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Sexism - LMFAO

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Abstract

So I have a confession to make, one that I'm really not proud of, but part of being a mature person is acknowledging, accepting, and learning from your past mistakes. Here it is:

I told a sexist joke. [excerpt]

Keywords

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Disciplines

Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Gender and Sexuality | Sociology | Women's Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](http://www.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

SEXISM – LMFAO

June 4, 2013

So I have a confession to make, one that I'm really not proud of, but part of being a mature person is acknowledging, accepting, and learning from your past mistakes. Here it is:

I told a sexist joke.

Actually, I've told a few. They've definitely never been my go-to genre of humour, and I haven't made one in a long time, but that doesn't change the fact that in the past, I have made the implication that the reason you shouldn't hit a woman with a car is that you aren't supposed to drive in the kitchen.

I know. I feel kind of awful. I want to take a shower every time I even think about it.

The thing is, I used to not feel bad about making those kinds of jokes. I mean, I'm a woman after all, so it's okay, right?

Not really.

Being part of a specific group doesn't automatically mean that you are incapable of discriminating against others in it. There were plenty female anti-suffragists and women who voted against the Equal Rights Amendment (which still hasn't been ratified, by the way). Women can perpetuate sexist behaviour without even meaning to do so. Steph's [blog](#) a few weeks ago talked about how Caroline in Sixteen Candles perpetuates rape culture, but Haviland Morris had to agree to play such a character. Also, I first learned the term "sorostitute" from a fellow Gettysburg female, and I know a number of girls on this campus who are [more than happy](#) to participate in some good old-fashioned [slut-shaming](#).

Still, I wasn't arguing against women's suffrage or perpetuating rape culture, right? I was just telling a joke. There's nothing funny about sexism, though. By telling that joke I was making light of the struggle for equality that should be taken seriously. With that joke in particular, I was also attaching a negative connotation to the idea of being a stay-at-home parent, a perfectly legitimate career choice for members of either sex which many women are still looked down upon for making. I also can't help but wonder if, even though I was only joking, a part of me didn't believe what I was saying. No, I'm not against women's rights, but I'd be lying if I said that I don't have to consciously remind myself, in all of my feminist glory, that staying home and raising a family is just as awesome

as becoming a CEO. Furthermore, I've encountered a lot of other people who have made sexist, racist, and otherwise offensive jokes who I had a hard time believing when they told me they were "only joking."

Depending on my audience, even if it wasn't my intention, I might also have been justifying someone else's sexist opinions. I used to tell myself it was okay because I saved these jokes for conversations among friends. No one with whom I closely associate could be sexist, right? I think I always assumed that I would be able to tell that someone was sexist because s/he would have an evil moustache or be such an inherently repulsive person that I would just automatically avoid him or her. That's the thing with -isms though: they're so ingrained in our society that you can be a perfectly nice, normal human being and still discriminate against others. It may be because you don't know it or because you just don't understand what's wrong with it. This is something I realized when I made a joke about women being bad drivers only to have a close female friend respond by saying, without a hint of irony, "I know, they should have to take a more stringent driving test or something."

I think that was really the moment that I started to understand why my sense of humor was problematic. It's one of the first times that I became truly aware of the fact that sexism isn't something that exists only in history books about the 1920s, in didactic episodes of television shows, or in news stories about [honor killings](#) in some developing countries. It's here, and it's now, and it's disgusting.

We see it clearly in shocking occurrences such as the Steubenville rape case, the fact that women make [77 cents or less](#) to a man's dollar, or the numerous blogs, like [this one](#) in which women share their stories of harassment. All of these are obvious manifestations of a much more subtle and inherent problem though. It's one that's perpetuated by seemingly inconsequential instances, by the prevalence of [princess culture](#), Princess Merida's [makeover](#), the sheer number of films that don't pass the [Bechdel test](#), and statements like "[boys will be boys](#)," "what was she wearing," and "I was only joking." Sometimes one person can even criticize harassment while unintentionally perpetuating rape culture [at the same time](#). With this in mind, it's pretty much impossible to know whether you're joking among friends or justifying gender discrimination. Sexism, as well as other -isms is something we [internalize](#); because of this, it's really difficult even to know whether or not [we ourselves](#) hold prejudice views.

If a joke about hitting your dishwasher helps to perpetuate violence against women by making light of spousal abuse, then it really isn't "harmless," is it? Making a conscious effort to censor your humor or, if you're like me, change a habit, might require a little effort. Trust me though, it's worth it. There are plenty of jokes out there that don't perpetuate negative stereotypes. Better yet, some, like [the Onion](#) and [Rape Crisis Scotland](#), even use humour to point out how gender discrimination is stupid and just not funny.

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