

The Problem?

Mood

Antioch High School freshman Brenna Padgett said she was walking in the hall during passing period when a girl whom she did not know threatened to slap her if she didn't keep on walking.

"I don't know why she said that. It was mean and unnecessary," said Padgett.

Incidents like this are all too common in the ACHS hallways, according to students, and the lack of respect displayed may be deeper than simple hallway drama.

Sometimes, students may not respect others because of age, gender, and religion. Another reason leading to a lack of respect another is skin deep- one's race.

This lack of respect could ultimately lead to a tense racial environment at the school. Over the years the diversity of the student population at ACHS has increased along with comes a tenuous level of tolerance for individual differences.

In a survey of 100 ACHS students, 16% said they would describe themselves as racist. 53% said they consider racism a problem at ACHS. 28% said they have been involved in a racial incident.

Racism stems from a lack of respect for others, and ACHS students and staff say both a lack of respect and racism are present here.

"The issues at ACHS are looks, gender, age- a lot more than race," said ACHS dean Wilbur Borrero.

Students have indicated that racism may not be the only problem, but it is one that deserves a closer look.

Causes

A white male ACHS junior who asked not to be

identified was sitting in the commons earlier this year when three African-American students walked up to him.

"They came up to me and asked me if I was racist and hated them and my reply was yes," he said.

This student admits to being racist, and said he uses racial slurs on a regular basis.

As for why he doesn't like African-Americans, he said, "I just don't."

According to the student, his father is also racist, and the student said he thinks his father's racist attitude has influenced him to be that way, too.

This white, male junior said he has always been "a little bit" racist but when he got to high school where the minority population was growing, his racist attitude grew.

The minority population has grown steadily over the past three years. As of the 2002, there were only 19 African-American students at ACHS, but that number has grown to 36 this year. The Hispanic population has gone from 47 students to 61 students in the same time period.

Although the minority population has grown, ACHS still is predominantly white, with 2011 white students.

Junior Michael Pollitt has also said he thinks that ACHS has a racist problem.

"The white people have not experienced racial diversity in Antioch, Lindenhurst, Lake Villa."

Pollitt said recent growth in minority population has left white students confused.

"... We had little to no students that were [members] of a minority [group,] and then all-of-a-sudden we have this boom out of nowhere. Most of the white students don't know how to cope with any of this."

As for a racial problem at ACHS, the white male junior said, "Yes, I think that most people are racist against someone. It's just that I talk about it openly while other people keep it to themselves."

Amanda DeMarco, ACHS senior and president of the Amnesty International Club said she thinks there is a problem with racism at ACHS.

As for the causes of racism, DeMarco said, "It gives insecure people a way to feel superior."

Becky McBrady, ACHS senior, had a different perspective.

"Racism happens when people take things too far," she said. The problem now, according to McBrady, is reverse discrimination.

"There is not only disrespect for color, but disrespect for everything."

Effects

Opinions differ over the causes of racism, but the experiences and feelings of minority students speak for themselves.

A female ACHS junior, who asked not to be identified, recently experienced regular racial harassment on school grounds.

She said she "tried to get through it," but after a period of time, "just couldn't take it anymore."

She reported the harassment to the authorities. She and her friends were questioned at length by the police, who also collected information about a prior racial incident. According to the student, the perpetrators were taken to court and the event went on their permanent records.

The student said the situation was "stupid, very embarrassing, and degrading."

According to Antioch Police Chief Chuck Fagan, such an incident did occur.

"There was one minor event [involving racism] that occurred earlier this year, but it was taken care of."

Still, Fagan said that in general, ACHS students aren't a problem.

"We give the kids at ACHS a good report card," he said. "They have a pretty clean track record."

Still, some African-American students report incidents involving racism. ACHS student Conchetta Quaites said she has been harassed in the hallway.

"I was walking down the hall and some guy was like 'why are you f***ing black people so slow?'" she said.

African-American students like Thabit Saleem has also experienced harassment, and said he responded with violence.

"I beat someone up because he told me that there were too many [racial slur] in this school," Saleem said.

Students said that they have also faced racial stereotypes. ACHS senior Crystal Wilson is one such student.

"In class, some boy asked me why I wear rope for hair. It made me so mad..." said Wilson. He was referring to her extensions, which are commonly used in African-American hairstyles.

As a result of racist attitudes, some minority students don't feel comfortable at ACHS.

"I'm not comfortable [at ACHS] because I get sick of going through the stupid remarks towards us blacks," said Quaites.

Krystle Umpierre, another minority student at ACHS, said she thinks there are "way too many racists [at ACHS]."

"People just call us names to cause trouble," Umpierre said.

Wilson agreed, saying she feels uncomfortable not because of other's skin color, but their attitudes.



"It's not because [ACHS is] mostly white, it's just because there are a lot of racists."

The problem might go unnoticed, because in some cases, Saleem said, the problem is well-masked.

"Our school has a lot of undercover racist people. They say one thing but believe another," he said.

Saleem also said that he feels uncomfortable at ACHS because there aren't very many people from a minority background.

"Everyone is too close-minded," he said.

Other students from minority backgrounds haven't experienced problems. Josh Enck, who is of Asian descent, is one such student.

"None of [the racism] is directed toward me; I haven't noticed anything," Enck said.

While he said there are some students who have racist attitudes, especially toward African-Americans, Enck doesn't think it is a major issue.

"I don't see it as a problem at our school," he said. "Our school is pretty good at those kinds of things."

Wilbur Borrero, ACHS dean, said he and other staff members are aware that racism is present in ACHS hallways.

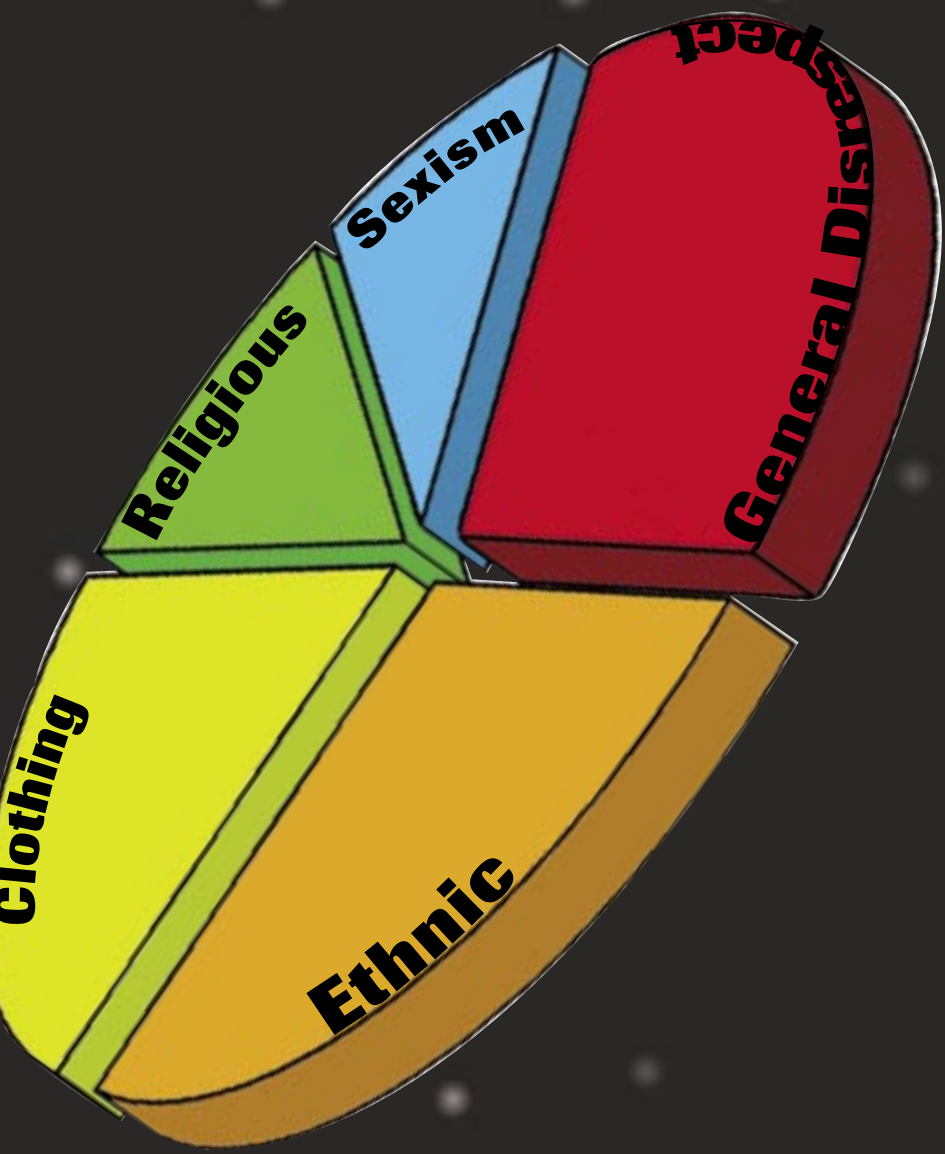
Borrero said that recently an African American student came to him and was offended because someone in one of his classes used a racial slur toward him.

Borrero said that without proof, he cannot take action.

According to Borrero, the proof of inter-racial intolerance is in the commons. People sit in segregated groups. They don't usually talk to each other and when they do, it isn't constructive.

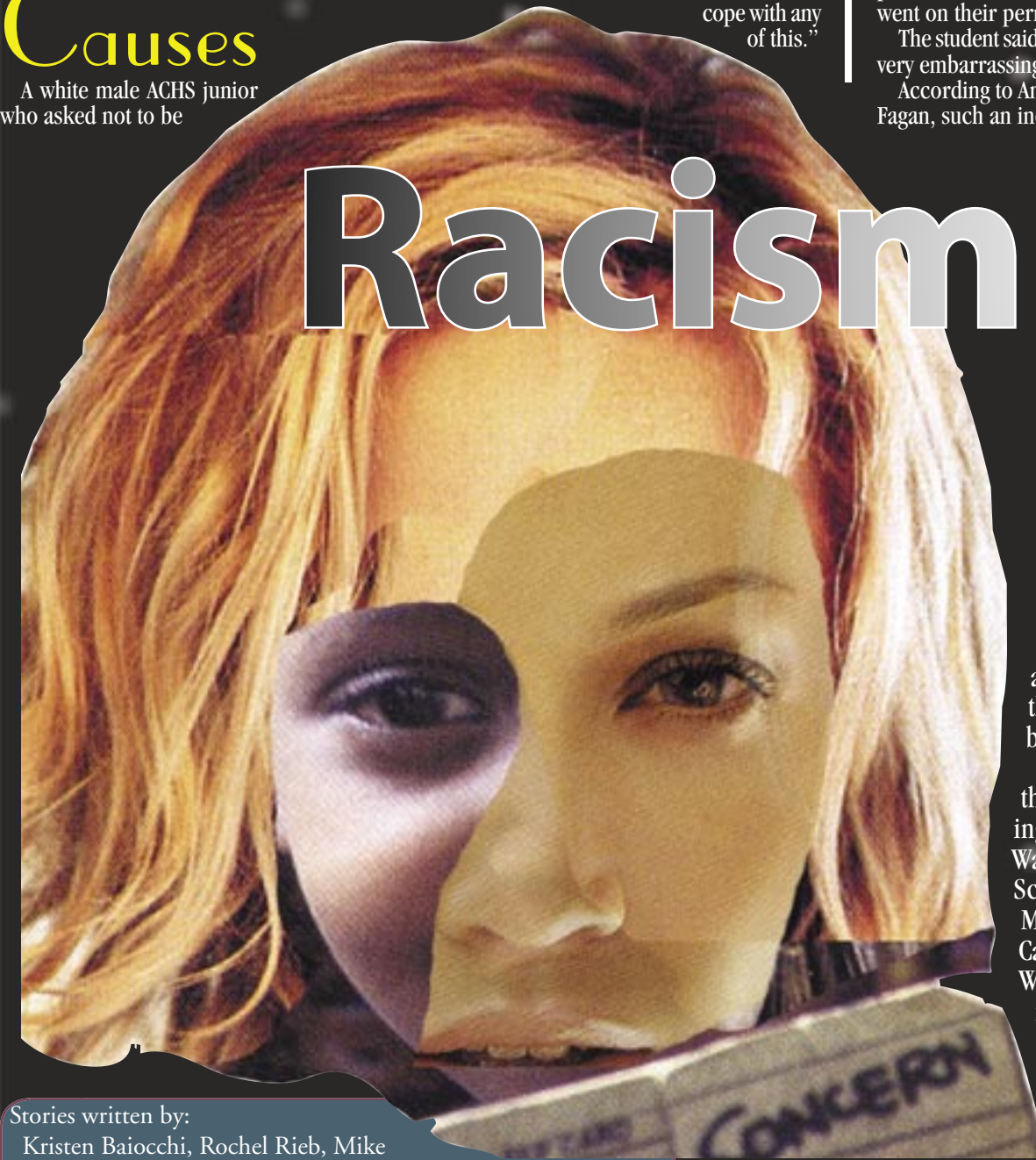
Borrero said he and other administrators see the hostility increasing, and have discussed solutions.

"The staff needs to be sensitive to this issue and also be able to discuss it in the classroom environment," said Borrero.



Which of these types of discrimination have you experienced?

Racism shows its face



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Solutions

If racism is in fact a problem at ACHS, then a solution must be found.

Other schools in the area are also dealing with this problem. Warren Township High School dean, Richard Mueller of the Almond Campus, doesn't believe WTHS has an issue with racism. According to Mueller, there have not been any specific cases of racism at the school. So what keeps racism out of WTHS?

One possible answer is that the school offers a session called First Class, a crash course in respect for students, where they learn how to treat people with dignity and respect, use appropriate language, deal with conflicts positively and to have pride in their fellow students and their educational environment. In the past few years, sessions were held approximately once a month during the school day, ensuring a large student attendance. This year however, the sessions are held outside of school hours, creating a decrease in student attendance. However, WTHS has yet to see a rise in conflicts involving racism within the school.

"We try to create an atmosphere of

mutual respect," said Mueller on the program.

Jeena James, a senior at WTHS described the sessions as a way of gaining respect for one another.

James herself is considered a minority in the United States and therefore lives with the possibility of being discriminated against. But James does not consider racism to be an issue for her at school.

"I haven't really experienced anything like that [racial discrimination]," said James.

"Round Lake High School principal, Dr. Jeff Brierton, also does not feel that there is a problem with racism at RLHS.

"We have counselors that are willing to talk to students who are

having problems with racism, but our students are pretty good with those issues."

Kelly Schwarz, RLHS senior, agrees with her principal that there doesn't seem to be a problem at her high school.

"I know of several people at my high school who are racist, but not a lot. Everyone pretty much gets along with each other, said Schwarz. "No one in our school really brings up that kind of stuff... but we don't really have a prevention program or anything like that."

So what is the answer to racial discrimination at ACHS? There may not be one.

"Certain people may act a certain way, and there is nothing that you can

