

Revenge of Dinah: Telling Our Stories

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Source: Revenge of Dinah: A Feminist Seder on Rape Culture in the Jewish Community

For hundreds of years, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. After the Ten Plagues, Moses led his people out of the suffering of Pharaoh's slavery, yet their march to freedom was strenuous. Oppression could not be escaped immediately, but rather took the steps of many down a long, arduous path. In modern times, we have not yet escaped the shackles of oppression: racism, classism, and what we are here to discuss today: rape culture. Sexism is just as real today as it was 50, 100, 500 years ago. However, it sometimes looks a little different, and it can be masked by our reluctance to talk about our experiences. The breaking of these chains, is not without strain, but in the act of addressing them, we literally move forward.

This activity is meant to help the Seder participants think through and embody the ways in which they are affected by and perpetuate rape culture. Everyone should stand in a circle while the leader reads aloud the following instructions.

Leader: All of us are affected by our culture of permissiveness around rape culture in different ways. Some of us are affected in obvious ways like experiencing street harassment, being shamed for what we wear or how we express our sexuality. Some of us are affected in more subtle ways, such as being told to “man up” or feeling pressured to laugh at sexist jokes, even when we don't find them funny. One way we can begin to shut down rape culture is to speak up when we experience it, and form bonds with people who can relate. In telling our stories, we reclaim the spaces and relationships that rape culture seeks to isolate us all away from by refusing to stay silent, ashamed, or lonely.

Together: We who stand in this circle are members of a radical community of witnesses. Our power lies in our willingness to witness each other, and see ourselves in experiences that aren't our own.

Leader: I am going to read a series of prompts. Please step forward into the circle if/when any of them describe personal experiences of the rape culture in which you live. After you step forward, pause in the middle of the circle and look into the eyes of everyone standing with you. Notice the people who are not standing with you. Notice how you feel. If you do not step in for a particular prompt, consider why not and notice how you feel. Should you feel uncomfortable stepping into the circle for any of the following prompts, there is absolutely no pressure to do so.

Telling Our Stories: List of Prompts for Group Leader

My elected representatives are mostly people of my own gender.
The more prestigious and powerful the elected position, the more this is true.

If I get excited about something frivolous, it won't be attributed to my gender or be understood as indicative of a general inability to deal with serious issues. I never have to worry about being called ditzy, shallow, or an 'airhead.'

If I'm shy, quiet, or too outspoken, I might be perceived as 'cold' or 'bitchy'

I worry about the message my wardrobe sends about my sexual availability.

If I am sexual in any way, there is a chance that I will be labeled a “slut.”

People of my gender will almost certainly praise or valorize me for my promiscuity.

Complete strangers sometimes walk up to me on the street and tell me to “smile.”

If I am in a dense crowd or a packed subway car, I don't worry about being groped or harassed.

Violence that happens to me or members of my gender is never put into diminutive special interest categories like “acquaintance rape” or “domestic violence.”

I have been taught specific safety techniques like keeping my keys and cell phone in my hand while walking alone after dark in public spaces.

Every major religion in the world is primarily led by people of my gender. Even God, in major religions, is depicted or described as being of my gender.

I did not grow up thinking that I should be the head of my household, or that my spouse and children should be subservient to me.

I have told or laughed at sexist jokes, either because they were funny, or because I wanted to fit in.