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Abstract

****TRIGGER WARNING****

You are walking to class when you feel someone grab your butt with both hands. You scream, swing around, and watch your assailant sprint away. You feel humiliated, disgusted, violated. You look over your shoulder with every step on the way home and cry yourself to sleep. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, sexual assault, rape culture, social media

Disciplines

Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) 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

UP-VOTE THIS

October 1, 2014

****TRIGGER WARNING****



You are walking to class when you feel someone grab your butt with both hands. You scream, swing around, and watch your assailant sprint away. You feel humiliated, disgusted, violated. You look over your shoulder with every step on the way home and cry yourself to sleep.

It's very late on a Saturday night, you walk home with a trusted friend. You are drunk and he brings you back to his room, which is closer. You are so tired and lay down to sleep. Minutes later you wake up with him pulling down your pants. Although you beg him to stop, he doesn't.

You are dancing with your friends in a cramped fraternity basement when you are approached by an acquaintance. The music is loud, the basement is dark, and you are dancing with him before you realize what's happening. He steps behind you, and you feel his hands on your waist, then up your skirt, his fingers pressing into your flesh. You want to yell, but when your mouth opens, nothing comes out.

These incidents have three important elements in common:

1. They are all defined as [sexual assault](#).
2. They have all happened to students on our campus in some way, shape, or form.
3. They have all been joked about, whether in personal interactions or on social media.

Obviously, the fact that so many sexual assaults are occurring on our campus is unacceptable. However, what seems to be less obvious to people is that sexual assault is never—I repeat, *never*—a laughing matter.

Now, I bet I can guess what you're thinking.

1. "This chick needs to chill out."
2. "She's taking this way too seriously."
3. "It's just a joke."

4. All of the above

But I'm not going to chill out. Jokes about sexual assault are **dangerous**.

Laughing at these jokes is like giving a secret handshake, a stealthy man nod or a knowing wink – a way to tell others that you approve. With every joke, victims are taught that their feelings are invalid, perpetrators are taught that their crimes are not that serious, and the rest of the population is conditioned to think of sexual assault as something to be tolerated.

For victims, (who are probably standing in earshot, [statistically speaking](#)) it can be incredibly triggering, bringing them back to the moment of the assault. An outcome of trauma is the constant mental intrusion. Words, sounds, images, smells, sounds – they can all take a person back to the fear, the panic, the humiliation.

The joke also tells perpetrators (who are also most likely [nearby](#)) that you are on their side. They feel validated, like they just received an I-got-your-back fist bump. They will internalize their actions as appropriate, worth replicating and an acceptable part of our culture.

This acceptance is an example of rape culture – a culture in which we normalize sexual assault. We live within this everyday – it's our culture. We minimize the existence of violence. We objectify women. We place blame on the victim. We deny that rape is a problem. We question our desire to report a crime. We rarely punish perpetrators.

At Gettysburg, rape culture is when we make up movie titles using the word “fondle” on Yik Yak *and up-vote it* after four of your friends are forcibly and sexually grabbed while walking to class. It is when we scoff at our classmate who reported being groped at a frat house because “she should have expected that was going to happen.” It is [laws](#) which require the College report crimes using the word fondling that means “to caress lovingly or erotically” when what really occurred was a sexual assault. It is when we use rape as an adjective instead of a noun, defending ourselves by saying “I am not as rapey as that dude.”

Sexual Assault is #notajoke (*thank the brave women of AAUW for introducing this to our campus*). When we stop trivializing a vicious and cruel act and we start thinking of rape as the crime it really is, we will reduce the number of sexual assaults on our campus.

We owe it to ourselves and each other.

Julie Davin '17
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