

The Cuddle with a Struggle: Rape Culture on College Campuses

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The night of October 19, 2013, excitement was high. It was Homecoming Weekend for Baylor University and the Bears had just beaten Iowa State 71-7 (Luther and Solomon). Sam Ukwuachu, who was ineligible due to NCAA rules regarding transfer students, was celebrating along with an 18-year-old soccer student, who court documents refer to as Jane Doe. The two were friendly, so when Ukwuachu texted Doe, she called him moments later and agreed to go with him to get something to eat or to go to another party. However, after he picked her up that night, he turned the wrong way out of her apartment complex and drove her to his apartment instead (Luther and Solomon). Doe, believing she was with a friend, went up to his apartment with him. She described Ukwuachu as extremely agitated and claimed she resisted his initial advances. Unfortunately, it did not end there; he began to grab her. She testified: "He was using all of his strength to pull up my dress and do stuff to me. He had me on my stomach on the bed, and he was on top of me" (qtd in. Luther and Solomon). She had to describe to a judge and a jury how he pulled her dress up, pulled her underwear to the side, and forced her legs open, her head pressed between his bed and his desk, and then forced himself inside of her (Luther and Solomon).

According to her testimony, after he finished, he told her "This isn't rape," despite her screaming and vehement "No's," and asked her if she was going to call the police (Luther and Solomon). The next day, Doe went to the hospital and was subjected to a rape kit, which found vaginal injuries including redness, bleeding, and friction injuries (Luther and Solomon).

In August 2014, Baylor defensive coordinator Phil Bennett told reporters Ukwuachu had "some issues" to deal with and "will not practice for a while" (qtd. in Rajan). The coach also allowed him to continue to do conditioning work with the team two months after he was indicted in June 2014. During a speech in Fort Worth in June 2015, Bennett said, "We expect him to be eligible in July," despite being on trial (Rajan). Nothing was said about the victim's ability to continue playing soccer. During the trial, it became known that the victim's scholarship value had been reduced in the

wake of the events. Nonetheless, Ukwuachu remained on full scholarship, and was close to playing, as reported by his coach. Finally, Ukwuachu was sentenced to only 180 days in county jail and 10 years of felony probation.

This is just one case among many. Around 23% of female undergraduate students experience sexual assault on college campuses (US Department of Justice). Let that sink in for a moment; if a girl is in a group of four or five female friends there is a high probability that at least one of them will experience sexual assault. This is *not* news; this statistic has been brought up in nearly every discussion of college rape for the last five decades. Worse still, The US Department of Justice also reported that only about 10% of these cases report the rape to authorities. Putting that into perspective, the average influx of female undergraduate students in a public US college, according to The Digest of Education Statistics in 2010, is 7,868,803. About 1,809,824 of these women will experience rape or some form of sexual assault while on campus but only 181,000 of these survivors report it in some way. Why do such a high number of sexual assault victims stay quiet?

Laura Dunn, student from University of Wisconsin, says she stayed quiet about what happened at the end of her freshman year at the University of Wisconsin, "I always thought that rape was when someone got attacked by a stranger and you had to fight back," she says (qtd. in Shapiro). She knew and trusted the two men who took her back to a house for what she thought was a quick stop. Instead, she says they raped her as she passed in and out of consciousness (Shapiro).

On a university campus, there is one kind of sexual assault that is more common than the others: Acquaintance Rape. Out of all the women raped, 80% are raped by someone they know: a classmate, a co-worker, a teacher, a friend, and this is the main reason for such a low percentage of reported rapes (United States). Because these cases tend to be acquaintance rape cases, another reason girls do not file a report is in fear of retaliation, in fear of "Rape Culture." The sad reality is that rape survivors often get treated worse than their rapists. There are four significant groups of people who hurt survivors in different ways: The campus as a community, including faculty, teachers and other students; the authorities; the rapist and his friends; and, painfully, the survivor's own friends.

Many survivors are victims of incapacitated assault. Meaning, they are sexually abused while drugged, drunk, passed out, or otherwise incapacitated. Instead of making it easier to determine if penetrating or partaking in sexual intercourse with an unconscious or incoherent woman is rape, it means that her credibility is shot. If a woman reports her assault to her school, before even contacting the authorities, they will ask her a series of questions—Were you drinking? Have you had sex with him before? How were you dressed? Did you say no at any time? —before deciding whether to act. Most universities see it in their best interests to sweep cases of rape under the rug. Colleges do not want that kind of publicity nor those ratings. Corey Rayburn Yung, JD, a law professor at the University of Kansas, analyzed the numbers of on-campus sexual assaults reported by 31 large universities and colleges during audits by the U.S. Department of Education for compliance with federal crime reporting requirements; he found evidence that some schools provided a more accurate picture of sexual assaults on campus only when they were under federal scrutiny (APA). He concluded that, "Many universities continue to view rape and sexual assault as a public relations issue rather than a safety issue. They don't want to be seen as a school with really high sexual assault numbers, and they don't want to go out of their way to report that information to students or the media" (qtd. in APA). Therefore, they will offer the victim money, send them to counseling or, in extreme cases, expel them. The ugly truth of the matter is that, in most cases, the reputation of the colleges and the men who assaulted the women are seen by the campus communities as more important than the actual assault. The university may explain it away with phrases such as: She should have known what would happen if she walked home alone, or she did not say no, or he is such a good student/star athlete and has true potential. They may want their varsity athletes to reach this "potential" and/or their biggest donors to feel comfortable." They want controversial statements, such as "I was raped" to disappear. That is the what we can infer they were trying to do when they reduced Doe's scholarship, from the Baylor case, adding to the stress she was already feeling (Luther and Solomon).

However, if the survivor is lucky, the official authorities will be brought in. These experts will cross-examine survivors as though they are criminals. Take the Brock Turner case as an example. To his victim and to the passerby who detained the assailant, the fact that there had been a

sexual assault was clear, but then, at the trial, she was forced to answer questions from prosecutors such as:

Did you drink with dinner? No, not even water? When did you drink? How much did you drink? What container did you drink out of? Who gave you the drink? How much do you usually drink? Who dropped you off at this party? What were you wearing? Why were you going to this party? Are you sure you did that? When did you urinate? Where did you urinate? Did you drink in college? You said you were a party animal? How many times did you black out? Did you party at frats? Are you serious with your boyfriend? Are you sexually active with him? Do you have a history of cheating? Do you remember what time you woke up? (Baker)

They asked about when she “woke up,” which indicates that they knew that during the attack she was unconscious, or at least incoherent and nearly unconscious. They were looking for any small detail that might slander her reputation and prove Brock Turner, somehow, innocent. Of the reported rapes and sexual assaults, like the example used above, only 8 percent to 37 percent ever lead to prosecution and just 3 percent to 18 percent of rapes and sexual assaults lead to a conviction (United States).

By now, news of her rape is public. It is circulating within all the inner circles on campus and on social media. Some people will call her out in person, saying things like “You cost us the game!” because her rapist is a star athlete, or other slurs like “slut and whore;” she’ll be told she was asking for it. Somehow, wearing a short skirt and a tank top, or tight jeans and a crop top, or any kind of revealing clothing, makes it her fault because “men have natural biological urges and can’t control themselves” (Turner). Dancing to a beat, drinking a beer, partying, even walking home alone are all signs that she “wanted it”. There are chants on campus, “No means yes, yes means Anal!” (a chant used by Delta Kappa Epsilon at Yale), or “We love a Cuddle with a Struggle!” that make her want to curl into herself and disappear. “Jokes” are posted online, such as “Oh you don’t want sex? Challenge accepted,” and even “I’ve got a dick and a knife, at least one of them is going inside of you tonight.” It is infinitely worse when this kind of criticism and doubt comes from those near and dear to her. When her “girlfriends” say things like “But he is kind of cute,” or “you shouldn’t have separated from the group.” When her guy friends ask what might happen

to her rapist, and when she responds with expulsion or possible jail time, they say “poor guy.”

It is words and actions like these that prove without a doubt that Rape Culture is alive and well in our lives; it is in rape culture that perpetrators like Turner and Ukwuachu have a future, but their victims only have a past. It should not matter how much we drank, how much we flirted, how we dressed. The first question that should be asked is “Did you ever consent to the sexual intercourse?” the second should be, “Do you think you were legally able to consent?” Arguably the worst part of this is that the girl I refer to as “her” throughout this explanation, could easily be you or me. It is the fear of having to sit through class with our rapist, after having it thrown in our face that the assault either did not happen or was our fault, after being ostracized by their friends and ours, after they *know* we snitched, that keeps our mouths shut.

Many times, when the topic of Rape Culture is brought up for discussion, it will automatically be refuted or ill-defined. Cathy Young, Russian-born American journalist, wonders at the existence of a culture that constitutes rape. In her article “The Injustice of the ‘Rape-Culture’ Theory”, she argues against the belief that boys using statements about how a game “raped” him is rape culture. She writes, “But losing a game is also called ‘getting slaughtered’, and the words ‘kill’ and ‘torture’ are routinely used in a metaphorical sense. Does that make us a ‘murder culture’ or a ‘torture culture’?” (Young). In the article, Young brings up the many definitions of rape culture that prominent men and women have come up with and tries to dismantle them. One example is political analyst, writer, and commentator Zerlina Maxwell’s assertion that “rape culture is when we teach women how to not get raped, instead of teaching men not to rape” (qtd. in Young). Young reminds us that we have a criminal code that threatens men with severe punishment if they do decide to rape, and that there is nothing to teach. This is where I believe she failed in addressing the statement as a whole; we know that men are not taught to rape, that is not in question. However, men are shown that they can be abrasive, intimidating, and that they are entitled to all that we have. This culture allows these ideas to be implemented into them with no effort to remove or correct. They learn that if they cannot control themselves then their victim must be doing something wrong. So, though they are not taught, they learn. Not to mention, women *are* taught: to be constantly

afraid, aware, covered up, and in a group. This culture is what pushed our parents to teach us these values. Rape Victims suffer through the knowledge that what they said and did and experienced will never be enough to silence the monsters they face in their day to day life.

A few days to a few weeks after the assault, victims are known to show symptoms of diminished alertness, numbness, dulled sensory, affective, and memory functions, disorganized thought content, vomiting, nausea, paralyzing anxiety, pronounced internal tremors, obsession with washing or cleaning themselves, hysteria, confusion and crying, bewilderment, and acute sensitivity to the reactions of other people (Brown et al.). They'll try to cope in assorted ways, for example: pretending "everything is fine," an inability to stop talking about the assault, refusing to discuss the rape, trying to analyze what happened and why, and sometimes even moving to a new home or city or altering their appearance (Brown et al.). Then, after already dealing with these moments of self-hatred and fear from memories alone, they are forced to face a society that firmly believes that there is a good chance the victims are liars (Brown et al.). Those who pretend everything is fine obviously made the whole thing up; those who cannot stop talking about it are just trying to convince everyone else they are not lying, so clearly, they are. Those who analyze must think it's their own fault and those who move are cowards. Can you even imagine living through this? This dismissal of torture, both physical and mental?

We know why survivors do not speak up. How can colleges reduce these numbers and help these people? I have defamed many authority and college criteria for their handling of rape cases, I have accused them of victim blaming and rape-splaining, but Congress, and many Universities are genuinely trying to change these policies. Congress has implemented the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act, a law that explicitly requires all schools to offer "primary prevention and awareness programs" that reduce the risk of sexual assault (Bishop). The idea is that all students and faculty members should be held accountable for the elimination of sexual violence on campus (Bishop). In these programs, participants learn what is defined as consent, for example, and how to recognize signs of abusive behavior. It also stipulates some minimum standards in campus judicial proceedings (for both the defendant and the accused) and mandates that institutions specify the number of dating- and sexual-violence claims filed

in their annual crime reports (Yoffe). Colleges have the Title IX, introduced in 1972, which indicates when a student experiences a hostile environment such as sexual assault or “severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive sexual harassment” (“Title IX”), schools must stop the discrimination, prevent its recurrence, and address its effects. This includes retaliation from other students, school administrators, or faculty.

As an undergraduate college student, I can assure you, I was required to be educated of my rights, of Title IX and its implications, and the university reminds me of these constantly. Title IX requires schools to combat sex discrimination in education. One of the most common objections we hear to campus adjudication is “but isn’t rape a crime?”, suggesting that the police should handle it directly. However, rape and other gender-based crimes manifest and perpetuate inequality. To make sure that all students, regardless of their gender identity and expression, have equal access to education, schools are required to prevent and respond to reports of sexual violence (Bhatnagar). The universities I have visited have all succeeded in educating its students of the dangers and consequences of sexual assault, drinking, partying, and drugs. Still, the way colleges handle sexual assault cases is very skewed. I have already mentioned that I believe that they push too many cases under the rug and make it uncomfortable for a survivor to report an assault, but the reverse is also true. There are times where a university will go too far. They forget the legal belief that an accused is innocent until proven guilty. Before any sort of trial, the accused can be banned from university housing, from eating on campus and restricted from attending any club or group events (Yoffe, 2017). There are cases proving the stress these people go through has a negative impact on their health, with good reason, having to fear the possibility of a life where they can never escape the thought of, “I did nothing wrong and they won’t ever believe me.”

The Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has expressed that she believes that the way campuses address sexual assault fails too many students. She intends to replace the department's current approach "with a workable, effective and fair system" (qtd. in McCausland). DeVos said the system needed to do more, not only for survivors of sexual assault, but to ensure fair due process for the accused. "Every survivor of sexual misconduct must be taken seriously. Every student accused of sexual misconduct must know that guilt is not predetermined," she said (qtd. in

McCausland). There are those who fear that DeVos' new guidelines on "solid" evidence will let more assaulters walk free but others look forward to a more ironclad system that lets innocent people stay in school, instead of behind bars (McCausland). The controversy has people frothing at the mouths trying to get their points across. My point here is that she's not wrong. Destroying a man's life just because someone said he assaulted them is not the goal; the goal is justice. Each case is special and requires a neutral and dedicated investigation; sometimes solid evidence is needed and other times knowing the situation is what will prove the case. Allegations are to be taken seriously, survivors are to be heard and protected, *and* the accused are to be investigated thoroughly before being punished for something they may or may not have done. It is not a hard concept to grasp, and besides, that is legally how these cases are supposed to proceed.

Nevertheless, these policies and regulations have failed in some aspects. While they have acknowledged rape, they have not acknowledged Rape Culture. Students and faculty make lewd jokes where women are drunk and then "regret" the "sex" in the morning. Fraternities plan to get girls drunk at parties for fun. Girls lightheartedly say, "I thought he was going to rape me," referring to a person they thought was creepy, and then laugh it off. Guys yell, "suck my dick," in both arguments and for laughs. Security guards will watch a guy slap a passing girl's butt or catcalling in "appreciation" and say, "Boys will be Boys." I have witnessed each and every one of these things. Not all of these happened in the same place, and not all of them were quite as serious as others. But they all terrify and disgust me to my very core.

Some communities have found ways to start combatting this culture. The most exciting is a gender-violence prevention program being implemented in schools in Kenya by the No Means No Worldwide organization. Not only do they teach girls and women self-defense but they also provide a gender-based violence curriculum for the boys. After finding out from the girls in Kenya that most rapes they experienced were by friends or boyfriends, the researchers realized that if boys were part of the problem, then perhaps they could be a solution, as well (Mnangagwa). They did a study that investigated the effects of those classes on improving their attitudes toward women and increasing the likelihood of bystander intervention. They found that boys who go through training were more

likely to intervene when witnessing a girl being assaulted, and they were less likely to verbally harass girls. Additionally, schools featuring this program found that rape by girls' friends and boyfriends dropped by 20% (No Means No Worldwide). Imagine if universities across the country implemented some sort of mandatory course along the lines of the No Means No Worldwide organization. Not only would men learn of the horrors women face daily and stop participating in initiating such things, but they are also more likely to call out someone else for doing it. How many cases of assault could have been prevented if someone stepped up?

Rape Culture supports rapists and incriminates victims. This culture, believed by many to be a myth, makes it ok to joke about the pain and humiliation every victim goes through in an attempt to be heard, in a search for justice. It lets boys get away with lewd and crude gestures and disrespecting women and the law. It fosters a community of families that lost their little girl to a haunted expression and a bottle of pills. While many think these things are harmless, unrelated, and that they do not constitute a "culture" per se, Rape Culture has an effect on the psyche of individuals.

Rape Culture across college campuses is a wildfire that no one is rushing to extinguish. From the way we are raised, to the way we act, to the places we feel safe going to, to the way we dress, all of these are directly affected by the culture around us: a culture that normalizes and excuses acts of sexual violence and assault. It is time universities acknowledge this culture and the behaviors it instills. It is time we stand up and change.

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