

## Office on Women's Health Blog

**Please note:** *We are performing some necessary blog maintenance. Comments will not be available until after the updates are complete. In the meantime, please feel free to continue the conversation on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)!*

## Kissing and Hurting

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April 2, 2015 • By [Katie Koestner, Survivor, Activist, and Author](#)

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### Content warning: Rape and sexual assault

When I was 6 years old, I wanted to be a ballerina. Pink and fluffy. At 14, I wanted to be a minister. As close to God as possible. At 17, I wanted to be a chemical engineer and speak Japanese. And, then at 18, I was raped.

My rape changed everything: my relationships, my life goals, and how I viewed the world. The world became a place where trust could be broken. I decided I had to do something about "it" — the entire problem of rape. I spoke out to help other victims know they weren't alone. I also spoke out to let everyone know that rape should not be a crime of silence anymore.

Why do some victims decide to report and others stay silent? I believe those of us who live through it find ourselves trying to recalibrate our individual scales of justice. When a crime is so personal and violates our trust, we're left trying to find stability while standing on ground that is in a constant state of earthquake tremble. As we attempt to find solid ground, we are simultaneously looking around to figure out how to verbalize what has been stolen — to somehow quantify the harm and the loss. We feel like we were robbed, but we don't know how to describe what was taken away. Then we play out "what if" chess matches of likely outcomes from a dozen scenarios if we report the crime. Many of us decide that silence is simply less problematic, less time-consuming, less draining, or less expensive.

For me, my scale moved swiftly away from silence. I had just started college and I knew no one. I had nothing to lose. I was bold. I told the story of what happened to me. Out loud. Not even at a whisper and not to a friend. Not to my parents. Not even my sister. The first person I told was



my Resident Advisor. Luckily, he tried to help me as best he could.

As I went from my RA to the health center, to the Dean's Office, to the campus police, and on through the "system," I felt the sting of bias, poor training, and misinformation. But, I refused to give up. In fact, I spoke more loudly when I decided the rules weren't fair.

My school's sexual assault policies required resistance on the part of the victim, instead of just a lack of consent. My perpetrator was permitted to do whatever he wanted to me until I tried to stop him, to resist. No other crime required resistance on the part of the victim to constitute a violation. I wanted this to change.

Just because he paid for dinner and I invited him back to my room, I didn't think I owed him anything. I decided that staying silent would change nothing. I thought it would prevent the healing. To me, speaking is powerful. Telling my story can help change the world.

This is why I write this post. I write to tell all women who have been in my shoes that you are not alone. I want you to know that you deserve respect no matter what. Each of us is entitled to decide who gets to touch us and under what circumstances. No one should *ever* kiss you and hurt you at the same time. Join survivors for a free online workshop on the journey from hurt to healing on April 6, 2015, at 9 p.m. EDT. Learn more by visiting [www.takebackthenight.org](http://www.takebackthenight.org).

*The statements and opinions in this blog post are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health.*