

# Never Asking for it: Mainstream Media and the Culture of Consent



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*“A girl has roughly the same chance of being sexually assaulted during college, one in four/five, as she does of getting the flu during an average year.” (Chemaly, Huffington Post)*

It is no surprise that rape is a world-wide issue, however many people do not realize just to what extent this is true.

On most college campuses when there is an outbreak of illness in a dorm emails and text alerts will go out to students letting them know where the illness is concentrated and how to make sure others do not get it. Often when there is a string of rapes the school attempts to cover it up.

A published by the University of Surrey talks about quotations from ‘lad mags’: pornography magazines, and how they affect our thoughts about sexual relationships and women. When shown statements such as “You do not want to be caught red-handed . . . go and smash her on a park bench. That used to be my trick.” (a lad mag) or “I think if a law is passed, there should be a dress code . . . When girls dress in those short skirts and things like that, they're just asking for it.”(a convicted rapist) (North, Jezebel)

people can't tell the difference between quotes from British "lad mags" and interviews with convicted rapists. And given the choice, men are actually more likely to agree with the rapists... they rated the magazine quotes as slightly *more* derogatory than the statements made by men serving time for raping women. The researchers also showed both sets of quotes to a separate group of men — the men were more likely to identify with the rapists' statements than the lad mag excerpts. (North, Jezebel)

“Slut shaming” is the idea that someone, most often a girl, is inferior and should be made to feel ashamed of herself because she differs from traditional gender expectations, for instance by wearing “provocative clothing” or expresses sexual behaviors or desires, usually sexual promiscuity. “Victim blaming” is when the victim of a crime is blamed for part or all of the crime that has been committed against them. Slut shaming and victim blaming combine to form a cultural tolerance for or apathy about rape and sexual assault.

Rape culture is an extension and combination of these two ideas. Rape culture is when rapists are excused and sympathized with instead of persecuting them, and when the victim of the crime, rather than the perpetrator, is blamed for what happens. "Rape culture teaches women to not get raped, rather than teaching men not to rape. Rape culture involves sympathizing with the rapist... Rape culture is dangerous because it leads to the victim not speaking out about the rape, and the rapists therefore not getting in trouble "(Nelson, Huffington Post)] This leads to the idea that something the victim did lead to them being raped and therefore it is their fault.

Rape culture is the idea that the crime of rape is tied to culture, how a society views and deals with the world around them.

Rape is a cultural phenomenon and the media has the power to shape cultural norms, and by extension, acceptance of sexual assault. Currently the majority of American media sources promote rape culture. However, the media has the power to change cultural perspectives and reverse the paradigm we currently experience.

Rape is not just a new, or even an American or Western problem. The many differences in cultures around the world results in many different ideas about what is right and wrong and how girls and women should be treated if they are the victims of sexual assault.

In many places, rape culture manifests itself in the form of honor killings. Honor killings are "the traditional practice in some countries of killing a family member who is believed to have brought shame on the family" (Merriam-Webster). However they often "can serve as a cover for domestic abuse, inheritance disputes, rape, incest or the desire to punish female independence", according to Maha Abu-Dayyeh, the general director of the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (O'Conner, Washington Post).

And honor killings are increasing "Twenty-seven women are thought to have been killed last year in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by family members claiming reasons of 'honor' — more than double the 13 cases documented in 2012" (O'Connor, Washington Post). There

really is not much conclusive evidence which indicates one way or another what is causing these attacks to increase so dramatically but some sources theorize that it is due to a clash of modern urbanization and traditional expectations and values. (Helsinki Times)

Traditionally the punishments of those who participate in honor killings has been lighter than of other similar crimes. In Palestine, the president recently annulled a law that meant perpetrators of Honor Killings could get no more than 6 months in jail for their crimes. There are many other examples of archaic laws of this type still in place world-wide. "The woman is not an emblem of honour for the man or her family... The categorisation of such crimes under misleading labels constitutes the exploitation of women, and in turn, it safeguards the offenders and promotes more crimes of this nature" (Ashrawi, Helsinki Times).

Honor killings are practiced for any number of reasons, from adultery, being raped, or even having any kind of relationship with someone their families disapprove of. In late January of 2014 a case was brought to national attention in India. A woman was gang raped for the 'crime of falling in love.' She was involved with a man from outside her village in secret. He proposed to her one night and the village chief found out. He ordered in punishment that both parties pay a fine of about \$442. The man was able to pay, but the woman was not. In punishment he told the villagers to "enjoy her". (Harris and Kumar, New York Times) He then told the woman and her family that if they reported the rape, their house would be burned down.

Thirteen people have been taken into custody already, including the village chief, and have been charged with rape, wrongful confinement, verbal threats and assault.

Sunil Soren, a leader from a nearby village, insisted in a telephone interview that people in the area "respect our women a lot." But he said that Mr. Sheikh and the young woman were "in an objectionable situation," and that such incidents "pollute the minds of youngsters... In the excitement, some wrong things happened." (Harris and Kumar, New York Times)

Village councils are quite common in rural India. They enforce strict rules, often including rules about who can and should marry whom. Couples who do not abide by these rules are sometimes murdered. However, with the media attention that India has been receiving in the past few years regarding rape and other gender based crimes people have started to pay more attention.

Local politicians have been reacting negatively to the recent upsurge in publicity. It appears to reflect badly on them if their local districts experience so much gender violence. Some politicians have even gone so far as to claim victims are lying even in the face of evidence. This lashing out is the premise of victim blaming. The disbelief and shame that gets put on the victim instead of the perpetrator makes it so that fewer victims are willing to speak out and fewer cases are likely to go through the justice system. This means that more perpetrators go free.

Rape is intricately tied to culture. This is shown through how many different ways cultures deal with and treat rape, however, "it is meaningless and misleading to argue about whether biological or sociocultural theories of rape are correct, for they are rarely mutually exclusive." (Jones, 832) While biological urges to reproduce fuel the enjoyment of rape ultimately how we deal with and what causes people to view rape as acceptable is based on cultural influence.

Slut shaming in the U.S. does not manifest itself in the way of honor killings very often, but instead suicide is becoming more prevalent rather than tribal councils. In the extreme, rape culture results in things like the recent suicides of Rehteah Parsons (17 years old) and Audrie Pott (15 years old). Both of these girls were raped by classmates who later spread pictures around the school of what had occurred. After the pictures were circulated the girls were ostracized and shamed. Eventually their shame and depression resulted in suicide. The media has always influenced people through a combination of news and entertainment and is one of

the largest ways we understand the world around us. The power of the media voice is especially evident in the recent Steubenville rape scandal.

At around midnight on August 12, 2012 a 16 year old girl in Steubenville, Ohio left a party extremely drunk with four local high school football players. The group didn't even make the 15 minute car ride before her shirt was removed and she was photographed by Trent Mays, one of the perpetrators, as he performed sexual acts upon her.

When she became unconscious she was stripped naked and the second perpetrator, Ma'lik Richmond, also took pictures of her and assaulted her. The perpetrators then went to another party and showed their friends the pictures. Mays later texted people saying she was "like a dead body" and sent out pictures of her naked body covered in his semen (New York Times).

In the following days Mays attempted to cover what they did up. telling a friend to "just say she came to your house and passed out" and even asking the victim not to press charges. This began a nationwide media frenzy as people began to take sides.

The town itself became split with some people believing that the perpetrators needed strict sentencing and other believing that the girl was awake enough to offer her consent, that her decision to get drunk was consent. Part of the reason for such a split is that the perpetrators were popular local football players. Some people were sympathetic to them and blamed the girl for what happened and for the negative press it brought to the small town and their football team. Some people worried for the boys' future -- wondering if one bad decision might cut short their promising careers.

This brought about a nationwide reaction from people on both sides of the argument, including such statements made by national news anchors like CNNs Poppy Harlow, saying how it was,

"Incredibly difficult, even for an outsider like me, to watch what happened as these two young men that had such promising futures, star football players, very good students, literally watched as they believed their lives fell

apart...when that sentence came down, [Ma'lik] collapsed in the arms of his attorney...He said to him, 'My life is over. No one is going to want me now.  
(Harlow)

This quote from Harlow demonstrates how we value the experience of one individual over another. It becomes easy to excuse the perpetrators and blame the victims when the perpetrators are someone in a position of power, even if that power is only being a football star. In this case the two men were more important than the 'slutty' girl, her life in the grand scheme of things didn't matter as much.

When we are being bombarded by these messages, often not as overtly, we begin to accept that this is the way culture is. We treat culture as something that is permanent and not something of our own making and manipulation. When the cultural messages are ones that excuse rapists, we are being taught that rape is an okay thing to do.

We can turn on our T.V.s and hear quotes like this one from Todd Akin, former representative for Missouri's second district , "From what I understand from doctors, that's really rare [pregnancy] If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.." (Gentilviso, Huffington Post) We can turn on the radio and hear

I always wanted a good girl I know you want it...You're a good girl  
Can't let it get past me You're far from plastic Talk about getting blasted I  
hate these blurred lines... I know you want it But you're a good girl The way  
you grab me Must wanna get nasty Go ahead, get at me (Thicke, Blurred  
Lines)

This song, talking about the supposed 'blurred lines' of consent, was the number one song in America in 2013. The lyrics in this song have been controversial because they follow the trope of women not actually meaning no when they say it.

This is dangerous because when the validity of someone's "no" is doubted, then they end up not really having control over their bodies or the situations they end up in.

This picture compares the lyrics in *Blurred Lines* with what rape victims' rapists said to them.

This is a particularly good example of rape culture and what dangerous messages we are sending through the media, even unintentionally. The imagery in the *Blurred Lines* music is especially indicative of this.

In 2012 the College Student Journal conducted a study on music videos and how they affect our perceptions of rape.

College students were randomly assigned to view a music video that contained either high or low levels of sexuality and sexual objectification and were then asked to rate the guilt of the male in a scenario they read about a date rape between a high school boy and girl. Generally, the high sexual -- ized/objectified music video had a greater effect on males' perceptions, decreasing their judgments of guilt and empathy for the victim. (Burgess and Burpo, College Student Journal)

This is especially important to remember when dealing with songs such as *Blurred Lines*. The unrated music video opens with Thicke on a bed fully clothed with a woman dressed only in platform shoes and a nude colored thong. This already establishes a power difference between the two, the woman being fully bared and effectively less powerful than the man in the suit.

The girl then stands there as Thicke sings, dances, and leers at her. The three men in this video are Thicke, T.I., and Pharrell Williams. All the men in this video are fully clothed while an array of women walk past them in nothing but these flesh colored thongs. As Tricia Romano of The Daily Beast puts it, "The nudity might be fine if the song was called, 'Let's All Have Some Fun,' but it's called 'Blurred Lines,' and the subject itself is enough to make some female music fans uncomfortable. The song is about how a girl really wants crazy wild sex but doesn't say it—posing that age-old problem where men think no means yes into a catchy, hummable song."

As Canadian model, Amy Davison, told the Daily Beast,

"The women are clearly being used as objects to reinforce the status of the men in the video. The men have all the control and status because they are not vulnerable—they are completely covered. Whereas the women have no status and are totally open to be exploited ogled and used," she said. "It doesn't jibe with me." (Davison, Daily Beast)



The degradation of the women in the video is especially apparent when they are shown interacting with farm animals, still naked. This equates them not only to fluffy cute things to be petted but also as property for the men to control. The imagery of naked women with virginal lambs is particularly offensive as it limits women to just their sexuality and sexual purity.

By the end of the video the ridiculousness gets to the point where the women walk around large balloon letters that spell out "Robin Thicke has a big dick".

However, Thicke doesn't see anything wrong with his video saying himself in GQ that,

We tried to do everything that was taboo. Bestiality, drug injections, and everything that is completely derogatory towards women. Because all three of us are happily married with children, we were like, "We're the perfect guys to make fun of this." People say, "Hey, do you think this is degrading to women?" I'm like, "Of course it is. What a pleasure it is to degrade a woman. I've never gotten to do that before. I've always respected women." So we just wanted to turn it over on its head and make people go, "Women and their bodies are beautiful. Men are always gonna want to follow them around." After the video got banned on YouTube, my wife tweeted, "Violence is ugly. Nudity is beautiful. And the 'Blurred Lines' video makes me wanna..." You know. And that's the truth. Right now, with terrorism and poverty and Wall Street and Social Security having problems, nudity should not be the issue. (Thicke, GQ)

Maura Johnston makes the point in response that "It would be actually transgressive if the men were naked, too. It's still such a taboo,...Then again, if the men were actually naked, would you be able to spell out 'Robin Thicke has a big dick' in Mylar balloons?" (Jezable)

However Thicke is not the only one trying to excuse what occurs in the video.

"There were lots of women who wanted to understand what we meant by those lyrics. But the two lines go: 'You don't need no papers/That man is not your maker.' Boom! Lyrically, you're done: there's nothing else to talk about. 'That man is not your maker.' Plus that treatment was written and shot by a female director, who's a feminist."(Pharrell Williams, Jezable)

In the end though Thicke can claim that it was all for shock value and that he was trying to break taboos, but in fact what he is doing is making a lot of money and reinforcing the power imbalance that can lead to rape and sexual harassment.

Not only are we sending negative imagery through the media, we send negative language as well. This year Dylan Farrow wrote an open letter about the abuse she suffered at the hands of her stepfather Woody Allen after the director was awarded a lifetime achievement award. The sexual abuse occurred in 1992, but Dylan was determined to be too fragile to prosecute Allen. The narrative of this story has degraded over time to become one of Allen's innocence, which is not the same thing as not being prosecuted for the crime.

Farrow opens the letter thusly.

What's your favorite Woody Allen movie? Before you answer, you should know: when I was seven years old, Woody Allen took me by the hand and led me into a dim, closet-like attic on the second floor of our house. He told me to lay on my stomach and play with my brother's electric train set. Then he sexually assaulted me. He talked to me while he did it, whispering that I was a good girl, that this was our secret, promising that we'd go to Paris and I'd be a star in his movies. I remember staring at that toy train, focusing on it as it traveled in its circle around the attic. To this day, I find it difficult to look at toy trains... But sexual abuse claims against the powerful stall more easily. There were experts willing to attack my credibility. There were doctors willing to gaslight an abused child (Farrow).

This is Farrow's first time publicly speaking out about her experiences, but the first reaction of many people was to try and distance themselves or discredit what she was saying. These people include stars like Cate Blanchett and Scarlett Johansson. Johansson called Farrow irresponsible for adding the names of stars like her, and went on to say about Allen "I think he'll continue to know what he knows about the situation," (Johansson) dismissing evidence and supporting a powerful perpetrator.

Allen responded to Farrow with an op-ed of his own in the New York times, but instead of talking about how serious child abuse is and how seriously he takes the accusations, he dismisses and diminishes his daughter by saying things like,

"Twenty-one years ago, when I first heard Mia Farrow had accused me of child molestation, I found the idea so ludicrous I didn't give it a second thought. We were involved in a terribly acrimonious breakup, with great enmity between us and a custody battle slowly gathering energy. The self-serving transparency of her malevolence seemed so obvious I didn't even hire a lawyer to defend myself. (Allen)

He also attempts to negate Mia Farrow's credibility by characterizing her as "self-serving" and "malevolent" rather than as a protective mother.

As Margot Magowan of the Reel Girl website points out,

Unless we all automatically bought in to all the stereotypes about vindictive, lying women and credible, powerful men, one would hope accusations of child abuse would be taken seriously. Statistics show the chances of being sexually assaulted is 1 in 3-to-4 for girls (before they turn 18), 1 in 5-to-7 for boys (before they turn 18), 1 in 5 for women, 1 in 77 for men. (Magowan)

Magowan believes Allen's disregard and his dismissive language should not convince people he is right it should convince people that he is wrong. "Allen's sarcasm is offensive. If he wishes for anyone to take his defense seriously, he ought to at least attempt to express some recognition of the seriousness of Dylan's charges. Instead, he comes off as narcissistic at best and delusional at worst"(Magowan, Reel Girl). This attitude of dismissal only continues to encourage the culture of the powerful getting away with their actions and those who are less powerful having their narratives of violence dismissed.

However, while media can perpetuate the crime of rape it can also redefine it. If one wants to spread ideas or re-write a narrative the mass distribution through media is the way to go. The Vlogbrothers, popular Youtubers John and Hank Green, address issues of sexual abuse, consent, and culture in one of their new videos. Hank starts his video saying that he is not a doctor, just a person with opinions.

He makes the point that "sex is like complicated in like every way imaginable. This is not aided by the fact that we have a general societal taboo against discussing it." (H. Green, Youtube) This leads to confusion and mystery surrounding sex. He says that this ambiguousness is unhelpful and has turned our sexual relationships into predator prey relationships, instead of ones where both parties are equal. "In my opinion, this is I'm sure not all of the reason, but one of the big reasons why sexual abuse [where one person is being coerced into doing something they do not want to do] is so common in our culture."(H. Green, Youtube) He ends his video by saying that "romantic relationships can be wonderful but you

have to have that magical thing, consent, and not saying no is not the same as saying yes.” (H. Green, Youtube)

The video has already gotten almost half a million views in the first three weeks since its posting and 782 people have subscribed to their youtube channel just from watching this video. This video is reaching many people very quickly, and it’s reaching young people who are just starting out to understand what relationships mean and what consent truly is.

We are also starting to get some positive images in movies as well. A new movie has just come out, *Divergent*, based on the novel by Veronica Roth. The premise is a dystopian war ravaged society that couldn’t decide what the cause of war was. The people split into factions based on what they thought would prevent more war, selflessness, honesty, knowledge, courage, and non-violence. At age sixteen the children decide which faction they agree with and they want to join.

The main character, Tris, decides that she wants to be Dauntless, the faction of the brave, and starts training. Roth puts in a clarifying point that is important which is that Tris “ is always the agent. That is, she’s always choosing, always acting, always moving the plot by her behavior” (Roth). Part of the problem surrounding rape and sexual assault is when women stop being the subject, as Jackson Katz (a filmmaker, educator, and author who deals with gender violence) also points out. The problem occurs when women become the object being acted upon rather than a subject doing the acting.

Beth Lalonde praises *Divergent* in her review saying it was “A subversion and deconstruction of every exploitative, sexist action blockbuster ever made. *Divergent*, at its heart, is about enthusiastic consent.” (Lalonde, Medium) She goes on to describe the premise for the movie and talks about Tris’s tasks in ‘boot camp’ as she trains to join the faction of the fearless.

One of Tris’s fears is the fear of sexual assault. This movie addresses the issue in an incredibly positive way. Early on in the movie Tris wants to slow down with her partner and says she isn’t comfortable with something. He respects that and stops without pushing or trying to

coerce her, which is an important image for both men and women to see. “Teenage girls all around the world are going to witness Tris insisting on consent, and teenage boys are going to witness Four listening to her.” (Lalonde, Medium)

Later in her fear simulation, where they put you in a situation you are afraid of so you can practice safely overcoming that fear, she faces her partner who this time doesn’t stop when she says no. She fights him off her and overcomes the simulation.

“She awakes to a crowd of exam proctors applauding her. Cheering her on. Patting her on the back. Telling her how brave and smart and strong she is. Telling her that she did *exactly* the right thing. That she’s a model for the other trainees. Have you ever seen *anything* like this? Have you ever seen a teenage girl fight off a rapist on camera, let alone be *congratulated* for it?” (Lalonde, Medium)

There is another scene in the movie where Tris is attacked by three boys. Their attack is foiled before they can do any damage, but the next morning one of the boys approaches Tris asking for her forgiveness. She says that if he touches her again she will kill him. “*Divergent* marks the first time I have ever seen a teenage girl articulate, in no uncertain terms, that her body belongs to her. That she gets to decide who touches it, and how, and when. That her *yes* and her *no* are final, and unambiguous, and worthy of respect. *Divergent* is important.” (Lalonde, Medium)

Several programs starting on college campuses that are trying to change people’s ideas about consent and sexual assault.

One such program is called Bystander Intervention, and it is just that. This program encourages people in the vicinity of a possibly hostile situation, the bystanders, to intervene on behalf of the person in danger.

Jane Stapleton, a University of New Hampshire researcher who runs bystander intervention programs at colleges around the country and in Europe, tells students they’ll need to be creative about outmaneuvering aggressors. Among the diversions she discusses: suddenly turning on the lights at a party or turning off the music; accidentally spilling a drink on the guy; forming a conga line and pulling him away from the woman he’s bothering and onto the dance floor. One of her favorites came from a young woman who approached her drunken

girlfriend and said, loudly, "Here's the tampon you asked for." (Winerip, New York Times)

The goal of this project is to stop what is going on before it reaches the level of sexual assault, possibly without the aggressor even noticing that he was being deterred. The hope is that this will protect not only the potential victim, but stop people from making bad choices along the way.

This program has been compared to the Designated Driver program that works to change attitudes about drunk driving and reduce the harm it can cause. "Both take the same tack: Drinking to excess can't be stopped but the collateral damage can." (Winerip, New York Times) In fact some students have even taken to becoming "designated interventionists" not drinking so they can make sure none of their friends get in trouble one way or another and intervening when there is a threatening situation.

Programs of intervention and deterrence are a start but do not address the real root of the problem. When women are treated as objects and not subjects, it becomes much easier to dehumanize them and justify their objectification and assault. Objects are acted upon and subjects do that acting. By making women into objects via media and popular culture, we imply that they are there for the taking and amusement of others and not as individual decision makers themselves. It is important to remember though that while it is important for women to have their autonomy, when that is taken away, in the case of rape and sexual assault, it is never the woman's fault. As Jackson Katz puts it.

It starts with a very basic English sentence: "John beat Mary." That's a good English sentence. John is the subject. Beat is the verb. Mary is the object. Good sentence. Now we're going to move to the second sentence, which says the same thing in the passive voice. "Mary was beaten by John." And now a whole lot has happened in one sentence. We've gone from "John beat Mary" to "Mary was beaten by John." We've shifted our focus in one sentence from John to Mary, and you can see John is very close to the end of the sentence, well, close to dropping off the map of our psychic plain. The third sentence, John is dropped, and we have, "Mary was beaten," and now it's all about Mary. We're not even thinking about John. It's totally focused on Mary. Over the past generation, the term we've used synonymous with "beaten" is

"battered," so we have "Mary was battered." And the final sentence in this sequence, flowing from the others, is, "Mary is a battered woman." So now Mary's very identity -- Mary is a battered woman -- is what was done to her by John in the first instance. But we've demonstrated that John has long ago left the conversation...

The key idea here, however, is where this thinking gets us. "Asking questions about Mary is not going to get us anywhere in terms of preventing violence. We have to ask a different set of questions." (Katz) While the bystander program may stop the event of sexual violence before it happens, it is no guarantee of the future.

Notably, campus perpetrators are often serial offenders. A 2002 study by David Lisak and Paul M. Miller found that 7% of college men admitted to committing rape or attempted rape, and 63% of these men admitted to committing multiple offenses, averaging six rapes each. These men know that alcohol, in addition to rendering their victims more vulnerable to assault, also makes them less likely to remember the event and less likely to be believed or taken seriously if they report it. (Hostler, Wall Street Journal)

When we treat the idea of rapists as scary non-human being who prey on people, that it is so separate and different from what we are, but that is untrue and unhelpful. In truth 84% of rape is done by someone the victim knows and out of that 57% is their date. (Raphael, Rape is Rape)

Rape is more than just an issue with the media it is an issue with how we think about and treat women. It is an issue with how we ourselves perceive rape.

Many women and most men involved in acquaintance rape don't label it as rape. To ask, 'have you ever been raped?' or have you ever raped anyone?' would have greatly--and falsely--reduced the number of affirmative responses. Instead, clearly worded descriptions of activities that met the most common legal definitions of rape were used to classify respondents' experiences. (Warshaw, 49)

Saying the word rape makes people less likely to say yes, but asking them about the definition of rape increased numbers of the affirmative answer. For example, the official definition of rape in the United States is "The penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without

the consent of the victim.” (Holder, US Department of Justice) However, if the researchers would ask questions about acts that by definition were rape but did not use the clinical technical terms, the number of people who answered yes would go up. These responses affirm that many people consider “that ‘real’ rape always involves force and that acts of sexual penetration against drugged or unconscious individuals are not rapes”(Raphael, 1)

Girls in the United States are learning from a very young age just what the numbers are, what their chances of being believed are, and what this means for our futures.

Entering our teenage years in the sex-saturated 90s my friends and I knew tons about rape. We knew to always be aware while walking, to hold our keys out as a possible weapon against an attack, We knew that we shouldn't walk alone at night, and if we absolutely had to, we were to avoid shortcuts, dark paths, or alleyways. We even learned ways to combat date rape, even though none of us were old enough to have friends who drove or to be invited to parties with alcohol. We memorized the mantras, chanting them like a yogic sutra, crafting our words into a protective charm with which to ward off potential rapists: Do not walk alone at night. Put a napkin over your drink at parties. Don't get into cars with strange men. If someone tries to abduct you, scream loudly and try to attack them, because a rapist tries to pick on women who are easy targets. Yes, we learned a lot about rape. (Peterson, 209)

Rape prevention has to come from the ground up. It has to be men and women saying that cultural norms that excuse rape are not okay. It has to be people showing victims empathy and respect. It has to be people being leaders.

In a society with gender diversity and sexual diversity and racial and ethnic diversity, you make those kind of comments [sexist or misogynistic], you're failing at your leadership. If we can make this point that I'm making to powerful men and women in our society at all levels of institutional authority and power, it's going to change, it's going to change the paradigm of people's thinking. (Katz)

Rape culture in the United States is perpetuated by the vocabulary and imagery the media uses when discussing rape and gender violence. Until we change this, rape is going to continue to be a huge problem in the United States. While discussion and attitude changes are important without serious overhaul of our current norms rape culture will continue to be prevalent.



If we as a country want to lower rates of sexual violence, we must to start young to bring education to schools and communities detailing exactly what constitutes consent. We need to as a society decide that slut shaming is not okay and treat women in the public eye as full people who are not defined by their sexuality. By changing the language, we can start to change what are considered normal attitudes.

I believe, as Roxane Gay does, that people are skeptical of abuse victims because “the truth and pervasiveness of sexual violence around the world is overwhelming. Why would anyone want to face such truth?” I also believe that deep down people know that once we start to believe victims en masse—once we take their pain and experience seriously—that everything will have to change. Recognizing the truth about sexual assault and abuse will mean giving up too many sports and movies and songs and artists. It will mean rethinking institutions and families and power dynamics and the way we interact with each other every day. It will be a lot. And we are lazy (Valenti, The Nation).

Once we start taking this on, once we change our thinking and our language we will be able to overcome the current standard. Just being lazy is not enough. We as a society need to start our change. There is a common saying: the most dangerous thing to men is heart failure, the most dangerous thing to women is men. It is time to change.

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