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Voices Carry: Understanding Rape Culture's Identity in Society

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Voices Carry: Understanding Rape Culture's Identity in Society

I have never been a victim of sexual assault. I will never know exactly what a person feels, experiences or acts like after this horrible violation happens to them. I write this paper because it is my promise to those who can't speak to bring awareness to this epidemic that is slowly eating us alive. Little is talked about sexual assault because our culture has made it somewhat of a taboo and if you were to speak about rape then you are literally ripping off the rose color glasses many of us are wearing. Pulling from activists and stories from the 1970s to present day, I see how rape culture has changed and transformed, adapting to the antidote. I know that I do not fight this battle alone, especially now that there have been many of us who are sick and tired of waiting for rape culture to die once and for all. This paper reviews the changes that have happened in the United States over the decades and what is being done in our society to make rape culture a thing of the past.

“There are many truths of which the full meaning cannot be realized until personal experience has brought it home.”

- John Stuart Mill

Introducing Myself

I have never been a victim of sexual assault. I will never know exactly what a person feels, experiences, or acts like after this horrible violation happens to them. I wrote this paper because I feel like it is my promise to those who can't speak to bring awareness to this epidemic that is slowly eating us alive. Little is talked about sexual assault because our culture has made it somewhat of a taboo, and if you were to speak about rape, then you are literally ripping off the rose-colored glasses many of us are wearing. If going outside the social norm is what it will take to bring awareness to this issue, then call me an outsider. I know that I do not fight this battle alone. I was influenced by Susan Brownmiller's (1975) writings about rape from her viewpoint and how she is more of an observer (like myself) because she has never experienced what so many of our peers have. Although Brownmiller writes from a different decade, both of our missions have intersecting values and goals. My research asks: How do we understand rape culture as it has evolved over time? How do we understand the circumstances around victims and survivors of sexual assault,

and how are higher education institutions handling this epidemic?

Anyone who has ever been to college knows the uniqueness of each experience that is thrown their way. Whether you identify on a whole spectrum or maybe do not even chose to identify with anything, your experiences as a new adult come hurdling towards you like an avalanche. Each experience is unique in its own special way like the friends you make, the type of clothes you wear, the car you drive, the gym you visit, the clubs you join or maybe clubs are not your thing. Despite these many opportunities, there are times in an individual's life where one's whole world is altered or changed forever. Everyone's college experience is different, and sometimes events happen, terrible and demeaning events, where we are unable to comprehend why it happened in the first place. I would say that my life is pretty average. I was 18 years old when I started my freshman year of college, I was able to make a great group of friends, and I joined several clubs. I could, however, tell you that I was a naïve young woman coming into college because I did not know about all the "hidden dangers" that a woman, like me or anyone, could face growing up. In my short time as a

college freshman, I would have known two women among my friend group to be victims of sexual assault.

High school does not give you the tools you need to understand how to deal with the topic of rape and sexual assault, especially when you are in the presence of someone who has just been a victim of sexual assault. High school does not teach to never put your drink down at a party, or make sure you travel with a group of people so you are not attacked. And they never teach you about what your options are when you or someone you care about is faced with a situation that was out of one's control. What does someone even say to a person who was the victim of rape? It is tough because you never know what to do until you are in this situation.

When a friend comes forward to tell you something that happened to him/her, what you say or how you act can either push him/her to get help or make the person internalize one's feelings and the event. It can be a maddening process when trying to help someone you care about after she or he has been raped. It is frustrating because you do not know exactly what to say to a victim. Living in a rape culture makes the circumstances around helping

someone who is a victim of sexual assault even more challenging.

Anyone who is like me would understand that getting this person help in a world that is so quick to disregard them would know that it is in the best interest of the victim that you believe them word for word.¹

I do not want my friends to be just another statistic. This makes me realize that my path is to do everything in my power to make sure that no victim of a crime as monstrous as rape ever feels alone or forgotten. In order for this to happen, we as a collective unit need to put an end to rape culture and return the stolen power to those who are victims and survivors of rape.

Terminology

The following terms are important to my thesis and help contextualize my writing.

Rape Culture:

When society normalizes sexualized violence, it accepts and creates rape culture. In more complex terms,

“[Rape Culture] is a set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and

¹ Author Note: Italicized sentences are my reflections about sexual violence as contemplated while I was writing this paper. These words are intended to provoke thought at different points of the paper as readers move through the essay.

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 (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1992, p. viii).

Sexual Assault:

The sexual exploitation, forcible penetration, or an act of sexual contact on the body of another person, male or female, without his or her consent (“sexual assault”, 2015).

Campus Community:

I define this empirically as anyone who is affected by the actions that happen on or within a college campus. This could mean students, faculty, staff, and even parents or guardians of students.

Victim blaming:

Victim blaming occurs when the victim of a crime or any wrongful act is held entirely or partially responsible for the harm that befell them (Valenti, 2013, p.2).

Consent:

A clear, unambiguous, and voluntary agreement between the participants to engage in specific sexual activity (New York State Governor’s Press Office, 2014, para. 11).

While these terms are readily available to us on the Internet or in books, society still has a lot of missing or incorrect information about sexual assault. Fisher, Cullen, & Turner (2000) report that nine out of ten victims of sexual assault will know their perpetrator (p. 17). Therefore, the concept of “the strangers in the bushes” is just a myth and the real danger is lurking within our bars, our dorms, and our campus. On a college campus, one in five women will be raped as well as one in nine men and the age group most vulnerable to sexual assault is the 18-24 range (McMahon, 2010). There are people within the United States who simply do not believe that sexual assaults are a major issue on college campuses and in communities. It is our responsibility to raise awareness and bring rape and sexual assault from out of the shadows to make it visible to all. Calling out rape culture when you see it can only help the fight go further. Whether it is a friend making a sexist joke or you overhearing something that sounds wrong, make it known to those

individuals that what they are doing or saying is not okay. If there is one thing that I have learned while being a college student, it is that talking to someone peer-to-peer is honestly one of the best ways to reach out to someone. This is how you start a cultural revolution.

Rape Culture: Why is it Still a Thing?

Rape Culture: Why is it Still a Thing? I ask myself this question all the time. You would think that after the second wave of feminism struck in the 1960s, where so many individuals fought for women's equality, we would be in a culture of respect and understanding. However, maybe I am the one wearing the rose-colored glasses. Some of you reading this might be conforming to society by believing, "I don't think that we live in a rape culture" or "I am pretty sure rape culture isn't a thing anymore." Well one of my goals for this paper is that it will persuade you otherwise and that you will begin to see the world with a more informed and realistic lens. Has anyone ever told you to always watch your drink at a party? Have you ever been told that the outfit that you are wearing might give off the wrong impression to others? Has anyone ever told you that you had to score with the ladies or guys at the bar,

and if you did not, you would not be seen as dominant? Well if you answered yes to any of these question, and believe me there are so many more I could go on to talk about, then you are living in a rape culture!

The term rape culture is prevalent in articles, books, lectures, and online, but does anyone ever think about how the idea of rape culture came to be? According to the site Feminist Whore (2009), the term "rape culture" was first created for a documentary in 1974 titled "rape culture" where it gave the audience the perspective of male-male rape and later discussed the idea of power versus gender. This documentary was first produced in 1975 but then it was later revised in 1983:

This was the first documentary to establish the relationship between rape and our culture's sexual fantasies. The film shows the connections between violence and "normal" patterns of behavior. The film also attempts to expand our society's narrow and sexist concept of rape to its real and accurate limits. The notion that rape is an isolated sexual perversion, the product of an individual's deranged mind, is dispelled in this film (para 6).

The directors of this documentary, Mary Daly and Emily Culpepper, additionally examined sexism within

films, music, and advertising, and they analyzed how these outlets potentially lead to violence against women. This documentary was the first source to coin the term “rape culture,” which gave it the definition that society was looking for and needed (Feminist Whore, 2009, para 4).

Back in the Day....

Time traveling back to the 1970s, we see a whole new feminist movement pop up. This is known as the second wave of feminism where feminist activists fought for sexual liberation and equality. Within the decade that Susan Brownmiller (1975) authored *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, an estimated twenty-six million individuals were victims of forcible rape (FBI crime statistics, 2014). The monumental things that feminism was doing at this time was expanding our knowledge of what we know about rape and how rape is not just about sex, rape is about power and control. Life in the 1970s was changing quickly and women were not going to stand by and watch their potential to make a change in society go out the window.

Brownmiller (1975) was a pioneer of her time because she ripped off the rose-colored glasses in an effort to make people see what was really

happening in our culture around sexual violence. In her book *Against Our Will*, Brownmiller (1975) clearly states how a rapist uses society as a weapon against the victim:

“She was asking for it” is the classic way a rapist shifts the burden of blame from himself to his victim. The popularity of the belief that a woman seduces or “cock-teases” a man into rape or precipitates a rape by incautious behavior, is part of the smoke screen that men throw up to obscure their action. The insecurity of women runs so deep that many, possibly most, rape victims agonize afterward in an effort to uncover what it was in their behavior, their manner, their dress that triggered this awful act against them (p 312).

Brownmiller wrote about rape in a time where the idea of rape was becoming less of a taboo and more of something that happens in our society. At the time of Brownmiller’s early writings, we understood power as men having all the control. In a controversial appeal on how to understand why men rape, Brownmiller (1975) wrote about Jane Goodall and the Chimpanzees:

Jane Goodall, studying her wild chimpanzees at the Gombe Stream reserve, noted that the chimps, male and female, were “very promiscuous,

but this does not mean that every female will accept every male that courts her.” She recorded her observations of one female in heat, who showed the telltale pink swelling of her genital area, who nevertheless displayed an aversion to one particular male who pursued her. “Though he once shook her out of the tree in which she had sought refuge, we never saw him actually ‘rape’ her,” Goodall wrote, adding, however, “Nonetheless, quite often he managed to get his way through dogged persistence.” Another student of animal behavior, Leonard Williams, has stated categorically, “The male monkey cannot in fact mate with the female without her invitation and willingness to cooperate. In monkey society there is no such thing as rape, prostitution, or even passive consent (p 13).

Although Brownmiller writes with power and influence, the above quote implies that all men have this primal need to reproduce and that they cannot control themselves when they see a woman in “heat.” This critique is important because both men and women can be victims of sexual assault. The paragraph implies that only heterosexual man on woman rape is true rape. This is never the case; anyone can be a victim of rape and sexual assault no matter what category of

identity a person occupies. Susan Brownmiller’s book *Against Our Will*, furthered the notion that rape culture is prevalent in our homes, schools and community. She writes this as a reflection of what our society has become.

When Susan Brownmiller released her research, she revealed to the world the ‘dark side of the moon.’ Writing about rape culture from her outlook brought on a lot of criticism from a variety of people, each with their own perspective on how rape culture is really integrated into our culture. Edward Shorter is a historian who critiqued Brownmiller’s groundbreaking book. Shorter’s (1977) essay “On Writing the History of Rape” argues against Brownmiller’s claim that “rape amounts to ‘a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a constant state of fear” (p. 13). The critique he makes is that not all men have an instinct to rape and not all women are living in constant fear. Another critique he makes of Brownmiller is her belief that all rapes are political (Shorter, 1977). Although Shorter criticizes Brownmiller’s work, he also praises her contributions bringing rape culture to mainstream discussion. Shorter does agree with Brownmiller that some aspects of rape have an undertone of politics in it, but

he wonders if all rapes that Brownmiller recorded were political in nature:

Short of falling into slavery, these women could scarcely have been more victimized by the male-controlled social, economic, and political systems in which they found themselves (Shorter, p. 476).

A Different World

Christine Helliwell's *It's Only a Penis* (2000) goes into the understanding of rape within another culture far different from our own. While Helliwell was studying the Dayak culture, a situation arose where a woman was almost the victim of rape. What Helliwell noticed about the ensuing events was far different from our own culture:

Thinking to obtain information about local women's responses to rape, I began to question her. Had she been frightened? I asked. Of course she had- Wouldn't I feel frightened if I awoke in the dark to find an unknown person inside my mosquito net? Wouldn't I be angry? Why then, I asked, hadn't she taken the opportunity, while he was entangled in her mosquito net, to kick him hard or to hit him with one of the many wooden implements near at hand? She looked shocked. Why would she do that? She asked- after all, he hadn't hurt her. No, but he had wanted to, I replied. She looked at me with

puzzlement. Not able to find a local word for rape in my vocabulary, I scabbled to explain myself: "He was trying to have sex with you," I said, "although you didn't want to. He was trying to hurt you." She looked at me, more with pity than with puzzlement now, although both were mixed in her expression. "Tin [Christine], it's only a penis," she said. "How can a penis hurt anyone?" (p. 790).

In this article, The Dayak culture is not familiar with the word "rape" and is baffled that a penis might be used to hurt someone. This shows us that violence has social and cultural place at its root. This article ties into the idea of rape culture because it is in the argument that rape is socially produced versus an innate outcome.

Conditioning

Bringing the rape culture conversation back into more recent decades, we are still left at an impasse. We have created this environment where women are the ones who are told to "watch your drink" or "make sure you walk home in a group, especially at night." On the flip side, men are not taught to take these same precautions. Other authors, like Joseph Weinberg and Michael Biernbaum, write about rape culture, arguing:

Until now, rape has been an invisible issue for most men. Say the word rape to most women and there is a shudder, an involuntary muscular reaction or some other visceral response. Certainly not all women understand the dynamics of rape culture, but most have a strong body sense of what rape means. Mention rape to most men and there is not a comparable physical response (1993, p. 89).

What I am about to say might be strange at first but just hear me out. Maybe we as a society have put men into this space where rape should not affect or even happen to them. I know for a fact that we need to bring men back into the conversation because it is hurting them just as much as it is hurting us. Living in the 21st century gives us privilege to understand that it is not just heterosexual women who are victims of sexual assault. It can be anyone. Men, women, straight, gay, lesbian, queer, regardless of identity, everyone must face this problem head on if we are to truly make any form of change.

Rape culture affects everyone; men, women, straight, LGBTQ, all ethnicities. “Most women and girls limit their behavior because of the existence of rape. Most women and girls live in fear of rape. Men, in general, do not”

(“Rape Culture, para 1, n.d.). Living in the 21st century brings so much more pressures on men to dominate women, who are seen as weak and easily manipulated. It has taken many scholars and activists, which I will discuss later in my paper, to bring to light this epidemic. Rape victims can come from different spaces among the spectrum of identity. They do not have to be heterosexual or white and they can come from any social-economic status. Individuals who identify with the LGBTQ community have greater risks when it comes to rape and sexual violence. According to a 2010 report from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (Walters, Chen & Breiding, 2013), one in eight lesbian women and nearly half of bisexual women will be victims of rape in their lifetime (p. 10). Four in ten gay men and nearly half of bisexual men will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime (p. 11). For bisexual women it has been reported that 46 percent have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime (p. 1).

The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) states that “while 80 percent of all reported rapes are against white women, minorities are more likely to be assaulted” (as cited in “Sexualized Violence Statistics”, n.d.). The rate of

rape or a violent sexual act among blacks is around 18.8 percent and 6.8 percent for Asian/ Pacific Islander. “The statistics for non-whites are probably low since barriers to reporting would be increased for women of color” (RAINN as cited in Humboldt State University, n.d.). “Most women and girls limit their behavior because of the existence of rape. Most women and girls live in fear of rape. Men, in general, do not” (“Rape Culture, para 1, n.d.).

History Repeats Itself

It would be an obscene comment to make, suggesting that absolutely nothing has changed in our culture to make rape and sexual assault more visible to everyone.

Several recent rape cases on college campuses show how much work there needs to be done and what improvements we as a society need to make to rectify harmful behaviors that fester inside a rape culture. Whether their stories took place in the 1970s or today, the following individuals tell their experiences as survivors in hopes that it will change the rape culture under which we still live.

Katherine Mckee was in a Michigan hotel room when she was raped by someone she considered her friend. Her

rape took place in the 1970s (Dillon, 2014). Mckee was an actress and a former Las Vegas showgirl riding along on tour buses with her boyfriend and always hanging out with his crew, of which her rapist was a part. He lured her into his hotel room that night by asking her if she would mind getting him some barbeque from a place down the road and then bringing it to him. He was stalking her like prey, ready to pounce on her as soon as she opened the door. “I remember I walked in the door, and he had a robe and cap on. He took the ribs from my hands and just grabbed me” (Dillon, para. 9, 2014). After this event, McKee never spoke a word to anyone about what happened, not even her boyfriend. Why you may ask? The reason why she never spoke a word about this to anyone was because her rapist was Bill Cosby. He had too much power in the public eye. Why would anyone believe the girlfriend of a musician over the man America idolizes so much? Now that she has come out with her story, many other victims have surfaced as well, however some of these cases happened decades ago and cannot legally progress further. McKee’s thoughts on Bill Cosby after the rape happened capture the frequent imbalance in power between victims and their abusers: “I chalked it up to

another powerful person in Hollywood who just felt he could take what he wanted from women” (para. 21).

Emma Sulkowicz, a student at Columbia University, used her senior thesis project as a public outlet to make visible her rape accusations and the way she experienced her college’s response. In her project, Emma carries her mattress that she was sexually assaulted on around the Columbia University campus in order to get the justice she deserves. Emma’s story details a rape that took place in 2012 and describes her school’s slow crawl in doing anything about her complaint (Culp-Ressler, 2014). Both Emma and her rapist still resided on campus and her case argues that Columbia University did nothing to remove her rapist from campus or try to help her in anyway. According to Culp-Ressler, the university mishandled her case, almost like they wanted this case, and potentially other cases like it, swept way under the rug. The events after Emma’s rape only pushed her further, and it took her activism to new lengths. By carrying her mattress around as a symbol for the injustice victims face, she unintentionally sparked an international conversation about college rape and sexual assault. Carrying around her mattress produced support

from within her college community and together they organized an event called “collective carries” where community members helped lift the mattress to show support to Emma and survivors everywhere (Culp-Ressler, 2014).

Emma Sulkowicz carried around this mattress not just for herself, but for all victims and survivors of sexual assault who are voiceless as well as all those who do not get the chance to speak up and let their voices be heard. She speaks about her rape now because she knows that what she is saying will only help those who have been a victim, such as the many women who have now come forward as victims of Bill Cosby, and to know that they are not alone. It is a crime against them and it is a crime against our society when we let this disregard for humanity fall through the cracks. No matter what decade we come from, a rape victim deserves the rights that all of us have. Just because someone was raped doesn’t make the person less of a person. These two cases alone show how much of a struggle it is to come forward, but it is a stepping stone for those who want to fight this brutality towards our peers.

Gender-based Violence: What We Know

The truth about the present is the increasing number of sexual assault cases across the United States, particularly in higher education settings. College campuses across the United States have reported over 5,000 sexual assault cases, but the reality is approximately 6 times that (Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2000).

Fisher, Cullen, & Turner reported that nine out of ten victims of sexual assault will know their perpetrator (2000). Therefore, the concept of “the strangers in the bushes” is just a myth and the real danger is lurking within our bars, our dorms, and our campus. On a college campus, one in five women will be raped as well as one in nine men and the age group most vulnerable to sexual assault is the 18-24 range (McMahon, 2010). On college campuses the ones who are most vulnerable to this type of assault are freshman and sophomores. This group is at a greater risk for victimization rather than juniors and seniors because of how they are seen as “easy targets.” It’s inconceivable to think that we put blame on these students who are coming to college for the first time, trying to figure out who they are, and just because they do not know what hidden dangers lurk around each corner, they are left to be victimized. Every two minutes there is

someone in America who is raped (Burnett, 2009).

Burnett’s 2009 study revealed that, “In NCAA Division I schools, more male athletes are reported to the judicial boards for sexual assault than any other students” (p. 466). The male athlete population fosters rape culture because sports are sex segregated and male athletes are put on such a high pedestal. Their aggression is seen as a good thing and they basically get rewarded for being aggressive and violent. “Most men don’t think of themselves as assailants. But their T-shirts, jokes and comments perpetuate the culture in which the minority can commit assaults with minimal risk” (Cook, 2012, p. 16).

I am not the first person nor am I in the first college organization that has thought of measures to keep our campus safe by using proactive measures. Kristen Bain (2002) writes about her experiences during college while trying to take preventable measures in ending rape on her campus. Bain states she was denied a permit to sell pepper spray because the administration thought that girls could use it in a “vengeful manner” (p. 26). The administration also informed Bain that giving a woman on campus a way to defend herself made her too great of a liability. This is wrong. Although this

article was written in 2002 when our country was fighting the war on terror, Bain makes the point that “not only is rape a barbaric crime of power and hate, it is the most effective method of perpetuating the patriarchal system” (p.26). Rape terrorizes and intimidates a victim. The way our society handles cases just silences and makes victims feel shame for something that they did not do. This perpetuates rape culture.

Gender-Based Violence: Sociocultural

When Levy wrote *Women and Violence* (2008), she pulled from different spaces where women are often faced with violence. Levy reveals how society has put women in a dangerous space that is swarmed with ideologies that accept men’s violence towards women. *Women and Violence* analyzes data from all over the world and looks at how different forms of oppression are being used to manipulate victims into submission. This book helps reveal all the pain, subliminal ideology and rape culture that societies are going through.

Sociocultural theories explain violence against women as stemming from social structures or cultural conditions. Advocates of these theories say that men abuse women ‘because they can.’ They mean that in our society men

who are inclined to abuse women for any number of personal reasons find it easy to justify it and get away with it without being punished or stopped (Levy, p. 20).

Our own culture has been living with gender based violence for far too long. Violence against women only rationalizes rape culture and makes it hard to pull our culture out of the hole we are digging. The theory explains how violence towards women is often glorified and makes society think that it is justifiably acceptable.

Feminist author Jessica Valenti has become a well-known activist who speaks about rape culture. In *Yes Means Yes* (2008), Valenti looks at how women’s sexuality inevitability reinforces rape culture in our society. Several examples that she writes about establishes that rape culture has fully integrated itself into our culture. From gang rapes to purity balls, Valenti makes the argument that “sexualizing girls is not just about beauty standards, it’s also about reinforcing traditional gender roles and the purity norm” (p. 302). Valenti further argues:

Battling the myth is just one step in dismantling rape culture, of course. But if, as activist, writers, and people who care about ending violence against women, we can start to understand and

talk about the way expectations about women's sexuality play into a culture that condones rape, we'll have that much more ammunition for the fight ahead (p. 303).

Within our culture this is completely accurate. Whether we see it or not, there have been many challenges to society trying to change our way of life. The bigots that run society are the ones who need to be taken down in order to change our rape culture into a culture of respect.

Sixty-seven

As an undergraduate attending college, one of my concerns for myself and potential students and their families is how safe a campus is and what a campus does in order to protect its students. The Clery Act of 1992 makes it so colleges are legally obligated to inform students as well as a campus community about any crime that takes place on the campus. Jeanne Clery was a rape and murder victim in 1986 at Lehigh University (Clery Center, 2012). After Jeanne's death, her parents made it their mission to make college campuses all around the United States have a formal and mandated reporting system for all crimes that happen on campus. When the Clery Act took effect, it meant that all colleges had to

disclose their security policies, make their crime log public, warn all students and employees on campus about immediate threats, and help ensure rights for victims of campus sexual assaults (Clery Center, 2012). This legislation is important when living in a rape culture, because it lights the match underneath colleges all over the United States in order to further progress our rights as citizens.

Prior to the Clery Act, one of the most vital regulations that has ever come out of the U.S Department of Education is Title IX. Title IX was created in 1972 and it states,

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance (Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972).

Not only does this bill help with athletics and a woman's right to an education, it also helps with sexual harassment. Under Title IX all colleges are required to:

...define sex discrimination (including sexual violence) and publish a policy stating that the school does not discriminate on the basis of sex, have and distribute procedures for students

to file complaints when sexual harassment, discrimination, or violence takes place, appoint a Title IX coordinator to oversee these activities, review complaints, and deal with patterns or systemic problems (even when there are no formal complaints) and distribute the Title IX coordinator's name to students (Lam, n.d., para 8).

Those who took a stand for what is right have helped shape this future and strived to give us hope. If it was not for those who aided in the fight to get legislation like Title IX and The Clery Act, our lives could be very different. As of March 2015, there have been sixty-seven universities that are under federal investigations under Title IX compliance mandates. This means that there are sixty-seven schools that we can change to establish better support for victims and all those who are affected by rape. Those with the rose-colored glasses off need to seize this opportunity to change the culture surrounding rape and it can and will start here.

Rape Culture: Personal Experience

As someone who knows what rape culture means to society, it gives me a special privilege to look at the work to fight rape culture through an informed lens. However, when certain situations

happen, I do not need my privilege to see how messed up a situation is becoming, and it just shows me how much more work there needs to be done to eradicate gender-based violence.

In the second year of my undergraduate experience, I was fortunate enough to be a part of the team that brought Jackson Katz to our campus. Jackson Katz is one of America's leading anti-sexist male activists. As an educator, author, filmmaker, and cultural theorist, he is internationally recognized for his groundbreaking work in the field of gender violence prevention education and critical media literacy ("Jackson Katz: Brief Biography", 2015). Being a sophomore who was part of the group that was able to bring him to campus made me feel that the work I was doing in educating our campus about rape culture was really working. Katz is an internationally known educator and scholar who fights for gender equality, and he was going to speak to my peers on my own campus about rape culture and how we can take it down. So, imagine my disappointment when many of the athletes attending the lecture behaved in vulgar and obscene ways by making rape jokes while Katz was speaking, and during and after the

lecture, sending out more offensive comments about rape and sexual assault over YikYak. It was one of the worst representations of our campus community that I have ever seen. The way that our school was presented that evening proved that rape culture still exists and it is more of a danger to our campus community than anything else. It made me so angry to see that a majority of our student athletes were rude, obnoxious, and represented The College at Brockport in such a negative light. This experience exemplifies how much work still needs to be done in order to end rape culture.

Arsenal: Politicians

Two major allies who have joined the crusade when striving to end sexual assault on college campuses are Andrew Cuomo and Kirsten Gillibrand. Both of these individuals are New York politicians and together they have put the issue of campus sexual assault on the legislative map.

New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo's "Enough is Enough" campaign helps create a uniform sexual assault policy on college campuses across New York State. According to the campaign, "specially trained members will be on call twenty-four hours a day to respond to sexual assault

cases, ...[and] State Police will also develop response protocols and training courses to share with campus partners" (Shaohui, 2015, para. 7). This legislation would be established in both public and private schools and will guarantee that 1.2 million students are protected.

United States Senator Kirsten Gillibrand has put her name on the Campus Accountability and Safety Act (2015). This act will create incentives to protect students based on how sexual assaults are reported and handled by college administrators. I recently had the privilege to sit down with Senator Gillibrand along with Title IX coordinators across the Rochester area and we discussed the Campus Accountability and Safety Act. This bill's intention is to establish new campus resources for student survivors, enacting minimum training standards for all who come into contact with a victim. This act will help get a better understanding of the campus climate with campus wide surveys. The act also ensures that all schools provide a uniform process in regards to student disciplinary hearings and will help enforce Title IX and the Clery Act compliance mandates. Colleges and universities that do not abide by this bill will be forced to pay heavier fines (Gillibrand, 2015).

Arsenal: The College at Brockport

Our campus has made strides when trying to combat rape culture on campus. From my own personal experience there have been clubs and organizations that get the bigger picture. Places like the Women's Center, the Counseling Center and The Center for Select Respect are safe places for all students, no matter where one comes from. Within The Center for Select Respect, a Restore representative is there to help assist with programing and educational components. The Women and Gender Studies program, Women and Gender Studies Organization (WGSO), Voices for Choice (VOX) and Sexual Orientations United for Liberation (SOUL) each play an important role in conversations to end gender-based violence and rape on college campuses as well as help create an inclusive environment for everyone.

Here on Brockport's campus we have movements like One Billion Rising, Clothesline Project, and Take Back the Night to help support victims of rape. For the past three years, One Billion Rising has been put on by the Women and Gender Studies Program in collaboration with Dance Studies. It is a dance of awareness for those who are victims of domestic violence. The

Clothesline Project takes t-shirts made by those who are victims of sexual assault or those who support victims and puts them on display for the college community. Take Back the Night is a rally that happens around the campus where marchers walk to raise awareness about campus sexual assault and rape.

Keep Moving Forward

How can we stop an epidemic from infecting our college campuses? This question is by far one of the hardest to answer. How do we continue to bring awareness to this silent but prevalent danger that lurks "unseen" in all college campuses around the United States? Kurt Cobain (1991), yes that's Kurt Cobain from Nirvana, is quoted:

Rape is one of the most terrible crimes on earth. And it happens every few minutes...The problem with groups who deal with rape is that they try to educate women about how to defend themselves. What really needs to be done is teaching men not to rape. Go to the source and start there (cited in Hobbs, 1991, para 22).

In my opinion, the best way to end sexual assaults on a college campus is by using proactive instead of reactive measures. Making the topic of sexual assault known to everyone and starting the conversation about the dangers of

unwanted sexual interaction that are on a college campus would benefit everyone. Rape culture is prevalent and in the forefront of perpetuating the acts of sexual assault. If colleges were to put an end to the demeaning and belittling words or phrases that are so rampant within our culture, we could see some real changes in our campus culture and create an environment that is suitable for everyone to live in.

Teaching about rape culture is never easy, especially if the people you are teaching do not see anything wrong with what our culture has become. With proactive measures, the most successful approach to educate classmates about sexual assault is on a peer-to-peer level. Trying to understand the background people come from will help in this fight because we can almost cater the needs of each individual when we know how they approach situations in life. It is important also to get an understanding of ways students interpret rape, sexual assault, and consent. Flood a college campus with flyers or anything that is appealing to the eyes to get people to look at the facts.

April has been established as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Colleges all across the United States come together in April for solidarity with victims of sexual assault. In the end *education* is

our biggest ally when trying to break down rape culture and establish a benign place for victims to feel encouraged and safe in their time of need.

Momentum

Looking at where we came from to where we are now, a lot has changed. Brownmiller's work on rape culture explored where few wanted to go. Once seen as a topic from 'the dark side of the moon,' Brownmiller (1975) explored everything that our culture has cast out and with that, she helped push the social movement to end rape culture. Looking forward to the 21st century, there is still a lot of work to be done, but we as a culture are taking a stand to end rape culture. Key events through the decades have put us into a space where we will not be silenced anymore.

What do we do now? Despite the progress that we have supposedly made, what is being done? During this paper I have given ideas, resources, thoughts, and changes that many of us have seen over the decades when it comes to rape culture. Our culture is changing and today we are not limited to speaking out about the things that affect our daily lives. My writing seeks to remove the rose-colored glasses off a person's face

and expose sexual assault. I believe that it is our generation's duty to establish and incorporate ways that we can help victims and make college campuses a safer place for all. What happened to my friends was inexcusable and this is a personal battle cry to change our culture and fix the system that is so broken.

There should be no more victim blaming, no more siding with a rapist, and no more obstacles that make it hard for victims and survivors to come forward and talk about rape and sexual assault. If we are truly to change the culture, we as individuals need to rise up, come together, and take back what is ours. Our voice. Voices carry.

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