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Do You Really Want to Walk in My Shoes?

Abstract

There is a problematic irony in the philanthropy event, Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, which took place on campus this week. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Gender, Sexuality, student activism

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement

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

DO YOU REALLY WANT TO WALK IN MY SHOES?

April 6, 2017



Trigger Warning: Sexual Assault

There is a problematic irony in the philanthropy event, Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, which took place on campus this week.

I do not want to undermine the importance of bringing awareness to issues of sexual assault and domestic violence and of raising money for these causes. I also do not want to suggest that fraternities have no place bringing attention to these issues. But, since event is meant to be “[fun and it gets the community to talk about something that’s really difficult to talk about: gender relations](#),” let’s get into it.

My freshman year, I was told to expect sexual assault at the fraternity houses, especially the one directly across the street from my freshman dorm- incidentally the same one who co-hosted this event.

I was afraid to walk by their house, afraid of being cat called by one of the men on the porch.

I know multiple people who have been raped by the brothers, both inside and outside of the house.

My male friend was kicked out of their party for not appearing to have any girls with him, and was repeatedly called a f*ggot, among other profanities.

At the door, men ask other men about their ratio, reminding us women that we are nothing more than currency to be exchanged for the inalienable right to our bodies, and at the bar our flirtations are the cost of a drink.

Therefore, on Wednesday, as I found myself caught in the parade of men in red high heels, feeling compelled to hide myself from their familiar threatening gaze, I was struck by painful contradictions.

A movement to end violence against women had me trapped, left without the option of escape from the thrust of people and gave me flashbacks of being groped in their basement, of having a brother grab me and press my face against his without my permission, of the scared text messages I have received from friends after being coerced into their beds.

And yet, the men in this organization are allowed to relish in their act of symbolism for the purpose of a monetary donation to victims “out there”.

It is not enough to stand in support of women on outside of our borders. Sexual assault is an epidemic at Gettysburg, and the culture that Greek Life perpetuates is an undeniable contributor. It’s a culture which gives the message that one has to prove their masculinity in order to be accepted into their inner circle, and often times this comes with the dangerous combination of excessive alcohol consumption and the treatment of women as objects for the taking.

Sexual assault can’t be addressed at one event each year. It is every person’s responsibility to be diligent to this issue every single day, especially those who are apart of these organizations. We all have a responsibility to practice the message they sent every day.

Sure, this organization can and should be applauded for taking the step to raise awareness, but please also acknowledge the irony.

Fraternities enable and perpetuate sexual assault through their parties, through their culture, and through their lack of accountability. They feel that they can hold this event to raise awareness for victims of violence, pat themselves on the back, and end the year with positive evaluation, even some [national attention](#), and then continue their pattern of violence as usual.

We can also point to the clear limits of this event. The imagery of “walking in her shoes” does little to suggest an interest in women’s experiences and replicates little other than a patriarchal fantasy of femininity. Further, calling on men to “man up” and put on a pair of heels is inherently [transphobic](#), suggesting the emasculating effects of wearing a certain type of shoe and [making a joke](#) of lived experiences of trans women who constantly have to prove themselves as “real women”. These reasons are why [some colleges are choosing to cancel this event entirely](#).

Only by critically analyzing and acknowledging these contradictions and by making a commitment to ending sexual assault not just today, not just this month, but every single day. Greek or non-Greek, now is the time to act.

Here are some ways to be involved in ending sexual assault on an ongoing basis:

- Join [Students Against Sexual Assault](#) (SASA). They meet every other Thursday at 7pm in the Women’s and LGBTQA Resource Center in Apple Hall
- Attend [Diversity Peer Educator](#) events, or apply to join by April 7th
- Sign up for a [Green Dot](#) training session to learn bystander intervention
- Partner with [Survivors Inc.](#) in town, an organization that works with victims of domestic violence
- Educate yourself. Learn about the structural problems associated with sexual assault. Understand how race, sexuality, class, etc., come into play in this conversation
- Take a WGS class

- Attend [nGender](#) every other Tuesday at 11:45 in the Women's and LGBTQA Resource Center
- Listen to each other. Talk with each other. Keep the conversation alive.

Stay safe. Protect each other. Be diligent.

Anonymous