

March 4, 2014

An Open Letter to the men involved in the recent rape culture incident at Ottawa U

We are deeply concerned for Ms. Roy. You have taken the right step in choosing to resign from your positions and apologize for the conversation you had about Ms. Anne-Marie Roy. From this experience, Ottawa is having a much needed conversation about rape culture on campus and beyond. A great opportunity now exists for you to contribute to this conversation. You can now shift from being a part of the problem to a part of the solution and take active steps and embrace a role in helping to end rape culture and sexual violence.

We are deeply concerned about the messages coming from media that question whether rape culture actually exists. We are deeply concerned that we live in a culture which silences those who speak out about sexual assault, shames women and individuals from other marginalized genders who have been assaulted, blames the victim for their assault, a justice system that provides only a 10% conviction rate of the 10% of rapes reported.

You have hurt women in Ottawa, because every single one of us who read your conversation felt the fear we often feel as women in this culture. You reminded us that we are not safe on our campuses, we are not safe on transit, we are not safe in our homes, we are not safe with strangers, and we are not safe with men we know. You've reminded us that when we are in positions of power, we are even more at risk, because misogyny ensures we will always be sex objects, and never taken quite as seriously as men.

There is no denying that the use of the "rape humour" in the conversation about Ms. Roy was used to humiliate and demean a woman in power. You've given us cold, hard, evidence that this actually exists. Your private conversation has proven our point- violence against women is on a continuum, and rape humour is on that continuum. We must understand that even conversations in "private" spaces still spread misogyny. These conversations still endanger women.

But this can change. How do we tell young women to protect themselves from their lab partners, their boyfriends, their prom dates, their classmates, and from rapists? We don't. We tell men that sexual assault is wrong. We educate young men about consent. We build a society and community that respects women and sees them as equals, not as objects. Can you take steps to further educate yourselves about violence against women? Can you help turn the conversation around?

Let us see the locker room, the pub, the Facebook private message, the "guy talk," as opportunities for you, as men, to speak up, and take a role in ending violence against women. We want to tell you that you can (and have a responsibility to) say something when you hear rape humour, misogyny, or hate language. What would it have taken for just one of you to say, "This isn't cool," when speaking about

Ms. Roy? Challenging this language is where true activism starts. Community support and resources exist to help you including OCTEVAW's I can MANifest Change and the White Ribbon Campaign, which seek to engage men and boys in the prevention of violence against women (VAW). We want to welcome you to the fight against VAW.

Now, the responsibility is yours.

In Solidarity,
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