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A Not So Picture-Perfect Moment

The prevalence of sexual assault in the United States often goes unnoticed or is ignored, but that has changed. Recently, many women and men have been striving to bring awareness to the pervasiveness of sexual assault in the United States. The main focus has been on the amount of rapes that occur on college campuses. This was largely due to *People v. Turner*, or the Stanford Rape Case, gaining popularity and media coverage in June 2016. On January 18, 2015, two men found a man crouching over and performing sexual acts on an intoxicated and unconscious woman. Immediately, one man called authorities while the other chased down the

fleeing suspect. After being arrested and undergoing over a year of court sessions, the attacker, Brock Turner, was convicted of three charges of sexual assault, including “assault with intent to commit rape of an intoxicated woman, sexually penetrating an intoxicated person with a foreign object, and sexually penetrating an unconscious person with a foreign object” (time.com). Turner faced up to fourteen years in jail, but the judge ruled for a six month conviction because jail would have too harsh of an impact on him. Turner was released after three months due to good behavior.

When the court confirmed the news of Turner's punishment and early release, people became enraged by the injustice. Some people turned to speeches or poetry, while others have gone with a more visual route of expressing their discontent. The most common of these methods are photo campaigns. In September 2016, Yana Mazurkevich, a college student, posted "It Happens" to her website, as well as Facebook, to draw attention to sexual assault on-campus. The images soon went viral. Mazurkevich's goal of creating this series was to "continue the conversation on sexual assault" and shed light on "Turner and his 3-month jail time" (Mazurkevich). The design of "It Happens" created a powerful statement that illustrates the dark reality that many people experience by including minor details that create a deeper meaning, yet still approaching the subject in a sensitive manner.

Throughout the series, there are many differences between each individual image but a few similarities as well. Two things remain the same in all the photos, the first being the models' facial expressions. The models playing the victims in each image always look directly at the camera with a straight face; every form of emotion is wiped away. The inexpressive faces are strikingly opposite to the pained and terrified expression that one would expect a victim to have in the midst of an attack. This could be an endeavor to lessen the gruesomeness of the event

that is depicted. Part of Mazurkevich's audience are sexual assault survivors, so an exact replica of these events could be triggering. The impassive faces also represent the emptiness felt by the victims after an attack. In addition, the perpetrator's face is never shown. This is likely to bring attention to the victims rather than their attackers. The lack of faces shown for the attackers makes it so that they could represent anyone. It also is a reference to the fact that most attackers are never caught.

The additional unwavering similarity is the crucial role words play in every photo, especially in the meaning and appearance of the image. In most of the pictures, the words "it happens" appear in all capital letters and bold font, followed by another series of words that make each photograph unique. The words directly relate to the act that is being carried out. They are a counter to the common stereotypes and judgments inflicted on victims in various situations. The color of those words always matches the color of the victim's shirt, which draws the picture together in appearance, making it more aesthetically pleasing. Matching the words and the victims' clothing also brings the victim closer to the words being said rather than their attacker. The only image that differs from this rule is the last one of the series; there are only the words "it happened." The words not only add a dramatic effect and portray what a serious reality this is for some people, but also allude to the Stanford Rape Case.

Another key aspect to all the photographs in this series is the location. Each location is related to the words found in the image following "it happens." For the second image above, the words "without a reason" are on the side of the bed in a dorm room during or after a party, judging by the clothing on the model and the cup above her head. The combination of the victim's clothing and location allude to the commonly asked questions: "What were you wearing?" and "Were you intoxicated?" By including the words "without a reason", Mazurkevich

is clearly indicating that no matter what the victim does or wears, it will never be a good enough reason. In the last photograph above, the location is a bedroom with pictures of the victim and her boyfriend in the bottom left corner. "With anyone" implies that the attacker is her boyfriend, as he shares a resemblance to the man in the pictures. By including this image in the series, she is directly combating the incorrect theory that a significant other cannot rape you. While the first image doesn't have the typical words, "it happened" still relates to the location. Emily Doe had stated in her letter that the men found her behind a dumpster, exactly like the women in the last image. Pairing these words with the location of the dumpster was certainly no coincidence. With this image, Mazurkevich is blatantly saying that these events happened, and this exact attack is not a made-up situation.

The model in the first image above shares a striking resemblance to the victim of the actual crime, "Emily Doe." Although Miss Doe chose to remain anonymous, descriptions of her appearance have still been released. She has been described as a brunette Caucasian female in her early twenties, which matches the appearance of the model. Doe wrote a letter that she read to Turner in court following his conviction. In the letter, Doe describes her side of the entire experience including before, during, and after the incident. She mentions wearing a "beige cardigan" similar to the one worn by the model. The most memorable part is when Doe explains how an article described her as "unconscious, with [her] hair disheveled, long necklace wrapped around [her] neck, bra pulled out of [her] dress, dress pulled off over [her] shoulders and pulled up above [her] waist, that [she] was butt naked all the way down to [her] boots" when officials found her (Emily Doe). In the above image, the model's hair is messy, her bra is lying next to her, and her underwear is pulled down to her ankles with her dress hiked up to her waist exposing her bare bottom. Throughout the letter, Doe mentions pine needles; they were

entangled in her hair from being on the ground outside while the event was taking place. When looking closely at the image in the series, it is apparent that pine needles are sprawled across the ground around and under the victim. The image is dark and appears to be taken at night, the same time that the actual incident occurred. The most chilling part of the image is the lifeless stare coming from the model's eyes, mirroring that of an unconscious person - precisely how Emily Doe would have looked after the attack. Just inches to the left of the victim's head is a beer can, adding to the illusion of the victim being intoxicated to the point of unconsciousness.

The wide media coverage of the Stanford Rape Case sent it to the center of the ongoing campaign against sexual assault. Mazurkevich's "It Happens" is one of many influential photo series created to promote dialogue about sexual assault on campus, but hers has become well known due to the resemblances and references to this case. The time of the release as well as the content, have caused it to rise to the top quickly and remain a talked-about piece. This last photograph in the series is a clear representation of the actual victim of the Stanford Rape Case, making the series all the more commanding. Making her piece relate so closely to the Stanford Rape Case caused more attention to be given to not only this case, but also the movement as a whole. Mazurkevich targeted everyone with her series, but her main audience was people who often victim-blame and remain skeptical about the pervasiveness of sexual assaults in America. Mazurkevich used pathos to evoke emotion in the audience, resulting in a compelling series. She may not have started the movement, but she made sure it was known.

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