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Spiders for Spiders

By Alexandra Abreu
"By stepping up at a party, we aren’t just helping one person—we are sending a message to our peers that this is not something we will tolerate.” - Alexandra Abreu

THE ENTIRETY OF MY HIGH SCHOOL YEARS were spent in one of three places: a classroom, my sister’s bedroom or onstage at a dance competition. I never went to a house party, and the idea that sexual assault and rape culture could affect my life was incomprehensible.

College has exposed me to a great deal of transformative ideas, insightful people and experiences that hold only positive memories. Unfortunately, these four years have also revealed a few terrible realities: According to a 2014 report released by the White House, one in five women and one in 16 men are sexually assaulted while in college. My friends, peers and myself have become living examples of these statistics. But I’ve also come to realize that we are part of the solution.

University of Richmond is composed of a diverse group of students whose roots stem from locations near and far. Despite the distinct and unique traits we each hold, each one of us has something in common. We can help end sexual violence.

This may sound like a feat too great for anyone to accomplish. One-in-five is an alarming, overwhelming statistic, an epidemic by every sense of the word. But we are a generation inspired and dedicated to pushing the limits and defying every social norm. We can make a positive change, and the best place to start is right here, right now, on this campus.

I remember going out on a Friday night during my first year at Richmond. I was new to the party culture and my only expectation was to have a fun night with my friends. I will never forget seeing a very intoxicated young woman being led away from the party by a male student. I had a weird feeling in my stomach and I just knew there was something about this situation that seemed off.

However, I was a shy first-year who was just beginning to make friends and I was scared to break any social codes or be pinned as weird. And quite frankly, I truly did not know what to do. I would be willing to bet that the majority of readers right now are reminiscing on a time when they were in a situation similar to this one. The feeling of wanting to step in but not knowing how – or even if you should – is far too common. I have learned since then that there are countless ways in which we can morph from passive to active bystanders.

If you feel comfortable and safe, it is OK to simply ask the person you are worried about how they are doing. Getting their attention for even a second can give them an opportunity to reassess the situation.

Maybe you know this person’s friends. It might be more effective to find them and have them bring him or her back to their dorm.

Don’t want to talk to anyone? Distract everyone by dancing around or accidentally spilling a drink on purpose.

Call URPD.

Ask the person to help you find the bathroom.

Tell the host(s) of the party that you see something concerning happening in their house.

Talk to your RA.

I could go on and on but the idea is clear: a simple action or a simple word can make a monumental difference in someone’s life. The culmination of all these seemingly small actions results in culture change – and that is larger than life.

We have the power to make a profound impact on the way future generations of Spiders and human beings view sexual violence. By stepping up at a party, we aren’t just helping one person— we are sending a message to our peers that this is not something we will tolerate. We have that power. At 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22 years old, you and I can work together as active bystanders to make one in five and one in 16 statistics of the past. As we start a new year and marvel at all our classmates varying talents and strengths, let us also remember the power that we all hold as one Richmond community: our ability to end the pain of sexual violence.

THE STATISTICS

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