columbia is more willing to silence and punish survivors and their supporters than serial rapists," the students said in their statement. "Because of this reality, students have decided to file . . . [the complaint] to hold the university accountable for its deliberate mishandling of campus sexual violence and mental health."<sup>30</sup>

Sulkowicz, who carried the mattress until the day she graduated, said the most painful thing for her was dealing with people who didn't believe her. "People somehow [used] the attention I [received] to discredit me," she said. "I know what happened. Why would I lie about something that terrible? That's been the most painful thing—dealing with people who don't believe something that was really traumatic for me."<sup>31</sup>

**"I know what happened. Why would I lie about something that terrible? That's been the most painful thing—dealing with people who don't believe something that was really traumatic for me."<sup>31</sup>**

**– Emma Sulkowicz, rape victim and creator of *Carrying the Weight* project**

In 2016, Sulkowicz received the Woman of Courage Award from the National Association of Women. When she posted about the award on her Instagram account, she took the opportunity to address people who had accused her of not moving on or getting over what happened to her. "Many people ask me how I've

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