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Editorial

Diversity needed to move #MeToo forward

He smiled. She moved away. He touched. She moved farther away. He told her it was OK. She fought herself in her head. Was it ok? Is this normal? Consensual? Am I part of #MeToo?

Women across the nation have found solace since the birth of the #MeToo movement, and it seems as though there is no intention of it ending anytime soon. Kevin Spacey, Harvey Weinstein, Matt Lauer and others are paying the piper.

But what happens when babe.net tells the story of an anonymous 23-year-old Brooklyn photographer who had a sexual encounter with Aziz Ansari — an American actor, comedian, and filmmaker — and has her story called out by women such as New York Times writer Bari Weiss and Headline News Network journalist Ashleigh Banfield?

“This was not what I expected,” the anonymous photographer said about her experience with Ansari on babe.net. “I’d seen some of his shows and read excerpts from his book, and I was not expecting a bad night at all, much less a violating night and a painful one.”

Weiss had a different take on the photographer’s story, writing that it was, “arguably the worst thing that has happened to the #MeToo movement since it began in October.”

Banfield spoke out against the photographer for comparing a bad sexual experience to sexual assault and said that her story was a setback in the #MeToo movement.

On the other side, New York Times reporter Lindy West had a different take.

“It may feel like the rules shifted overnight, and what your dad called the thrill of the chase is now what some people are calling assault,” West wrote in her article “Aziz, We Tried to Warn You” in the New York Times.

“Unfortunately, no one – even plenty of men who call themselves feminists – wanted to listen to feminist women themselves. We tried to warn you. We wish you’d listened, too.”

Ansari said in a statement that the sexual activity was completely consensual.

The photographer sent a text to Ansari that said he ignored clear non-verbal cues and continued to make sexual advances.

Clearly, the anonymous photographer did not receive the same support as, say, actress Ashley Judd, who came out with accusations against Harvey Weinstein for sexual harassment in the New York Times article “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades.” But the situation, no matter a person’s opinion on the matter, does raise the bigger questions of whether certain stories can cause the #MeToo movement to lose focus and begs the question: How do we keep moving forward?

Luanne Gearhart, a psychology instructor at Laramie County Community College, said that recently she has seen the #MeToo movement shifting its focus toward sexual harassment in the workplace and within communities instead of assault, and she said that concerns her.

“The stories that I think are most telling are the stories I’m afraid that are going to get diluted,” Gearhart said.

Gearhart said that sexual harassment is by no means OK, but that as a society we need to look at all the factors involved with #MeToo stories and look at the bigger picture. We need to look at the darker sides of human sexuality.

So, what exactly does looking at the bigger picture entail?

Philip Zimbardo, a social psychologist, talks about how evil comes to be and how a person is not necessarily evil because there are enablers that made them become evil. We were not born to be ugly toward each other, Gearhart said. We have to look beyond the individual and their behavior and find the enabler of their behavior.

Zimbardo uses the analogy of bad apples in a barrel. In every barrel there is bound to be a least one bad apple. So, people have to ask the question, “Was it the apple itself that was damaged or was it an outside factor that caused the apple to become rotten?”

When applying this analogy to sexual assault or harassment, we have to look at the barrel and who made the barrel, so not only do we get rid of the bad apples, but we identify the barrel makers so they don’t affect any more apples.

Gearhart explained that enablers or influences have changed from generation to generation throughout centuries, but they are all driven by the same motivation of privilege and man’s perceived right to treat women and children as chattel.

“As far as outside influences today I think that we live in an incredibly disrespectful culture in general, and it’s enabled,” Gearhart said. “People are not kind. I don’t know what happened.”

Katie Way, reporter for Babe.net and author of the anonymous photographer’s experience with Ansari, did not take Banfield’s opinion lightly.

“I hope the ~500 RTs on the single news write-up made that burgundy lipstick, bad highlights, second-wave feminist has-been feel really relevant for a little while,” Way wrote.

It’s one thing to disagree with Banfield’s opinion, but tearing down a woman with comments based on her looks and relevancy is not only extremely unprofessional, but it goes against the basic principles of the #MeToo movement to be kinder and more respectful toward one another.

Without a doubt, the American culture has to do better and as a society we need to recognize our flaws. The #MeToo movement has been a vital and noble step in the right direction.

In order for the #MeToo movement to continue making leaps and bounds, we have to encourage diversity.

On Jan. 20, people gathered in Cheyenne, Wyoming, at the Depot Plaza for the second annual women’s march. In the crowd there were people supporting different forms of equality, not just the equality for women. That is how change happens, Gearhart said.

People with diverse beliefs and cultures need to get on board with the #MeToo movement. That doesn’t mean you have to agree with every part of the movement, but support the parts you do believe in.

The spoken word is powerful, Gearhart said, and people need to continue sharing their stories to keep the #MeToo movement alive.

We can’t lose focus and label a person’s #MeToo story more or less profound than another person’s #MeToo story. Broaden the scope and remember that there are many women still out there who feel alone and need encouragement to tell their own story.

Expose the bad apples and target the barrel makers.