

# Rape Culture: Ending Victim Blaming



# Content Warning



***\*\*SASH Club Power Topics may include sensitive content that may be difficult to present and may possibly be triggering to some participants.\*\****

***You may want to seek the support of an ally during this presentation, especially if you're a survivor of sexual violence.***

# What's Ahead



- What is rape culture and how does it impact everyone, especially survivors?
- What is victim blaming and how does it contribute to rape culture?
- Why do people victim blame?
- Why we need to change rape culture and end victim blaming
- What we can do to make positive change

# What is Rape Culture?

- Widespread false beliefs embedded in society about rape that justify sexual aggression and downplay the seriousness of sexual violence
- Behaviors include but are not limited to:
  - Victim blaming
  - “Slut-shaming”
  - Sexual objectification
  - Trivializing rape
  - Not recognizing the harm sexual violence causes

**Rape culture reinforces the belief that victims are responsible for what has happened to them.**

# How Does Rape Culture Impact Survivors?



- Hurts survivors and silences many who want to share their story
- Causes others to think that trauma from the sexual assault is not severe
- Breeds a culture of **victim blaming** where survivors are believed to be responsible for what has happened to them

# How Does Rape Culture Impact Survivors?



- Causes our society to isolate survivors of sexual assault, making it less likely for them to:
  - Come forward
  - Share their story
  - Report to police or school
  - Seek support
- As a result, survivors:
  - Are further injured when they can't obtain help
  - Experience greater difficulty healing
  - Lose the opportunity to see justice for crimes committed against them

# Rape Culture: The Impact

- In their lifetime:
  - 1 in 5 women experience rape or attempted rape
  - 1 in 4 men experience some form of sexual contact violence
- Nearly 1 in 8 girls in grades 9-12 report having been raped
- 1 in 3 girls in middle school report having been forcibly “kissed, hugged, or sexually touched”
  - 1 in 10 report having been “made to do something sexual”
- People of color, LGBTQ+ people, and those with disabilities are more frequently victims of sexual violence

# Rape Culture: The Impact

- Overall, only one-third of rapes are reported to police
  - **Among students, as few as 5% of rapes are reported to police:**  
Most survivors do not even tell parents or friends
  - Why? Emotional pain/trauma, shame, fear: of not being believed – of being blamed – of retaliation – of loss of privacy – that nothing will happen
- **False reporting of sexual assault to police is very rare**
  - Multiple studies conclude only 2-8% of accusations are false, the same percentage as false reports for other felonies
  - Yet 60% of men, and 51% of women, believe that false accusations of sexual assault against men are “very common”



# Talk About It



- What signs of rape culture do you see at school, in the community, online, or in music/TV/movies?
- How do you think this might impact someone not reporting sexual violence to friends, parents, the school, or the police?
- Are you aware of examples of particular races, ethnicities, genders, or orientations being victim blamed?

# Victim Blaming: Definition

- When a victim is judged and thought responsible, even partly, for an offense committed against them
- Rape culture contributes to victim blaming in sexual offenses:
  - “They asked for it”
  - “It wasn’t really rape”
  - “They liked it”
  - “They already had sex before”
  - “She has a boyfriend so obviously she’s lying that it was rape”

# More Victim Blaming Examples

- “It’s hard to believe it was really an assault, you don’t have any bruises”
- “You weren’t screaming or crying afterward, so it must not have happened”
- “That skirt is too short, no wonder you got raped”
- “You walked through a dangerous neighborhood, what did you expect?”
- “Why didn’t she fight back? She must be lying.”
- “They were wasted – they deserved it.”
- “Girls like her, when they say no, they mean yes”
- “You outed yourself as trans on a website, no wonder you were beat up”

# Talk About It



- What other examples of victim blaming have you heard?

# Truths



- A victim often doesn't have bruises or other visible signs of physical abuse or struggle.
- Many victims enter into a state of shock and may appear like a “zombie” afterward.
- No one asks for an assault. No type of clothing worn, flirting, or being intoxicated excuses rape.
- Not fighting back or crying out for help does not equal consent:
  - A lack of "no" does not mean “yes”
  - Shock or fear often take over

# 1-Minute Video

## “Fight or Freeze: I Just Froze”

Here is a short video from Rape Crisis Scotland that challenges common misconceptions that there is a right or wrong way for people to react during or after a rape.

Download from:

[www.sashclub.org/sash-club-power-topics](http://www.sashclub.org/sash-club-power-topics)

Or stream at the SASH Club YouTube channel:

<https://youtu.be/GlaWkpTwkeU>



# Talk About It



- Have you ever frozen when something frightening happened to you?
- Beyond freezing, what are other reasons someone might not fight back?

# Why Do People Blame Victims?

1. We want to believe that the world is safe, fair, and just; that people get what they deserve
  - “Good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people”
  - This belief is challenged when we learn of someone suffering random misfortune
  - We may therefore feel the victim “deserved it”
  - We don’t want to believe “this could happen to me” as a way of coping and feeling protected



# Why Do People Blame Victims?

2. When bad things happen to other people, we tend to blame it on their personal faults or poor decisions instead of their environment
  - But if something bad happens to us, we tend to blame it on our environment
  - And if something good happens to us, we tend to credit our own personal strengths

# Why Do People Victim Blame?

3. We don't want to think we are vulnerable
  - We blame the victim so that we feel safe
  - We do not want to feel that we can lose control over our life and our bodies
  - “She was raped because she walked home alone in the dark. I would never do that, so I won't be raped.”

# Talk About It



- What other examples can you imagine for why people might blame someone for something bad that happened to them?

# Why We Need to Change Rape Culture and End Victim Blaming



- **Taking action to help change false beliefs to end victim blaming can produce:**
  - More survivors speaking up: Getting support and being supported by friends/family/professionals
  - More people believing survivors
  - More reporting of offenses: To schools and to police with more cases tried, with more just outcomes
  - Others speaking out which can educate even more people
  - Future offenses reduced

# What We Can Do to Change Rape Culture and End Victim Blaming



- Start with yourself:
  - Examine your own beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors
  - Avoid using language that blames victims
  - Do not let stereotypes shape your actions
  - Understand that some populations are more vulnerable to abuse and victim blaming

# What We Can Do to Change Rape Culture and End Victim Blaming



- Reach out to others:
  - Let survivors know that **it is not their fault**
  - Work to be a role model and ally for others
  - Speak up if others reinforce rape culture:
    - Call out rape jokes, victim-blaming speech
  - Reach out to educate others in the school and community:
    - Write an article for a blog or newspaper
    - Organize a school or community presentation
    - Organize a complete campaign with daily education, activities, and commitments from others to work against rape culture and victim blaming

# Do More



- In what other ways can you personally change to help end rape culture and victim blaming?
- What other activities for the school or community can you think of to educate others and help change the culture?

# Sources & Acknowledgments

- [University of New Hampshire Sexual Harassment & Rape Prevention Program \(SHARPP\) Webpage: Rape Culture](#)
- [The Canadian Resource Center Centre for Victims of Crime: Victim Blaming](#)
- [RAINN: Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network](#)
- [National Sexual Violence Resource Center \(NSVRC\)](#)
- [AAUW: Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School](#)
- [CDC 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Study](#)
- [Young, Amy M., et al. "Adolescents' Experiences of Sexual Assault by Peers: Prevalence and Nature of Victimization Occurring Within and Outside of School"](#)
- [The Making a Difference \(MAD\) Project](#)
- [US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics: "The Sexual Victimization of College Women"](#)
- ["Ipsos/NPR Examine Views on Sexual Harassment and Assault"](#)



# To Do Immediately if Sexually Assaulted



- Get away from the attacker to a safe place as fast as you can.
- Then call 911 or the police.
- Call a friend or family member you trust.
- You can call a crisis center or hotline to talk with a counselor.
- One 24/7 option, for all genders, is the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE (4673).
- RAINN will connect you with a rape crisis center in your area.
- Visit the Survivor Support page at [www.sashclub.org/survivor-support/](http://www.sashclub.org/survivor-support/) for more helpline options and details.

# To Do Immediately if Sexually Assaulted

- Preserve the evidence, even if you are unsure you will report.
- **Do not:**
  - Wash, comb your hair, or clean any part of your body
  - Brush your teeth
  - Change clothes, if possible, so the hospital nurse can collect evidence
  - Touch or change anything at the scene of the assault
- Seek medical attention ASAP at your nearest hospital ER:
  - You need to be examined, treated for any injuries, checked for possible sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or pregnancy, and can receive preventative medicine.
  - The nurse or doctor will collect evidence the attacker may have left behind.
- Ask hospital staff to connect you with a local rape crisis center.



# If You are Sexually Harassed

- It isn't your fault...and you can get help to make it stop.
- Reach out ASAP to a friend, school counselor or trusted adult for immediate safety & support to bring the issue to your Dean of Students, Principal, or Title IX Coordinator.
- Confidential National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673  
[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

# Feedback & Suggestions

- SASH Club welcomes your feedback and suggestions on the content of this presentation. Contact us via:
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  - Email: [info@sashclub.org](mailto:info@sashclub.org)
  - Instagram: [@sashclubs](https://www.instagram.com/sashclubs)
  - Facebook: [sashclubs](https://www.facebook.com/sashclubs)
  - Twitter: [@sashclubs](https://twitter.com/sashclubs)
- Contact an adult advisor with your questions or concerns about local issues.