

# **A Culture of Violence & Rape: how the normalization of rape perpetuates inequality and injustice**

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Voices Against Violence Project Blog:

[http://voicesagainstviolenceproject.com/2012/04/28/a-culture-of-violence-rape-how-the-normalization-of-rape-perpetuates-inequality-and-injustice/?goback=%2Egde\\_43780\\_member\\_112327483](http://voicesagainstviolenceproject.com/2012/04/28/a-culture-of-violence-rape-how-the-normalization-of-rape-perpetuates-inequality-and-injustice/?goback=%2Egde_43780_member_112327483)

Desensitization surrounding rape and sexual abuse seems to continuously invade our lives – it’s in the TV shows and movies we watch, in the songs we listen to and it’s even woven into every day speech as if it weren’t a horrifying crime that affects millions of women and men in the U.S. alone. While some may think that a rape joke is harmless or a TV show graphically depicting a sexual assault is just interesting television, the prevalence and normalization of sexual violence in our daily lives has very serious consequences. Namely, it furthers the perpetuation of a culture of violence and rape in which the sexual objectification and dominance of women is just the norm.

This so-called “rape culture” creates an unhealthy and warped reality that communicates to our children, ourselves and even to perpetrators of sexual violence that we don’t take these crimes seriously and even in some cases, we condone it.

When we use rape as a casual term in everyday language (for example, to express something has gone poorly – “man, our project proposal totally got raped in that meeting”), we are equating rape to an mildly unpleasant event or a hard day.

When we see rape themes or violent scenes in our entertainment (so that by age 18, children will have seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence on TV – and that is from a study conducted in 1998), we are consenting that sexual violence is a normal part of life - a part of life to watch without reaction or disgust, a part of life that our kids learn about in the shows they watch or the video games they play.

When we see explicit ads that depict male dominance and sexual violence supposedly meant to be sexy or even funny, we are saying that rape and force are sexy, glamorous and somehow central to our marketing themes.

When we make light of rape and sexual violence, we reveal that we are insensitive to horrific and violating crimes that affect someone every 2 minutes in the U.S. We separate ourselves from an incredibly traumatic type of violence that is also very common – 1 in 6 women in the U.S. (and 1 in 33 men) have experienced rape and 1 in 4 girls (1 in 6 boys) have experienced sexual abuse by the age of 18.

This normalization, along with long-standing gender stereotypes and discrimination, perpetuates myths and misconceptions that lead normal people to trivialize rape and blame victims. So much so that we rarely see a jury of 12 U.S. citizens convict an alleged rapist, as 97% of them do not

spend a day in jail. But, why in the world would everyday people not want to see justice done and a rapist in jail, especially so they couldn't perpetrate further violence?

If justice were simply about justice, we would not have to ask this question. Unfortunately, justice also entails individual prejudices from jurors, judges and sometimes even prosecutors as well as pointed antagonism from defense attorney's intent on blaming the victim, not seeking justice. When juries deliberate about a rape conviction or when normal people see news stories about rape and sexual assault, they inevitably ask the inappropriate victim-blaming questions of "why was she alone with him?"; "what was she wearing?"; "what did she do to provoke him?", etc. The misconception that these factors should come into consideration of a rapist's guilt only serve to further injustice and silence future survivors who hope to speak out against their attackers and abusers.

April is Sexual Assault as well as Child Abuse Awareness Month. This month shines a light on issues that most people would prefer to pretend don't happen, on issues we'd rather joke about or distance ourselves from by making them something more casual. However, the campaign slogan for 2012 Sexual Assault Awareness Month is "It's time to talk about it" and if we're ever going to live in a world without sexual violence, it is time to talk about rape and sexual abuse as just what it is and what it isn't:

**Rape isn't a joke | Rape is a horrible crime.**

Rape isn't appropriate to use in everyday speech | Rape is serious and the word shouldn't be normalized to the point where it isn't seen for what it really is.

Rape isn't somehow exciting, glamorous or something to use to sell products | Rape is traumatic, terrifying and inappropriate to be used as a marketing tool.

Rape isn't the victim's fault because of where she was, how she dressed, what substances she might have used, or what she said | Rape is only the fault of the perpetrator, the person who is willing to commit a sex offense.

Rape is not an inevitable byproduct of life, conflict or war | Rape can be stopped, but only if we talk about it, educate ourselves and our communities and stand with victims and survivors to put perpetrators behind bars.