




4-16-2015

Object to Your Affection

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Lauro, Melissa J., "Object to Your Affection" (2015). *SURGE*. 223.
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Object to Your Affection

Abstract

Recently a guy in one of my classes defended objectification of women on the grounds that if he cares for a girl, he will treat her like he treats his most treasured objects; he used his coat as an example. He said that he loved his coat, he wouldn't let it touch the ground, and he took great care of it; he would do the same for any girl he cared about, for "his girl." [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, Feminism, Objectifying Women, Sexual Assault, Rape Culture

Disciplines

Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Politics and Social Change | Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance | Social Psychology and Interaction | Sociology of Culture | Women's Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

OBJECT TO YOUR AFFECTION

April 16, 2015



Recently a guy in one of my classes defended objectification of women on the grounds that if he cares for a girl, he will treat her like he treats his most treasured objects; he used his coat as an example. He said that he loved his coat, he wouldn't let it touch the ground, and he took great care of it; he would do the same for any girl he cared about, for "his girl."

The class laughed, amused I suppose. My professor simply nodded, didn't engage in discussion with him or the class, and only one person half-heartedly argued with his comparison. No one questioned what his words really meant or their implications. No one questioned what this meant for girls he didn't care about; what objects were those girls? Scraps of paper, shoes, trash?

Objects don't have organs, blood, or complex bodily systems that allow them to breathe, sleep, live. Objects cannot talk or make conversation; objects are silent. Objects are for the pleasure of their owners, and their sole purpose is to be used by their owners; objects don't have choices. Objects are to be looked at and touched as much as their owners want to. Owners may treasure an object, but as long as an object doesn't break, it will be used, beaten, thrown around, and forgotten about. Objects cannot say "yes" or "no;" objects cannot consent. Objects don't have feelings, emotions, or thoughts. Objects cannot be confused or hurt.

People can. Women can. Making a woman interchangeable with an object, with a coat, makes it easier to (ab)use her. Objects can be important, but are impersonal; people do not make connections with objects, they don't get to know them, they do not really care about them. Making a woman an object is to make her unimportant and voiceless; it makes abusing her—whether it be sexually or physically—easier and less

dramatic. Just another beaten wife, another girl “fondled,” another rape victim. Abuse and rape become a number and not a story.

Sexual assault emails we receive from DPS have increased this semester. Reactions are mostly divided between people who think “it’s another drunk freshman girl who regretted sex” and those who want to take action. Sometimes even those people sum it up with, “stop raping people, it’s not that hard.” We need to question why sexual assault is so prevalent. We need to question why we view such violent, traumatic and violating crimes as practically inevitable. We need to question the culture that allows rape and sexual assault to not be viewed as unusual or uncommon.

Just the other day at a frat party, a brother slapped my butt as I was leaving; this wasn’t shocking, and my friends barely blinked when I told them. One even said she doesn’t care if her “ass is slapped” as long as she gets free alcohol.

Now, the coat comment may seem innocent at first (especially since boys are often extolled when they treat a girl “right”), but when it goes unquestioned, it becomes ingrained into our way of thinking and then into our actions. If we think of women and talk about women as objects, it’s much easier to take control of a woman’s body without consent, and without viewing it as wrong. Research shows that [women who are objectified](#) by their partners experience increased sexual coercion, increased body shame, and lower sexual agency.

What’s even more disconcerting is that my friends and I considered ass slapping to be a normal part of our evening. My friend was even satisfied to let her body be used as a form of currency (alcohol). This scenario – our willingness to support, accept, normalize and trivialize abuse – is rape culture.

We don’t often connect our actions or occasional comments to the perpetuation of a major societal problem. Making one joke or doing one stupid thing at a frat party seems small; but we all do these small actions, often multiple times a day, and that is what creates a societal problem. We become conditioned to participate in a culture that perpetuates harm and inequity and we become willing to accept it as norm.

Rape culture is not rape, but when we allow it to exist we create an environment in which sexual abuse can thrive.

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