

Funny idea...but saddening that it is still women who must modify our appearance to be safer, rather than men who must change their behaviour to become less invasive. - Jena Vincelli

CULTURE OF RAPE: NO LONGER ENTERTAINING

On the 12th of February Wall Street Journal writer James Taranto publicly stated that we lived in an unjust system of blaming only the perpetrators of sexual crimes. He further claimed that women should take responsibility for tempting perpetrators who are in turn given no choice but to sexually or violently attack them. The good news is the world responded instantly. A world-wide petition condemning Taranto's comments was set up, furthermore the petition called for the immediate termination of Taranto's employment at The Wall Street Journal.

If two drunk drivers are in a collision, one doesn't determine fault on the basis of demographic details such as each driver's sex. But when two drunken college students collide, the male one is almost always presumed to be at fault. - James Taranto

Taranto's argument essentially is that women, if drunk, are mutually responsible for the sexual assault performed upon them. Taranto further stated that society is harshly and unfairly punishing men for crimes that I'm sure he believes are a "grey" issue.

This is the culture of rape. The fact that Taranto even has a platform on which to say these utterly outlandish statements is proof that our society is enabling the innermost and unfounded thoughts of those who are, simply put, ignorant. That is not to say that I am all in for a world of censorship but the public sphere, namely in this case, a well reputed magazine, should take more responsibility for the comments that their misguided employees make.

But this idea is not limited to individuals only, rape culture is fully embedded into popular culture. Every time we tune in to our favourite sitcoms we are bombarded with sexist jokes disguised as humour. The notion that men are more sexually aggressive and virile

is a constant theme on American television. Men are pressurized to sleep with as many women as possible on these sitcoms and if they do not then they are not considered to be masculine enough. In that same vein women are set up to seem as being emotional and weaker than men.

Rape jokes are prevalent in film as well. Here is a common scenario that can be found in many American romantic comedies, the most prominent culprit I remember is "Two Weeks' Notice" starring Sandra Bullock and Hugh Grant. The female lead gets drunk in a "humorous" kind of way. The male protagonist rescues her from her over-emotional self and brings her home where he chivalrously puts her on the couch/bed. In the morning the female lead awkwardly broaches the subject of whether they had spent the night together as she obviously drank such copious amounts of alcohol that she has no memory of it. When the male lead says no they didn't, she exhales a sigh of relief by saying something along the lines of "Thank God, that would have been so embarrassing". To this my response is NO. Are you telling me that if you slept with someone the night before and have no memory of it your only concern is that it might be embarrassing? Excuse me. You were black out drunk; if he - sufficiently conscious - had sex with you in that condition that unequivocally means that you were raped. Embarrassment should be the last thing on your mind. The above-mentioned scenario is literally played out over and over again in movies and acts as a humorous bridge between the sexes. Wrong, wrong, wrong.



In addition to popular rape culture conditioning, the commercial market has now become flooded with anti-rape devices such as hairy stockings and anti-harassment electric shock jackets, all designed to ensure a potential rape victim's safety. However, the question remains, why is it that women (who remain to be the world's highest raped demographic) have to physically alter themselves to become "unappealing" to the opposite sex so as not to be sexually harassed? Society has come to an unspoken consensus that rape victims or potential rape victims should have been or should be more responsible for their own protection because there is no real protection available. We are now conditioned to believe that the world is simply a terrible place where bad things happen and we (as potential victims) should know better than to venture out into it and if we do, what happens to us is naturally our own fault. Our silky legs, our mini skirts, our cleavages are blamed. But what can be blamed on a 90-year old blind lady minding her own business behind the closed doors of her private house, a sleeping baby, a ten-year old playing by herself with her dolls or a woman dressed in a burka for getting raped?

It is people like James Taranto who perpetuates this mode of thinking. Therefore our society will continue to be rife with victim blaming as opposed to working on true equality between the sexes.

To this my response is NO. Are you telling me that if you slept with someone the night before and have no memory of it your only concern is that it might be embarrassing?

Coined by feminists in the United States in the 1970s rape culture has many definitions but one of the most accurate descriptions can be credited to author Emilie Buchwald, who in her book, *Transforming a Rape Culture*, describes rape culture as:

"A complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. In a rape culture, women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm . . . In a rape culture both men and women assume that sexual violence is a fact of life, inevitable . . . However . . . much of what we accept as inevitable is in fact the expression of values and attitudes that can change".



This has been normalized by film, television, advertising campaigns, music and in many more spheres of communication. On a daily basis the public is bombarded with references to rape culture that is often difficult to keep up with. So how do we confront it?

The first and most important thing to do is to call it out. Recognizing rape culture and highlighting it is a way to let you and your friends know that you do not stand for it. We must remember to speak it out if we hear anything that is disrespectful or degrading to men or women otherwise these types of jokes or attitudes will continue to fester unchecked.

Rape culture is everywhere but if we pay little more attention to what we view as entertainment and what we say then we have the potential to slowly make a difference. This way women no longer have to subject themselves to ridiculous modes of protection when it is in fact that society must change and stop treating violence and rape as acceptable. Entertainment is entertainment but only when it does not cause harm to others.

We have the power to deem rape culture unacceptable and ineffective.

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