Rape Culture

Wonderfully Made

Palm Beach State College

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Rape Culture

Society has learned to accept rape as part of its culture by denying it and telling themselves, “it doesn’t exist.” Society has become desensitized to rape by distancing themselves from the problem and blaming the victim for the occurrences. Women have learned to accept it by blaming themselves for being raped; as a result, many are suffering silently because they are afraid to come forward. To end “Rape Culture,” society must stop victim blaming and women should feel empowered to speak up.

What is Rape Culture?

Rape culture is something that society has been dealing with for years. Women are exposed to rape culture through the media, publications, and everyday activities, but what is rape culture? To better understand rape culture, the terms must first be defined. When one thinks of culture, the word rape certainly does not come to mind. In most part, culture is defined as a social group that shares common traditions and values. According to Merriam Webster (2018), “Culture is the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties especially by education,” which means it is sets of behaviors that is learned not inherited. Albert Bandura’s concept of social learning theory (1977) stated, “Behavior is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning” (as cited McLeod, 2016). When combined “rape” and “culture” both words have a negative connotation. Rape is forcing a woman or a man to have sexual intercourse unwillingly and unable to consent. According to Merriam Webster (2018), rape is defined as

Unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against a person’s will or with a person who is beneath a certain age or
incapable of valid consent because of mental illness, mental deficiency, intoxication, unconsciousness, or deception.”

While men can be victimized, they are necessarily not the primary target because most rape incidents are done by men to women. Rape Culture means that society has learned to overlooked sexual violence and normalized rape as part of its culture.

Why is it a problem?

Society has learned to normalized sexual violence by pretending that rape is not a widespread issue in the United States, but it is an issue. “Every 98 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted,” according to RAINN (2013). The reality is that rape is pervasive. In the United states 321,500 people are assaulted each year (RAINN, 2013), which average about 864 per day. “One in five women and one in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives. 91% of victims of rape and sexual assault are female, and nine percent are male,” according to National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2011). Rape culture is prevalent, but somehow society finds a way to silence it even though it is problematic. Society often trivialized rape and women do not even realize the exposure in the media because it is easy to dismiss and deny. There is a deafening silence that surrounds rape culture and not enough attention is emphasizing on the issue. While society look for ways to silence rape, 98 seconds have passed by, and another woman has been assaulted. There is no way to simplify rape; if it is force, unwilling, without consent, regardless if they fought back or said "no," then it is considered rape.

Society has learned to normalized rape by listening to the myths associated with sexual assault. These myths are used as reasons to simplify sexual assault. For example, the idea that if a woman does not “scuffle” or “fight back,” then it is not considered sexual assault is wrong and sends the wrong message to women. But in fact, “this belief serves to condone the actions of
“rapist” because they are viewed as “fundamentally unable to commit rape” that “submission does not equal consent and “No” does not mean ‘Yes.’” (Campus Violence Prevention Program, n.d.). Women cannot be held accountable for men’s pervasive actions. Society often believes the myths that support rape culture and women are not given the chance to tell their stories because society believes a man (especially of high power) is unable to commit such abhorrent crimes and survivors are being marginalized and silenced; therefore, society makes it impossible for women to come forward. These myths often shame survivors into silence because women do not want to relive those horrific experiences, only to be ignored and blamed by those who refuse to acknowledge that rape is destructive and life changing.

Rape culture has learned to normalized itself through the media, online, and other publication. “Look through any supposed women's publication and notice the ads that display women at the mercy of a man or at the mercy of the male gaze” (Pearson, 2000). The ads emphasize more on dependence and passivity of a woman and less on freedom and power (Pearson, 2000). A “woman at the mercy of a men” is portrayed as submissive because society have taught men to be aggressive and women to be submissive. The same passivity and dependence is displayed when women are sexually assaulted because women are left with no choice at the moment but to submit. Women are displayed as compliant objects and society is glorifying it as a form of art, but in reality it exemplifies rape culture. A culture where sex is used as a form of art and oppression is used silently to display subliminal messages. Society need to lead and create a platform that will provide women the chance to end their silence.

**Blaming**

Victim blaming occurs when society blames the victim for the perpetrator’s crime because it is a way for society to disconnect themselves from unpleasant occurrences. “Victim
blaming refers to a practice of questioning what a victim could have done differently in order to prevent a crime from happening, thus implying the fault of the crime lies with the victim rather than the perpetrator” (“Victim Blaming,” 2016). Victim blaming comes in many forms and society holds the victims responsible for their misfortune, which often shifts the focus from the perpetrator and make it seems as though the victim is accountable for the assault. “Some people have a harder time accepting that the victims of these crimes didn’t contribute to their own victimization” (Roberts, 2016), because society have a tough time accepting based on the victimization theory that says victims themselves may essentially initiate, either passively or actively. “One of the most controversial points of this theory is the idea that women who are raped actively contributed in some way, either through provocative dress, a relationship, or suggested consent of intimacy” (as cited Harper, 2014). A woman’s clothing does not give a rapist permission to commit crimes. Society already made up their mind and has its own preconceived notion about who to blame for the crime.

While victim blaming is entirely universal, it often happens when a woman gets raped. “Society have assimilated rape into everyday culture with the concept that if a woman wears revealing clothing or goes to a bar alone, she is likely to 'get raped’” (Pearson, 2000). This statement is not true; a woman can be raped wherever she goes and being at a bar certainly does not send an invitation to men. When a woman is raped, there are always questions: why was the woman there and what was the woman wearing? One of the biggest misconceptions is that women put themselves in the position to be raped and women get raped because of the type of clothing they choose to wear, which is untrue. But in fact, a woman can be raped whether she is wearing revealing attire or not.
Currently at Palm Beach State College, there is an exhibit at the gallery showcasing what women wore during the time of their assault. The exhibit displays victim’s clothing from kids to adult. Figure 1, are pictures from some of the victims and support argument to show why women’s clothing does not objectify reasons of why women are raped. Those women were covered, not wearing anything provocative or enticing, but basic attires that everyone would have worn and yet, it still happened. Society has placed the burden on women to control men’s actions that women has to dress “modestly” or “She asked for it.” “She was advertising for sex.” These words were spoken by jurors who reached a unanimous verdict, acquitting a man of charges of kidnapping and sexual assault in a 1989 Florida case” (Lennon, Lennon, & Johnson, 1993, p. 391). These statements reflect paradigmatic beliefs that women asked to be raped. Jurors have argued that a woman’s clothing signifies implied consent (Lennon et al., 1993, p. 392). If that statement was accurate, then none of those women would have been sexually assaulted. The belief that clothing can indicate consent shown that people draw conclusions and make inferences based on mannerism and myths. Inferences are not often true; for these reasons,
clothing should not be used as evidence to simplify men’s behavior for assaulting women because the burden that society has placed on survivors of sexual assault, women have taken those burdens and internalize them and blame themselves for allowing these incidents to happen.

Any woman who has dealt with any kind of sexual assault have struggled at some point with self-blaming. Self-blaming refers to guilt and shame and many women are affected by it. Not only are they blaming themselves, but women also have to deal with family members and outside judgements; as a result, many have to seek professional help because the incidents paralyze them before they can move forward. Women must understand that the perpetrators are at fault and accepting the blame will only hinder them from moving forward. Women must not be too self-critical, women should seek professional help, and women should feel empowered to speak.

**Speak Up**

Women are afraid to speak up about rape or any kind of sexual abuse; as a result, majority of sexual assaults are not reported to the police. “Rape is the most under-reported crime; “63% of sexual assaults are not reported to police,” according RAINN (2013). Perpetrators of sexual violence are less likely to go to jail or prison than other criminals because women do not want the world to judge them. The worst part for a woman who is a victim of sexual abuse is seeing the perpetrator not being held accountable because the crime was not reported, so the memory plays back every time. Women have to speak and expose those men who have committed sexual violence.

Society must recognize that sexual violence has been an issue in the United States, especially women whose been forced into secrecy to protect their perpetrators. “When a woman says that she has been raped, do not trivialize, ridicule or dismiss her statement” (“Ending rape
culture, ” 2018). This might be the only opportunity a woman has to explain the sexual violence that is committed. “Shame must be on the perpetrator, not on the victim-survivor. It is not surprising “why less women and girls report violence to authorities and decide not to pursue their cases further” (“Ending Rape Culture, ” 2018). Even when women report a crime, society second guess their statements, and not enough attention is accentuating on the issue. Therefore, society silenced women before given a chance to speak. Women should speak up and report sexual abuse because they are able help other silenced women who are afraid to speak.

**Conclusion**

While the world is normalizing rape culture, women must challenge themselves and society as a whole and must demand for their voices to be heard. Just because a woman does not come forward does not mean it did not happen. Society must recognize that sexual violence has been an issue in the United States and myths and clothing should not be used as reasons to simplify sexual assault. Society must stop blaming women and women need to stop blaming themselves for being sexually assaulted. Instead, women should feel empowered to speak up and report sexual abuse because through their stories, other women will also feel brave to speak up.
References


Palm Beach State College Survivor’s Exhibit. (2018). *What were you wearing?* Figure.1.


