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## Sexual Assault & OUR Ineffective Solidarity

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# SEXUAL ASSAULT AND OUR INEFFECTIVE SOLIDARITY

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Earnest Aaron

Lately there tends to be allies for every issue, yet allies have not been able to shift the tide on sexual assault. The social justice community as a whole has pondered, questioned, and debated what it means to be a good and effective ally. As I think more about what does it takes to be a good and effective ally in regard to Sexual Assault, I'm confronted with the idea that perhaps I'm asking the wrong question. Allies stand alongside you, but inevitably are not directly affected by the outcome of your efforts. Sexual assault however requires solidarity because we are all – no matter how minisculely – affected by sexual assault. The revelation then posed the question, what does sexual assault solidarity look like? This question perhaps might be easier.

The foundation to sexual assault solidarity must lie in effective and quick reporting. We must shift the conversation of sexual assault from a 'person A said,' 'person B said,' type of narrative. Having physical evidence provided by a rape kit helps shift the conversation in the case of most rapes, but it'll never cover all. However, doing such requires some additional steps. It also requires us to examine some of the narratives surrounding sexual assault. One of the most prominent is the false accusation narrative. Which usually insist that the victim wasn't raped; the victim is simply reluctant to admit their sexual behavior. In that theory lays a major problem, essentially we're saying someone would rather deal with the social pressure and stigmata that come with being raped than deal with the social pressure and stigmata that comes with enjoying sex. So here is our first additional step, standing in solidarity means encouraging the choices people make regarding sex and their body. It means doing your part to put an end to slut shaming. Reporting can happen quicker and smoother when victims don't have to think about the social repercussions of reporting their assault. We can eliminate the theory of false reporting and become more aware of when we should report.

While it might seem like it goes without saying, we've got to understand the diversity of sexual assault victims. If we're going to stand in solidarity, we've got to understand sexual assault can happen to anyone. Sexual assault happens to every gender,

race, sexuality, ability level, religion, spirituality, and sex; as such we cannot focus on a narrative of “this is” sexual assault. Every case of sexual assault is unique and deserves unique attention. When we start focusing on how the person was dressed or what activity they were doing, this causes us to focus on a sexual assault narrative that has very little to do with the actual sexual assault.

While undermining the theory of false accusing goes a long way in changing the way we talk about sexual assault, such actions alone doesn't mean we've mastered solidarity. Effective and quick reporting is just the foundation, so next we've got to tackle the “I know them” theory. Another prevailing theme surrounding sexual assault is the belief that the accused would never do such a thing. Unsurprisingly, this theory is used when talking about several violent crimes. In all of these cases, we have to understand: no matter how much we know people we don't exactly know what they're capable of. Even more so we've yet to ask: would the victim seek to utilize the resources of our justice system to punish someone? In theory there are very few instances where we could answer yes to this question. But solidarity isn't about this question, it's about ensuring that victims feel safe and comfortable sharing their story of what happened. If you want to do something about sexual assault, it's about time to stand in solidarity instead of just being an ally. Claim the fact that every case of sexual assault involves you.