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Bystander Behavior in his Fucking House

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Bystander Behavior in his Fucking House

Abstract

My first semester at Gettysburg, I was at a fraternity party with a group of friends from my floor. As a first-year who spent the majority of her Saturday nights in high school watching Netflix with friends, I was still growing accustomed to the utter chaos which defines our college's primary social scene. Despite my inexperience, even I knew to be worried when a visibly intoxicated girl stumbled past, pulled behind a guy towards the stairs.

[*excerpt*]

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Comments

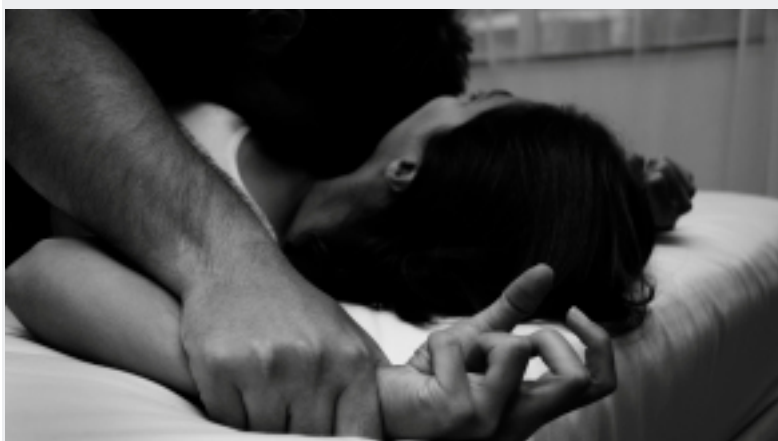
Surge is a student blog at Gettysburg College where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com. Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, 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

BYSTANDER BEHAVIOR IN HIS FUCKING HOUSE

April 4, 2017



My first semester at Gettysburg, I was at a fraternity party with a group of friends from my floor. As a first-year who spent the majority of her Saturday nights in high school watching Netflix with friends, I was still growing accustomed to the utter chaos which defines our college's primary social scene. Despite my inexperience, even I knew to be worried when a visibly intoxicated girl stumbled past, pulled behind a guy towards the stairs.

Alarm bells, established over the years of sexual assault education and simply living as a woman, rang shrilly in my mind. Something's not right! They screamed. Don't let him take her upstairs! Apparently my friends' felt a similar apprehension as they collectively moved towards the pair.

"Are you alright? Do you need help?" one friend stepped between them.

The questions, perfectly appropriate considering the girl's apparent intoxicated state, enraged her potential assailant.

The girl shook her head sloppily, face tense with what anyone could clearly identify as fear. Any apprehension I may have initially had intervening between two strangers immediately dissipated.

"I'm just trying to help her out," the unknown student defended weakly. None of us bought it.

Even with the slightest chance that his intentions were good, we had received too many emails with the same, consistent message: "A student was sexually assaulted within a college recognized residential facility...The

suspect is a student known to the victim” to stand around and not do something. Apparently picking up on our resolve, he moved to push past us. When he took a step back towards the girl, who was becoming evidently more and more upset by the moment, he initiated a frantic blur of action: as my one friend attempted to guide the distressed girl upstairs and outside, his mood quickly flipped from angry to enraged. He attempted to follow: grabbing, pushing, yelling at anyone who dared get in the way. At one point, I faced the full brunt of his fury as he repeatedly screamed in my face, “This is my house! My fucking house! I can kick you out!”

I’m not sure what effect he expected this to have, but my feet remained firmly planted on the beer covered floor. I had no intention of staying in the house any longer than absolutely necessary. While the threat may not have disturbed me at the surface level, I cannot say I was impervious to the deeper meaning behind his words. This was “his house.” He was older, bigger, stronger, and had the power to do whatever he wanted inside the protected bubble of his fraternity house. In the system of patriarchy, I was at the bottom of the power hierarchy.

Thankfully, the yelling drew the attention of the unknown girl’s friend who was able to direct her to a side door. After gathering together with my friends, we quickly moved to follow them outside. Not, however, without being stopped by the fraternity’s designated guard dog who tried to redirect us back through the porch. In that moment I was overwhelmed with anger and fear. Even leaving had to be done on their terms.

Thankfully another brother intervened, admonishing him “What are you doing? If they want to leave they can leave.”

We rushed out the door, just in time to see the girl being guided away from the house by her friend. Her arms were wrapped around the girl, supporting her shaking body as she sobbed.

I felt physically sick the rest of the night and into the next day. Anytime my thoughts drift to what could have happened my stomach clenches and I have to redirect my mind to something, anything else. The problem is, I can’t, we can’t just ignore this issue. This wasn’t an isolated incident, after all. One in five women will be sexually assaulted by the time they finish college. Even if you allow yourself to disregard the gravity of this statistic, simply living on campus is a constant reminder that sexual assault is a very real problem. My dorm halls are plastered with posters that have to remind students that “sex without consent is rape” and “it’s not sex when she’s wasted.” I receive an email, regularly, reporting a sexual assault with the additional knowledge that the majority of rape cases go unreported and there are very likely more victims than the campus safety alerts document. At this rate, despite the implementation of new orientation programs, [Green Dot](#), and campus campaigns, my first year at Gettysburg will have a record breaking number of reported sexual assaults.

While we like to pretend it’s not happening, someone needs to address the “big, angry, hungry, bear” in the room. The “It’s On Us” campaign implores everyone to make the personal commitment “to help keep men and women safe from sexual assault” and “promise not to be a bystander to the problem, but to be a part of the solution.” I was initially unsure about discussing my experience that night with anyone else. While I may have had a small part in distracting the male student, I never reported the incident to anyone with any authority. Too concerned about overstepping my bounds, I didn’t do everything I could have and should have done to prevent the likelihood of the situation being replicated. If we want to see a change in our community, “did you see there was another sexual assault this weekend” can no longer be a passing conversation at the breakfast table on Sunday morning. This is an issue which needs to be actively and aggressively addressed if we can ever hope to attain an acceptable level of safety on campus.

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