
2018-19 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

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Heavier Topics

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March 25, 2019

Heavier Topics



I wanted to talk about something that has recently been in the news and is becoming a more prominent subject in the world, but also Korea — sexual assault and harassment.

Before I came to Korea I understood its conservative status as being entirely opposed to religious differences, homosexuality, and differing political views. There was a period where I thought that I wasn't going to enjoy my time here because I was so concerned about what might be, rather than figuring it out first. Now that I've been here I think it's important to state that my views have changed a bit. Honestly my concerns were either very dramatic or misplaced.

Korea is still a conservative country. From what I've experienced though, the younger community is much more accepting to the majority of beliefs, whether that be tattoos, foreigners in general, homosexuality, etc.

What is important to think about, something that I would say I was aware of but didn't think about it too much, is the issues regarding sexual assault and harassment.

A few things to keep in mind are that Korea is in a stage where there is a social battle to combat victim blaming, the stereotypical relationship is based on gendered roles, with this assumption that men are dangerous to women if they're left alone together, and women are conditioned into feeling ashamed for "putting themselves" in a dangerous situation. I would also like to say that this is prominent in most of the world — I don't want to single out Korea as if they're the only country working through this.

For women specifically, there have been situations where women's public toilets, changing stalls, and occasionally hotel rooms have hidden cameras in them. I wouldn't say that it's something that keeps me from using the bathroom all the time, but it is something that sits in the back of my head. Hidden cameras here have also become subtler: some look like water bottles, battery charging packs, and flash drives. I don't want to scare people at all, but I would say it would be a good idea to look around a stall occasionally. Restaurants are safe and the police will do walk-throughs to make sure there are no cameras in the stalls.

According to a trauma center, every day 20-30 videos are uploaded per day on various sites (I don't know what they are, but apparently they are popular).

Communication between men and women here is indirect; it's something that Yonsei will make sure you know at orientation since it could be considered a cultural difference for most people. That in mind, there's this perception that foreigners are very open to people touching them, so I would just like to remind everyone that "no" is an amazing word that everyone should feel comfortable saying, and it's okay if someone calls you something rude because they're not expecting direct language. Never feel bad about prioritizing your own safety and comfort.

Thanks for making it this far (if you did), I know it's an extremely uncomfortable subject, but there are too many people that are willing to gloss over this. I also don't want to take away from the positives of this experience — I truly am having a great time here — just want to keep people in the loop.

— Isis