

Recognizing date rape when it happens

Everything but "yes" means "no"

By Candida Rifkind (CUP)

You walk into the campus pub and see a group of women sitting together. You think one of them is really attractive, and you've talked to her a couple of times and get the feeling that she likes you too. You go over and sit down, and notice that she is paying a lot of attention to you, maybe even flirting. Everyone's had a couple of beers and is really relaxed, so you figure that it's cool to flirt back with her.

You get up to dance, and she's acting like she's really drunk and wants you to hold on to her. So you figure she's definitely interested, and ask her if she wants to leave. She laughs and says that she should stay with her friends, but you know that she doesn't want them to think that she sleeps around. So you say that you just want to go for a walk, and drag her outside. She's still laughing, and saying that she doesn't even know you and her friends will worry about her. You figure she's too hung up on what her friends think and that she really wants to get together with you. So you convince her to go to your place for another beer. You go to your room, and she's beginning to get really uptight about going back to the bar. So you say that's okay, because you think she's really attractive and get the same feeling from her. She begins to say that she does like you, but you cut her off with a passionate kiss. Next thing you know you're on the bed and she's saying she doesn't think it's right but you tell her to lighten up. You start making love to her, and after you've climbed on top she stops saying anything. After it's over she leaves right away, and when you offer to walk her home she runs down the hallway and tells you not to call her.

It's been a long week of classes, moving in and meeting new people, and you decide to go for a beer with some of the people you're living with. You go to the campus pub, and sit at a table where you can see people coming in. Half an hour later, this guy you think is really attractive walks in, and comes over to your table. He starts talking to you, and you find out that he's really interesting and has a great sense of humour. When you get up to dance you realize that you've had too much to drink, and actually feel kind of sick. He says that you should go outside for some fresh air, and you laugh to make it seem like you're okay. He laughs too, and drags you outside, even though you say that your friends will worry about you leaving. You've just spent orientation week being told not to walk alone and to let people know where you are, so you don't want to scare your friends by taking off. When you get outside you feel better, and he suggests going to his place for a beer. You don't really want to, but he's a great guy and you're sure it'll be okay. You get to his place, and he says he wants to show you his room. You say okay, but you really want to get back to the bar before all your friends leave. Then he says that you are too concerned about what your friends think, and that he finds you really attractive. You want to tell him you think he's great, but that it seems like he's moving too fast, when he cuts you off with a forceful kiss. He pushes you down onto the bed and starts taking off your clothes, and you know it's all wrong. You try to say no, but he keeps kissing you and then he climbs on top. He is so heavy and he won't let you go. You're really scared, and realize that if you say anything he could hurt you. When he's finished, you grab your clothes and leave. He wants to take you home, but

you're terrified of him. He just raped you.

Are these scenarios realistic? Aren't most rapes committed by strangers in dangerous parts of town? If she liked him and kissed him back, wasn't she letting him know she wanted to have sex with him? If she didn't say no and try to defend herself, is it really rape?

Forcing a woman to have sex against her will is called acquaintance rape. It's sexual assault and it's against the law, even if you know her, if she said she likes you, if she's already agreed to kiss you, neck, or pet, if she doesn't fight back, or if she's too drunk to say no. Acquaintance rape happens to women of all ages and from every cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, and socio-economic background. In 84% of all attacks, the perpetrator is someone the woman knows. Alcohol is often involved in acquaintance rapes.

But alcohol is not the cause of date rape, violent attitudes toward women are. Alcohol can often bring out these attitudes, which range from making sexist jokes, to commenting on a woman's body, to sexual harassment, to sexual assault, and to murder. Sexual assault exists on this continuum of violence against women in a society which degrades women and treats them as sexual objects.

The messages are everywhere: advertisements picture women in bikinis selling cars, little girls are taught to be polite and not to say what they think, we sit in classes where women's contributions are ignored, we go to parties where men who flirt are called "studs" but women who do the same thing are called "sluts", and we have a legal system which places as much blame on the women who are raped as it does on the perpetrators.

If this picture seems bleak, it is. But there are things that we can all do to stop violence against women, and to end acquaintance rape forever. Some men must learn that it is never okay to force or coerce someone to have sex, to ask and to never assume, to respect another's wishes, to realize that when a woman doesn't want to have sex it's not necessarily a personal rejection, but a specific wish at a specific time, and to listen to "no" - whatever form it takes. Women must learn to always trust their feelings and their instincts, that you have the right to set your own limits, and that you always have the right to say no.

Many events are centred around meeting new people, and in many cases, partying with them; however, you don't have to pretend that a group of people who were recently strangers, and are now suddenly friends, are completely trustworthy. Date rape happens to university and college students, and it is only when we begin to think about it, speak out about it, and change our attitudes and behaviour, that we can begin to stop acquaintance rapes on campus.

Everyone has the power to end violence against women.

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