



## Judgement

I have a list to refer to when talking about the sexual assaults I've been through.

When I was 12, a friend and I were indecently assaulted by a group of boys we went to school with.

When I was 15 a neighbour tried to rape me.

There are a couple of 'minor assaults' that I don't really think about.

I was in an emotionally and sexually abusive relationship for four and a half years.

I reported the indecent assault, I haven't reported anything else. I made the decision to not report these things and I'm happy with it. With the conviction rates being what they are, the trauma of having to go over and over and over and over what happened when you give your statements, and while it's all happening neighbours and strangers talk about you and stare. I just wanted to be able to move on from the assaults and get on with my life. That was part of me regaining control after everything these people had done to me, I chose to not report so I could deal with the assaults in my own way and get on with my life.

When I starting seeing someone last year and I told him about the assaults his first response was to ask if I'd reported, when I told him I hadn't I had to defend my decision to not report. I had to argue with him that it isn't my responsibility to protect others they might assault. After bravely telling him about these assaults, I had to stand and argue with a man who claimed to love me and defend the decisions I had made. I vividly remember standing in his kitchen, sobbing, asking, 'Who protected me?'

He was adamant that what had happened was wrong but he was convinced that I should have reported the assaults and that it is my responsibility to stop them from doing it to anyone else. He would try to convince me that I should go and report there and then, he would repeatedly tell me that if I did he would support me. Whenever I told him that I wouldn't report it he'd shush me, then repeat that he would always support me if I changed my mind.

I was made to feel like a failure for not acting differently during the attacks and complicit in any future assaults these people committed. If that's the sort of victim blaming I can get from someone who is supposed to love me, what can I expect from others?

Every time I tell someone new about what happened I wait for their response, I wait to have to fight my corner and defend my decisions. I feel a constant need to explain why I acted the way I did and why I didn't do something different, to show people that what happened isn't really my fault. Most of the time it feels more as though I'm trying to convince myself.

When I've finished doing that, I have to prove to people that these things may have shaped me but they don't define me - pity in their eyes isn't necessary. Yes, I've experienced some terrible things but I've come out of the other side. Don't get me wrong, I've had a lot of help and support along the way and I still have bad days, but I've made it through and I'm better and stronger for it. Their actions do not define me, I won't let them.



Through it all I remind myself of one thing, I am not a victim, I am not a survivor, I am me and I'm awesome.

Sometimes it's all that gets me through the day.

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