

Apathy allows abusers to flee accountability

By **Alexia Nizhny** - October 11, 2018

I spent a long time sitting down and thinking about writing this article. It hasn't been very easy to compose a biting exposé on sex and power. In my head there were a few bullet points I'd wanted to cover: "It needs to be a captivating, vivid, graphic and fresh new op-ed on how sexual assault affects victims." I thought about talking about the time I was raped. I thought about writing a satire on men who believe they're the victims of the #MeToo movement. I thought about writing something good enough to change the mind of at least one person who victim-blames the girl wearing skirts that cling to the fat on her thighs.

As hard as I'd pushed myself to create this groundbreaking level of uniqueness in my writing, I'd come to realize that redundancy – when it comes to sexual assault – is inevitable. It's happened to me. It's happened to my friends. It's happened to my mother and her mother and it's not surprising or captivating or unique.

Growing up in New York City, I would count how many times I got catcalled on my walk to school. Once, my father was beside me when a passing man complimented my body. My parents found out I was raped through Upper East Side gossip at one of my friend's mother's soirées. "That poor girl," they all said between sips of rosé. Everyone knew, everyone believed me, but nobody did anything. That's the power sexual assailants have over girls like me. The power to silence not only the victims, but also those who hear their stories. It's sometimes not even through any sort of physical or emotional abuse. Most of the time, it's just apathy.

Five Republican female panelists entered into conversation with CNN to discuss Supreme Court nominee Judge Brett Kavanaugh's sexual assault accusations by Dr. Christine Blasey Ford. Irina Villarino, one of the five women on the panel, expressed her disbelief in Dr. Blasey Ford's retelling of the night saying, "In the grand scheme of things, my goodness, there was no intercourse. There was maybe a touch. Really?"

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Then, I imagined a young Blasey. 15. Pinned down to a bed. A hungry teenager silences her screams with the palm of his hand. She can almost taste the alcohol from his breath as he attempts to rip off her clothing. She's scared for her life. She goes home at the end of the night shaken and she moves on as best as she can. But then, she finds out the boy she remembered from decades ago, who craved her flesh between his teeth, stood a chance to have a lifelong seat at the table of America's most powerful decision-makers.

It's a power dynamic she doesn't want to relive. Villarino finished her thought by saying, "Thirty-six years later she's still stuck on that." The other ladies nodded in agreement. In our world, it's expected that the victim will just keep quiet and move on. It's expected that she should not expect any consequences from the man who couldn't take no for an answer.

This isn't to say that men don't get assaulted or that women don't ever do the assaulting, but I shouldn't hear my friend tell me about the man who groped her at an airport and then be able to move on to doing Chinese homework. It shouldn't be as digestible as it is.

Why is it so digestible?

When Rose McGowan told actor Ben Affleck how Harvey Weinstein raped her on the edge of a jacuzzi, she reported that Affleck responded by saying, "Goddamn it. I told him to stop doing that." It shouldn't be this internalized.

What's worse is that this realization of redundancy isn't radically new. Advocates against sexual violence have been throwing statistics around for ages. People know that every 98 seconds someone in America is assaulted; people know that one in six women have been the victim of rape (attempted rape included); people know and simply don't care. We need to change our apathy. These stories aren't unique, but that should be used as fuel to care more, so that when my friend's parents gossip about me to their guests, they don't just swallow my rape down with their wine.

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