

Rape culture oriented feminism sociology essay



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Part of the current feminism strive is to raise awareness of what is known as rape culture. Rape culture is a socially constructed concept that depicts a culture in which sexual violence and rape are belittled, tolerated, and even justified in society. This concept is related to some specific behaviors such as women's causal role, rape stereotypes, sexual objectification, and trivialization of rape along with sexual discrimination.

Legally, rape is defined as forced sexual intercourse between a man and a woman against the woman's will (or the man's). In many states, the legal definition of rape does not include marital rape. In others terms, husbands which force their wives into sex are not punished by law, as rape is only seen as "illegitimate" sexual intercourse, i. e., the wife's exception implies that "rape is rape" if and only if the man commits the act on a woman other than his wife. This would suggest that sexual violence is not always considered as an act of rape. Even more, this implies that the law might consider sexual assaults as tolerable. For a forced sexual act to be sanctioned as rape, the man should not have conjugal rights over the woman. In other terms, the law's acceptance of a violent sexual act depends on the relationship between the victim and her rapist.

According to the feminists' rape culture theory, sexist behaviors contribute to the normalization of sexual assaults towards women. The root of rape culture is -according to the theory- the objectification and domination of women in a highly patriarchal society. Rape culture exists today because of the socially constructed image of sex as being an act of male domination over women. It is the traditional perception of how men and women are to behave which is the cause of rape being so trivialized. Men are expected to

have sexual dominance in the relationship whereas women are pictured as passive, subordinate creatures.

The contrast between men and women in the socially constructed sexual culture can be seen in dating for instance. In a date, a man is expected to buy gifts, dinner, drive the date of/from location to location and shower the woman with attention. Society has accustomed men to expect sexual rewards for their actions. The man thinks he has a right to sexual favors because of what he did on the date. This reasoning puts women as legitimate for sexual aggressions, and gives justifications for men to reason what they might do. When society produces rapists by encouraging values such as domination, anger, aggression, violence and rejecting the idea of men expressing and sharing their feelings, it fosters a rape culture.

The rapists are also victims in the sense that they are frustrated by not being able to nurture their need for love and affection through more normal, healthier ways; hence acting through violence.

Social conditioning through media holds a huge part of responsibility in rape culture oriented societies. Men and women are made to behave and think in a very specific way from a very early age through school and popular culture. Women and girls should act properly and in a “ ladylike” manner, men should be strong and unemotional. This socialization process, this distribution of roles and behaviors creates the imbalance of power between men and women, giving the floor to male domination over female subordination, and indirectly training women how to be raped, and men how to be rapists.

Some rules which train women “ how to be ladies” actually contribute to a lot of rape situations. For instance, a “ lady” should not make a scene just because she is at discomfort. During a sexual assault, wouldn’t this entitle that the woman should stay quiet, in order to preserve ladylike qualities? A “ lady” should always trust and be kind to strangers which offer to help. This rule gives rapists plenty of situations where they can trick women into thinking that they are actually willing to help them whilst having planned the rape act. Another rule claims that a “ lady” should always graciously smile when spoken to. A potential rapist might consider a woman acknowledging him with a smile as her being consenting to the situation.

Social conditioning has also led us to deem as true a set of prejudicial beliefs, called rape myths. These stereotypes provide aggressors with justifications and legitimization for their acts of sexual violence. Feminists claim that rape myths are fundamental to the patriarchal society which supports control and domination relationships. Not only do those stereotypes and lies present assaulters with excuses for their acts, but they also move the responsibility of the act away from the aggressors and lay it on the victims.

Some examples of rape myths include: “ Black men rape white women”, “ Provocative female clothing is the cause of rape”, “ it’s the victim’s fault”, “ She was asking for it”... Even more dangerous is women’s acceptance as the ones to blame for rape and the hostility some women show towards other women which were rape victims, by saying and believing in claims such as “ She provoked the rape”, “ Men are unable to control themselves”, “ rape is only perpetrated by sick men”.

The new trend nowadays, and from what I hear around me when I ask people about the causal role of women in a rape situation is to say that women should not dress in an alluring way then blame men for raping them. Society is full of sick men, and women should be prepared for this. Raped women actually “ had it coming”.

A study done in Germany where participants (students) were given a set of questions, tried to measure to which extent rape myths were accepted and it tried to study the correlation between the desire for sexual dominance and the inclination to accept rape and rape myths. The results of this study supported the feminist theory which claims that rape is much more linked to the desire for men to express their dominance and control over women than to simple sexual arousal.

There are three main theories which suggest different factors as support for the proliferation of rape culture.

The first theory, gender disparity, claims that rape is the main instrument for patriarchal societies to keep oppression and control. As discussed earlier, the imbalance of power in the relationship between men and women is a direct cause of the objectification and subordination of women versus the domination and demonstration of force of men, which encourages rapist behavior.

The second theory, cultural overflow, claims that rape myths and gender socialization are not the only causes for sexual violence, as other components of culture might serve to justify and trivialize rape. An example would be the aspects of violence in our everyday life. Violence in schools, in <https://assignbuster.com/rape-culture-oriented-feminism-sociology-essay/>

media, and in governments can be generalized or extended to relationships, thus condoning rape acts.

The third theory, social disturbance, suggests that elevated rates of rape might reflect disturbance in social lives such as divorce and relocation. A generalization of the theory would be that deviant acts in general mirror social disorganization which disturbs commonly agreed on social mores.

Although I agree with the fact that feminists have done well in raising awareness against rape in societies, and (to some extent) to how society might have contributed to the increase of rape rates through popular culture and mass media, I think there are some issues with rape culture as an entity proposed by traditional feminists.

Traditional feminists' rape culture theory mainly insists on gender imbalance as being the cause of rape proliferation in society. However, and as the Cultural Spillover theory suggest, other factors and other components might cause increase in rapes' rates.

The war in Bosnia (92-95) was infamously known for wartime rape. Many Muslim women in Bosnia were raped by Serbs at the time. Rape becomes a weapon of war in this case. It is not intentionally or (at the least solely) directed towards the individual victim, but rather used as any other tool to hurt the enemy.

The rape during the Yugoslav conflicts was consequently labeled as “genocide rape” or “rape warfare”. Many examples in India, South Asian, and Middle Eastern and South African countries show similar patterns where the

culture of war and violence tends to lead to a tacit acceptance of rape in society.

Rape as a war weapon can be much more effective than any other weapon as the lasting effects of such an act not only hurt the individual on the long term but the society as a whole. Through children born in time of rape warfare, the society is relentlessly reminded of the war and the enemy. It is one of the most degrading and brutal attacks that could be carried on the enemy. Victims of rape in war time live in isolation from their family and community, especially if they have a child born from the rape act.

Another issue with the traditionalist feminist view on rape is the binary structure and the rather monolithic perspective on the matter. There is this tendency to represent men as evil animalistic rapist creatures and women as helpless submissive victims.

The feminist cause is first and foremost a fight for equality. As a movement which condemns rape as a result of gender inequality, the irony here is the separation between genders which label the man as a rapist and the woman as a victim. The theory depicts all men as potential rapists and sex offenders, controlling and dominant. Across my research, I noticed that most of the literature on rape culture only highlights female oriented violence. Such discrepancy makes it appear as if male oriented violence does not exist, and that female victims are much more prevalent. Such unfairness in research contributes to the rigid binary representation of the matter.

The danger in doing such propaganda (i. e. labeling all men are potential sexual aggressors) makes it sound as if being a man is enough to identify the

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person as someone likely to rape. Even the definitions I encountered on feminist blogs and journals define rape as the act of sexual violence towards a woman by a man without her consent, but not vice versa. A similar distortion can be seen when talking about domestic violence as it is now assumed and taken for granted that men are the wife beaters. While feminism's original strive is to gain and maintain equality between the genders, rape culture theories create a serious loophole as such distortions and discrepancies actually put women as the harmless gender on higher grounds for moral superiority in comparison with men as the harmful gender, which creates gender imbalance all over again.

By acting as such, feminists negate their goal of gender equality. It is not anymore the battle for equal rights; it is the fight for moral superiority that is at stake here.

Hence as much as rape culture following the feminist view trivialize and encourage rape, rape culture also benefit this feminist view of men being animalistic and unable to control their urges in comparison with women.

A third issue with rape culture is the labeling itself of the entity. What does rape culture exactly encapsulates? I am concerned that the focus of feminists on rape culture might exclude other abused victims which were not subject to rape but other types of violence.

For instance, domestic violence victims' doesn't necessarily mean rape victims. Aren't those women excluded from the movement because of the fact that they were not raped? Sexually harassed women are not necessarily raped too, where do they stand in the rape culture movement? By choosing <https://assignbuster.com/rape-culture-oriented-feminism-sociology-essay/>

a label and identifying an entity such as rape culture, Rape acquires a special place in the feminist movement, as women who were raped gain a unique status which makes them a priority over other women.

The problem here is that, by giving rape this privileged status, by making the focus rape and rape culture, the feminist movement creates this gender-separatist, discriminatory entity which shadows other gender related issues. Other society problems are as important as the rape issue, yet we do not have a “ child molesting culture” entity for instance.

Furthermore, one can actually draw a pattern of similarities between the feminist’ rape culture movement and the traditional white feminist movement, because both are discriminatory in a way. The white feminist movement does not represent black and Latino women for instance.

Similarly, rape culture feminists do not represent battered women or women who were not raped but were still victims of sexual harassment.

Rape culture oriented feminism does have some good arguments as socially constructed behaviors and gender roles do impact on rape behaviors.

However, and to draw the analogy with the white feminist movement, victimized women which were raped as a product of the imbalance of power between men and women in society represent only a small part of the rape victims and situations, as much as white desperate housewives with college degrees who are forced to stay at home only represent a small portion of oppressed women.

Just as white feminism should evolve to include other women in the group, rape culture oriented feminism should also change by broadening its area of

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interest and not limiting itself only to first: physically raped victims and second : physically raped victims outside the sample society provided by rape culture oriented feminism. Wartime rape victims, which are ignored by this feminist movement currently should also be part of the strive.

Furthermore, the movement should also reconsider the monolithic view it gives of society which separates men and women in a negative way. Rape culture oriented literature so far is very biased in terms of who does the aggressions. It should also recognize that not all men are aggressors, because of the unfairness and incorrectness of such accusation, and move towards a more cooperative image between the genders rather than the hatred one it currently gives.

Work cited:

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