

WHAT IS A RAPE CULTURE?

A SHORT GUIDE

BOLD
VOICES

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If this question makes you a little uncomfortable - that is FINE. It's a strange thing still to openly talk about rape and sexual violence.

The word 'rape' can be a scary one. It is controversial. It is at its core a word for the most horrific of acts, yet it's also thrown around casually as a threat or a joke. Add the word 'culture' and eyes start to roll...

So why do we use the term rape culture?

Well, although rape is a *consequence* of a 'rape culture', rape culture as a concept isn't purely about the specific act of rape.

Instead, rape culture includes all the ways that different forms of aggressive and violent sexual behaviour are normalised, encouraged and even admired by society.

A rape culture exists when sexual violence is condoned and normalised through societal attitudes, actions and structures.

I don't expect to have convinced you yet, but allow me to unpick this for you over the following pages...

A RAPE CULTURE EXISTS WHEN SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS CONDONED AND NORMALISED THROUGH SOCIETAL ATTITUDES, ACTIONS AND STRUCTURES

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

is any kind of unwanted sexual act or activity including...

RAPE

let's cut straight to it... the definition of rape is when a penis penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of someone without their consent.

The legal definition in the UK differs from the US where rape includes penetration with other body parts or objects (this is called 'sexual assault by penetration' in the UK)

SEXUAL ABUSE

is generally used to talk about actions towards children (under 16s).

It can include touching in a sexual way, forcing a victim to touch the perpetrator in a sexual way, making a victim look at genitalia or watch sexual activity.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

is a sexual act carried out without consent. This includes forcing or manipulating someone to watch or be a part of sexual activity.

Penetrating someone with an object or body part other than a penis, without their consent is 'sexual assault by penetration'. This carries the same sentence as rape.

Sexual assault doesn't have to involve other physical violence and doesn't always leave injuries that are visible.

(!) This is a common myth to watch out for (!)

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

includes any unwanted sexual actions (a one off or repeated incident) that leave someone feeling uncomfortable, distressed, intimidated or humiliated.

This includes:

- sexually degrading comments or gestures
- staring or leering at someone's body
- sexual jokes or propositions
- sexual content sent online
- physical behaviour, including unwanted sexual advances or touching
- displaying sexually explicit images
- offering rewards for sexual favours

Street harassment included here - catcalling, etc

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CONDONED & NORMALISED

Remember *The Notebook*? Remember the scene where Noah is dangling from the Ferris wheel saying he won't get down, despite his hands slipping from the bar, unless Allie agrees to go on a date with him...? Concealed by the smokescreen of a Hollywood romcom, a fanciable actor and a culture that tells us women only say no because they want to be persuaded otherwise, is the not-so-subtle coercion and emotional blackmail being portrayed as the ultimate romantic gesture...

what do you think? over the top analysis or accurate? let us know @bold_voices

... a casual portrayal of coercive sexual behaviour in **popular culture and the media**...

...and an extension of sexual violence into **all areas of women's lives** from the street to the nightclub to social media to the home.

High rates of sexual violence.. act as both an example of sexual violence being accepted yet also reinforce it.. a lovely cycle of normalising something horrendous

Through this cycle sexual violence comes to be accepted as a normal part of life that is so engrained we don't realise it exists or if we do, we don't think anything can be done about it.

62% of students experience sexual violence at university (Revolt Sexual Assault)

1/7 students experienced serious sexual or physical assault (Hidden Marks)

68% experienced sexual harassment around university (Hidden Marks)

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VICTIM BLAMING

41% of men aged 18–24 say a woman is totally or partly to blame for her sexual assault if she goes out late at night, wears a short skirt and gets drunk (The Fawcett Society)

ATTITUDES & ACTIONS

everyday actions and seemingly insignificant attitudes - each acting as a small seed that together creates a rape culture

CONSENT

I didn't report "because I didn't know if he was doing anything technically wrong, even though I asked him to stop over and over again" (Revolt Sexual Assault)

OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN

Rating women's bodies and comparing them

SILENCING VICTIMS

"My college pretended like it didn't happen" (Revolt Sexual Assault)

SLUT SHAMING

E.g. a practice called 'slut-dropping' where male students drive round and offer female students who "look like sluts" a lift home then leave them miles from their destinations

JOKES

Trivialising gender violence by jokes such as Jimmy Carr's "What do nine out of 10 people enjoy? Gang rape."

LAD CULTURE

Includes misogynistic banter, objectification of women and pressure/competition around sex

FALSE RAPE MYTHS

People are quick to claim that women are 'crying rape' when they speak up. Despite the fact that a man is more likely to be raped himself than falsely accused of rape. (Fact Check - Channel 4)

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JUSTICE SYSTEM THAT RESULTS IN LOW CONVICTION RATES

Prosecutions for rape in the UK were at just 37% in 2018 (Crown Prosecution Service)

STRUCTURES

legal and institutional structures that prevent change from occurring

LACK OF FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS

At the end of 2018 there were 6,355 victims on Rape Crisis waiting lists, and the wait for counselling ranged from three to 14 months (APPG)

POOR REPORTING PROCEDURES

lead to low reporting rates and victims left unsupported and isolated

Only 8% of students report experiences of sexual assault to their university (Brook)

43% of sexual assault victims who didn't report the incident said it was because they thought they would be blamed for the incident (Hidden Marks, NUS)

33% of students have no knowledge about where to seek support if they experience sexual violence. (Revolt Sexual Assault)

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Rape culture is everywhere. It's kind of overwhelming. But that's what your Bold Voices Community is here for. We've got your back.

If you made it this far... signing up to get your guide, reading all the way to end... then we take it you're one of us. You know rape culture exists, you might have witnessed it or experienced it or even taken part in it (many of us have without even meaning to). So, what now?

THE COMMUNITY

Welcome to the Bold Voices Community - yessssss.

If you've signed up to our newsletter (we'll assume you have... it's great) you'll get a regular update from us. Make sure you're following us on Instagram or Twitter or Facebook... wherever it is you hang out.

And most importantly... get involved. Chat to us, tell us what you want to know, tell us what really gets you angry, tell us what you find hard and what you want to change about the world. You can DM/tweet/email us - we'll always respond and we want to hear from you.

This community is your safe space to talk, get advice and find others with the same mission to tackle rape culture at uni.

AMBASSADORS

If you're thinking... this is great and all but I **want to do more**. Then we hear you.

So we're launching our BV Ambassador programme for students at school and uni who's role is to work with us at Bold Voices HQ and with your school or uni to raise awareness and affect change.

Our Ambassador programme is neeeaaarly ready... bear with us and watch out for updates on our newsletter and social media.