

The Washington Post

“Getting to ‘No’” in The New York Times Magazine

By [Nicholas Quinn Rosenkranz](#)

December 15, 2014

My friend and college classmate Susan Dominus has [an extremely good piece](#) in The New York Times Magazine this week. After all the strident polemics about sexual assault on campus, here at last is an article that is both exquisitely personal and genuinely useful. Dominus writes that what is needed — what she herself needed on an awful night at Yale — is a “linguistic rip cord, something without the mundane familiarity of ‘no’ or the intensity demanded in ‘Get off or I’ll scream.’” She explains:

What if every kid on every college campus was given new language — a phrase whose meaning could not be mistaken, that signaled peril for both sides, that might be more easily uttered?

One phrase that might work is “red zone” — as in, “Hey, we’re in a red zone,” or “This is starting to feel too red zone.” Descriptive and matter-of-fact, it would not implicitly assign aggressor and victim, but would flatly convey that danger — emotional, possibly legal — lay ahead. Such a phrase could serve as a linguistic proxy for confronting or demanding, both options that can seem impossible in the moment. “We’re in a red zone” — the person who utters that is not a supplicant (“Please stop”); or an accuser (“I told you to stop!”). Many young women are uncomfortable in either of those roles; I know I was.

This seems like a very promising idea. College administrators: take note. And read [the whole thing](#).

Nicholas Quinn Rosenkranz is [a Professor of Law at Georgetown](#), [a Senior Fellow in Constitutional Studies at the Cato Institute](#), and [an occasional Broadway producer](#)