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A Targeted Existence

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A Targeted Existence

Abstract

Over the summer, I visited a friend from Gettysburg who was having a party. The party was fun for the first half, and I was having a good time, so I decided to stay the night instead of walk in the dark to the bus. This is what parents and educators and older sisters and women everywhere had taught me: stay with people you know; clutch your keys in your hand; don't walk alone. I was staying with my friend from school; I was safe. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Center for Public Service, college, consent, discrimination, Gettysburg College, Judgment, partying, Rape, sexism, Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence, Sexuality, Slut Shaming, Social Justice

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement | Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Gender and Sexuality | 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

A TARGETED EXISTENCE

April 18, 2016

Over the summer, I visited a friend from Gettysburg who was having a party. The party was fun for the first half, and I was having a good time, so I decided to stay the night instead of walk in the dark to the bus. This is what parents and educators and older sisters and women everywhere had taught me: stay with people you know; clutch your keys in your hand; don't walk alone. I was staying with my friend from school; I was safe.



As the night went on, more people that I knew left for home and more people I didn't know seemed to arrive. My friend's older brother, Eric*, walked over to me. He didn't bother to ask my name. He grabbed my arm and traced his fingers over my shoulder blade. He asked what my tattoo said, keeping hold of my arm. The red siren in my head went off, the one that every female knows.

I just met this guy a minute ago. He's standing a little too close. He's touching me out of nowhere. This guy must be a little creepy.

I moved away from him and found people to talk to. I noticed Eric talking to several other girls, pinching their waists, cornering them against walls. I was torn. He was probably doing to them what he did to me, but what could I do to stop him? I would only make myself vulnerable again if I investigated any further. So I just continued to try to enjoy the party. I convinced myself it was no big deal. He had just gotten a little too close, but I was fine. Those girls probably were too.

I saw a girl from school, and I noticed her nervously glance at Eric. It was getting late and I was tired, so I suggested we go upstairs and get ready to sleep. Unfortunately, he followed us. He was right behind me, and I knew it because he slapped my shorts as I walked. I burned red but I kept my mouth shut. I suppose I didn't want to engage him....I just wanted to be left alone. I contemplated leaving, but that option still seemed dangerous because it was after midnight and I was far away from home.

I led my friend into a room where a few other girls were already sleeping, but I noticed Eric go into the room across the hall. He leaned over another girl who was lying down in there. I heard her hiss, "No! Get away!" She jumped up. We shared a slightly panicked and frazzled glance, and she dashed past me into the room with the rest of my friends. I followed her. We heard Eric mumble angrily and walk away.

I stayed there for awhile, but there wasn't much space, so I decided to go downstairs. At least there I could sleep on a couch and not the floor. I felt like I was dozing off when I heard him enter the room, a shadow in the darkness. I sat up immediately.

"Hey, don't be scared," He laughed. "Can I just sit with you?"

I felt frozen as he sat on the other side of the couch.

"I just wanna sit with you."

I curled into a ball on my side of the couch. That didn't last thirty seconds before he was behind me. He wrapped his arm around my stomach and snaked one hand up under my shirt. The other went up my leg under my shorts, touching my underwear.

I started to struggle, and he grabbed my arm firmly. "Hey, chill, chill, chill." I ripped my arm away, kicked my leg back, hit his shoulder, and jumped up. I felt a scratch burn across my collarbone. I ran up the stairs, into the room where the rest of my friends had been, closing and locking the door behind me. I slept on the floor, using my purse as a pillow. I wished I had stayed there from the beginning. Guilt was already bubbling inside me: *I should have known.*

I risk this type of situation anytime I want to go to a party or a bar with my friends. So do all of the women I know, and all of the women I don't know. Some women are used to it and it bothers them less than it bothers me. I have friends who decide to avoid it altogether by not going out much. Sometimes I go out and nothing happens to me or my friends; no one bothers us or overstays their welcome. But the slight anxiety, the thought that something bad certainly *could* happen, is always with us. It's with all women. It's why we're taught certain "rules" to follow when we go out – don't dress too skimpily; don't drink too much; don't flirt too much; stay with your friends.

Even most men understand these social rules. They are why my father eyes me disapprovingly when I dress in a way that disregards them. They are why, when I tried to explain this incident to a couple guys afterwards, I received nothing more than a bunch of questions that made me feel more shame, more embarrassment, more guilt. *He touched your arm? Asked about your tattoo? So what? He didn't try to, like, rape you. You got away. Yeah, he was a little creepy. So what? Walk away. He's your friend's brother, what is he gonna do?*

I know that as a woman, going to a party is not just about having fun. There's an anxiety that comes along with it. We take all the precautions that we're told to, and still, it's never enough.

This is our existence.

I went to that party, and that man felt he had a right to touch me, and to touch all the other girls at the party. It scared me how he didn't seem to hear me, that my "no" didn't matter to him, nor did any of the rejections he had received from the other girls at the party. We all looked different, dressed differently, had had varying amounts of alcohol. None of it mattered. We were targets solely because we were women. To be a woman is to be constantly aware of the fact that you may be taken advantage of, and that it's considered your responsibility to make sure you aren't. And if you are anyway, you better be able to justify every action you took that may have led a man to believe that you meant "yes" when you expressed "no."

If you don't believe my story, ask a girl you know. Your best friend. Your sister. A stranger on the street. Your mother. Your grandmother. You will hear a similar story. And not just one.

Listen to us. Our experiences aren't lies or exaggerations. They are our feelings and our truths. We have stories to tell.

Listen.

*Eric is a pseudonym.

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<https://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2016/04/18/a-targeted-existence/>