

“Me Too” Founder brings to light sexual violence on campus

By: Sophie Walsh, 511 Words

For The Eagle

WASHINGTON- American University’s Women’s Initiative presented Tarana Burke, founder of the “MeToo” movement, with the Women’s Initiative Award for Excellence in Activism Saturday night in the Tavern.

Burke, the brain behind “MeToo”, gave the crowd insight on her work as an organizer and the origins of the MeToo movement in Selma Alabama. Burke herself is a survivor of sexual violence and called upon her experiences when creating “MeToo”, a program to help other young African American girls who were experiencing sexual violence. When #MeToo went viral this October, Burke found herself receiving a brand new audience of survivors around the world, of all shapes, sizes, ages and races.

“The simple, yet courageous “Me too” hashtag campaign has emerged as a rallying cry for people everywhere who have survived sexual assault and sexual harassment,” Dr. Gay Young said. “And Tarana Burke’s powerful, poignant story as creator of what is now an international movement that supports survivors promises to move, uplift and inspire us tonight and going forward.”

Burke’s message did just that. American University is far from unexposed to sexual violence, given the recent November sexual assault case that left students reeling. Sexual violence on

college campuses is an epidemic, and while the administration at AU has recently received commendations for their handling of sexual violence on campus and Title IX complaints from Education Technology Company- EVERFI, that doesn't mean the school has perfected protecting students; as several AU students revealed that they are still dealing with sexual violence today.

“I personally did survive sexual assault as well and I try to advocate for a lot of my friends, many of them do come to me asking for advice on what they should do,” AU student Sarah* said, “The problem I face, especially at university, is that fact that a lot of friends will come to you with the problem, but they don't want to hear the solution of going to the school or going to authorities or reporting it.”

When the event was turned over to a question and answer session moderated by College of Arts and Sciences professor, Sybil Williams, the experiences of AU students like Sarah* were revealed in each question asked of Burke. Sexual violence is still affecting many students at American University, as every person who asked Burke a question during the discussion, was themselves a survivor of sexual violence. In her answers, Burke had answers for all victims.

“It's the same thing, how can you heal in a community where you were hurt,” Burke said. “This college campus is a community, when people get hurt on this college campus it means something has to change, the culture has to shift, the policies have to shift, things have to change in order for people to feel safe.”

In an evening filled with love, support and empowerment, Tarana Burke reminded American University that the campus' battle with sexual violence is far from over, and gave survivors on campus an opportunity to share their stories. After each survivor gave their testimony, Burke responded with two infamous words: "Me Too."

*Last name redacted for privacy