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## Rape Culture: When Sexual Violence Against Women Is Normalized And Excused

Since 1998, the estimated number of women sexually assaulted in the United States is a staggering 17,700,000. The percentage of alleged perpetrators that have walked free is even more alarming at 99%. Why are these numbers so incredibly high? What is causing this problem? Unfortunately, modern-day society has normalized sexual assault and rape on innocent victims through media and popular culture, and oftentimes even making excuses for the perpetrator. Because of this, society has developed a rape culture. Rape culture is an ongoing problem with increasingly harmful repercussions on our society if something is not done to change the mindset of the people.

Rape culture is an environment in which rape, non-consensual intercourse, is prevalent and in which sexual violence against women is normalized and excused. It is having the mindset that a woman's body is an object and glamorizing sexual assault which creates a society that disregards women's rights and safety. It is a culture in which the behavior of men is excused and even laughed at by saying, "boys will be boys." It is a society in which making crude comments towards women is expected to be regarded as harmless flirtation and that women should be happy that someone is paying attention to them. It is a society in which making sexually explicit jokes is the norm. It is a culture in which pressure is placed on the male to "score." It is a culture in which women are taught how to avoid getting raped rather than teaching men not to rape.

The potential causes of a rape culture are varied and controversial. Among the factors that contribute to this are the decreased status of women within a society, pervasive media exposure of sex, availability of pornographic materials, especially those involving acts of violence, inadequate information or misconceptions regarding sexual behaviors, and the prevalence of child sexual abuse. When boys are at a young age, they are taught to be more aggressive than girls. They usually enjoy playing rough aggressive sports, while girls choose to play less aggressively. As boys, they grow up and think that they should get anything they want or have things their way, and when it does not go their way, some tend to get violent. When boys get older, they are taught to have multiple girlfriends and to not get "tied down" by one girl when they are young. They are supposed to "play the field." Some boys think it is important to date pretty girls so they receive more admiration or get more approval from peers when they are dating one. Meanwhile, girls are often taught that they should have a steady boyfriend and to guard their "reputations" because when girls tend to have multiple boyfriends, people look at them in a different way. They are more targeted. Men see women as objects, while women are raised to have no power in relation to men and taught that in order to be desirable, they need to be sexually submissive. Society has made the assault on women trivial and even blurred as to what assault really is. Many artists have written songs with lyrics such as "You know you want it" and commenting on the "blurred lines" of consent. There have been shirts with slogans such as It's not raping if...., this is my casual rape shirt, and I'm feeling rapey.

One of the many consequences of rape culture is victim-blaming. So many victims that do speak out are being "assaulted" twice because it is turned back on them as victim-blaming. There are so many victims that are remaining quiet out of fear that something worse will happen

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to them. Comments are being made claiming that women ask for it, saying that it would do some women good to get raped, and asking what she was wearing that caused him to do that to her? Such comments are making victims scared to tell their stories because they are afraid that nothing is going to happen to the perpetrator when they do or that they will be blamed for their assault. Individuals are being judged and perceived as being responsible for what happened to them whether it be because they were drinking or what they were wearing. Jokes are made that “No” means “Yes.” There have even been websites opened and dedicated to the “support of athletes accused of rape” and accusing victims of being career destroyers. More often than not, victims are being shamed for being victimized rather than comforted and made to feel safe and secure. Many women live in fear of being raped, while most men aren’t disturbed by this at all and often do not even give it a second thought. Women fear walking alone at night if even just walking from the store to their care or from car to their home.

Another problem created by rape culture is doubting the assault. When a victim starts talking about a rape assault, a person’s first thought is that it didn’t happen because there are no bruising nor open wounds. In their minds, they are thinking it really did not happen, but rape can happen in different situations. People are starting to keep all the experiences and horror to themselves because not too many people are standing up and listening to them.

With women having to hold this in, it is causing more damage, but it is also making them feel unsafe. If our judicial system is not doing everything in its power to get the man behind the incident locked away, how can women feel safe? How can they live without fear? This is an ongoing crime because too many individuals are getting away with it more and more each day. There have been numerous cases of men being completely let off of all charges and the judge claiming that the young girl that was raped was “of a much older age due to maturity” and even some cases where athletes were set free because it would be unfair to ruin their lives because of one small misunderstanding. What is this saying to victims all over the nation? What is this saying to potential perpetrators?

Women who take a stand against sexual assault are often referred to as radical feminists. They are often coined as being irrational “man-haters” insinuating that because they will not sit back and let the dehumanization of women continue, then they must be against men altogether. This is another crippling problem associated with rape culture. The differentiation between feminism and toxic feminism must be made.

Women need to know that it is safe, and it is okay to talk to someone about their story. They need to know that someone is going to fix the problem. They need to feel empowered in situations like this because all their power and dignity have been taken from them. There is too much at stake if this societal change is not made. The number of women and children being sexually assaulted each year is increasing. Suicide rates among victims continue to rise. Depression and PTSD are multiplying at alarming rates. While our society continues to teach individuals how to stay safe, the pornography and sex trafficking businesses continue to multiply only making the problem worse.