




2-2-2015

Stop the Spread, Please

Stephany W. Harrington
Gettysburg College

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Harrington, Stephany W., "Stop the Spread, Please" (2015). *SURGE*. 244.
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Stop the Spread, Please

Abstract

As I walked down the sidewalk of East Lincoln Ave, I saw several students coming towards me. They were guys strolling three across. They clearly saw me approaching, but as the gap closed between us I found the situation similar to a game of chicken. I was unsure how close I would get before one of them moved. It sure as hell wasn't going to be me. No, I stood my ground and was subsequently body-checked. As he collided with my shoulder I looked at him with disgust, but he kept walking like nothing happened. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, Manspreading, feminism, "Shrinking Women"

Disciplines

Gender and Sexuality | Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Place and Environment | Women's 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

STOP THE SPREAD, PLEASE.

February 2, 2015



As I walked down the sidewalk of East Lincoln Ave, I saw several students coming towards me. They were guys strolling three across. They clearly saw me approaching, but as the gap closed between us I found the situation similar to a game of chicken. I was unsure how close I would get before one of them moved. It sure as hell wasn't going to be me. No, I stood my ground and was subsequently body-checked. As he collided with my shoulder I looked at him with disgust, but he kept walking like nothing happened.

I have spent my life politely stepping out of the way, moving on to the grass or changing the position of my body so guys or groups of guys could pass. This was the day I was determined to make a change.

This isn't just about me being annoyed with the actions of few disrespectful students. It's about the entitlement men often feel in public [spaces](#). Travelling home for the holidays, I constantly saw men spread

out, with their legs wide open, sometimes even taking up two seats. Meanwhile, the women beside them had their legs crossed and arms tucked in close in order to make room.

Usually, the behavior doesn't seem intentionally harmful. Most men don't even notice that as they occupy space they are denying me mine. But, that is exactly the problem. The behavior is so entrenched in our culture and that is an insidious act of privilege. Kristin Schaal nails it on the Daily Show segment, "[Manspreading](#)," as she sarcastically defends men's rights to claim space on public transit because feminism has "literally driven men underground to find that last inch of ball space."

It's not just about physical space, though. It's also about ability to be the assertive, confident, outspoken. Girls are taught to be sweet, polite, modest, selfless and "[not bossy](#)." When our voices confidence are diminished, our willingness to maintain the assertive body language of our girlhood also shrivels. Lily Myers' explains how she was taught "accommodation" in her outstanding slam poetry performance, "[Shrinking Women](#)." While her brother was taught to "grow out" and "emit", she was taught to "grow in" and "absorb". And from what I have experienced all of my life, I have to agree with her. In elementary school I always felt that the boys in my class could get away with anything. They could be boisterous and spoke how they liked, and that was seen as endearing and spirited. But as one of the girls, I was expected to yield to the boys and sit quietly.

[Feminista Jones](#) takes it a step further, linking the control of space to the sexual domination. "Girls are raised to cross their legs when they sit and they're told it is 'ladylike.' We're supposed to keep our legs closed as a way of not offering access to our intimate parts," she noted. "Men, on the other hand, are raised to embrace their virility and assert themselves boldly, especially in public spaces. Claiming physical space is a subtle way of marking territory and taking ownership of their piece of the world." While men may not explicitly see their behavior as a direct claim to their manliness, [others do believe that their reproductive organs should take priority over others' ability to sit on a moving train](#).

As I paused on Lincoln Ave to shake off the sensation in my shoulder and process what had just happened, I realized that it would take more than a trial of sidewalk determination to make more space for me to walk, talk, be seen and be heard as a person worthy of respect.

Stephany Harrington '15
Editor