

Rape Culture

Did you know every two minutes someone in the United States is sexually assaulted? (National Organization For Women). Over the past two months I have been learning about rape culture and how it is perpetuated. Rape culture is an environment where sexual violence is normalized and excused. I researched, “What are the factors that perpetuate rape culture in the United States”. I think rape culture is important to know about especially since I am a girl. In addition, I think the topic of rape culture is extremely interesting. I focused on why rape occurs, date rape, and perpetuation of rape culture.

Rape over the years, has been redefined many times. One of the earlier

definitions of rape is, “...an act of sexual intercourse by a man with a woman against her will” (Encyclopedia Britannica). By the 1970’s, rape was redefined again to, “...not only the attacks by strangers but also those by acquaintances and husbands” (Freedman 279). Today the definition we use is, “...an act of sexual intercourse with an individual without his or her consent, through force or the threat of force” (Encyclopedia Britannica). In the earlier years, rape was only violent rape from a man to a women. Now, the term rape has expanded to include the other types of rapes.

In the past rape only defined by when a man rapes a women that he does not know. Before the sixteen hundreds,

“A husband could not rape his own wife, since he owned the rights to her sexual and reproductive labor” (Freedman 280). This is another example of rape culture because husbands don’t own their wives. If it is unwanted, it is rape not sex no matter who it is with.

In the 1850’s women’s rights movements started to protest against abusive husbands. These protests brought awareness, and about 20 years later most people started to recognize unwanted sexual acts in marriage as rape. By the 1970’s the laws started to change. Rape was redefined to “...not only attacks by strangers but also those by acquaintances and husbands” (Freedman 279). In addition, there were

new terms created such as, marital rape, date rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence.

I researched why rape occurs. Rape can occur for many reasons, such as, to cause pain, revenge, to punish, to control, and to have power over the victim. These reasons are generally more related to violent rape. Cases like these are much less common than acquaintance rape or date rape. In date rape, the aggressor may not know that they are raping. The line can be blurred when alcohol is involved which most of the time it is when a date or acquaintance rape occurs.

There were still not enough punishments for the rapists. For example, in 1974, ten white policemen

gang-raped a 17 year old black women and none of those policemen were punished (Freedman 283). This shows laws to help victims were not followed through and most of the time there was no form of punishment. Today there are still very minimal punishments. Only 3% of rape aggressors serve time in jail. That is only 3 out of 100 rapists that are punished (Womens Justice Now). This shows there is very little chance for being caught. That is not ok because in the book *No Turning Back* by Estelle Freedman, it mentioned a study where male college students were asked if they would violently rape if they could get away with it. Disappointingly, a third of these young men said they would. If our legal system was harsher on rapists it

would make sense that there would be less sexual assaults.

Another part of rape culture I researched is acquaintance rape. Did you know 75% of acquaintance rapes involve alcohol or drugs? (National Organization For Women). Many times if the assaulter drugs the victim they will not be aware of attack until 8-12 hours later. This is a big problem if you want to report the rape because it would be much harder to get evidence because the drugs used in date rape leave the body extremely quickly leaving no sign of drugs. Some of these drugs are: GHB (otherwise known as liquid x), Rohypnol (brand name is Xanax), and Ketamine, (commonly known as 'purple'). These drugs generally have no

taste, smell, or color, so it is extremely unlikely for the victims to realize they are being drugged. Once the victim is drugged, the victim will get confused, weak, and in extreme cases, will pass out. By this time, the victim cannot consent to sex, and the aggressor will commit rape.

To try to understand the beginning of rape culture, I looked into the history of it in other cultures. The biblical law is if man rapes an unmarried women, then the man must pay the bride-price and marry her because no one else would want ‘damaged goods (Freedman 275-280). This shows women who have been raped were seen as damaged goods but men were not seen any differently after committing an

act of rape. This shows rape culture has been around for a very long time instead of that our society in recent years had created rape culture.

Rape is wrong. Many people perpetuate rape culture without realizing it. For example, the practice of teaching how not to be raped versus how not to rape. This perpetuates rape because while it may be helpful to know how not to be raped, that is being reactive instead of slowly starting to stop rape. In addition, victim blaming perpetuates rape as well. The victim is never at fault for being raped. Asking “what were they wearing when they were raped” is putting the victim at fault (Marshall University). When society condones rape it makes it “ok” to

sexually assault. Rape culture continues
now because we are not standing up for
change.