

MODULE

6

RAPE CULTURE

This section describes the societal norms that allow sexual violence to exist and how these show up in our culture. It offers insight into the ways rape culture impacts survivors and society and provides an opportunity for participants to consider ways they can challenge rape culture.

LESSON 1: Defining Rape Culture

LESSON 2: How Rape Culture Impacts Survivors and Our Communities

LESSON 3: Reflecting on Manifestations of Rape Culture

LESSON 4: Challenging Rape Culture



OBJECTIVES

Participants will be able to:

- Identify the social supports for sexual violence
- Discuss the ways rape culture shows up in everyday life
- Explain ways of challenging rape culture



MATERIALS

- Training agenda (if you create one)
- Flipchart paper or dry erase board and markers
- Pens/pencils and paper for each trainee
- Copies of “Examples of Rape Culture” handout (at the end of this module)
- Computer with screen, projector, internet, and audio (optional)



TIPS FOR PREPARATION

- A few short videos are provided as optional components to supplement this lesson. If you would like to show one or all of these videos, preview in advance and be ready to facilitate discussion on these clips. Set up technology in advance of the session and test out the clip to make sure it runs smoothly. All clips require video and audio. If you choose to show these videos, warn trainees of the potentially upsetting content.

What is: Rape Culture

by Kat Blaque

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SupUmg566js>



Consent at 10,000 Feet

by Guante

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzR5Wjnk2hk>



Action

by Guante

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifTITAtNiUU>



For the Rapists Who Call Themselves Feminist

by Blythe Baird

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJRKJ_z9iAk



- Print or otherwise obtain the handouts listed in the Materials section of this module and make copies for participants.
- Review materials and lessons to be comfortable with the material before the training session.
- Lesson 3 requires trainers to write prompts on flipchart paper that will be placed around the room. It may be helpful to prepare these sheets in advance. Look to Lesson 3 for these prompts.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRAINERS

Rape culture can be a distressing topic for many.

Exploring rape culture is critical to understanding the context in which sexual violence occurs. It may also be difficult for participants to examine for a variety of reasons. This section will be an opportunity for participants to reflect on their own understanding of why sexual violence exists and our culture's role in perpetuating sexual violence. Specific discussion of behaviors, attitudes, and experiences may be triggering for participants because they are similar to one's own experience or because this new information may shake a person's worldview. It is critical that care is taken in discussing rape culture, that attention is given to individual needs and group dynamics, and that adequate time is allotted to process what comes up for participants during this section.

We need to use an intersectional lens when we talk about rape culture.

Rape culture is a demonstration of the ways sexual violence is normalized in our culture and it's essential that we understand how it is intrinsically entwined with other forms of oppression. Rape culture tends to uphold all of the '-isms' and while it affects all of us, it often disproportionately targets and impacts people from marginalized communities. When we talk about rape culture, we need to use a critical lens that also considers the unique ways rape culture impacts people across race, ethnicity, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability, immigrant status, HIV status, incarcerated or institutionalized status, and much more.

Understanding rape culture makes us better able to support survivors.

Many survivors are reluctant to talk about having been assaulted. They may fear their confidentiality won't be respected or that they will be blamed for what has happened. This knowledge can help advocates empathize with the challenges survivors face when trying to make decisions about what they need.

LESSON 1: DEFINING RAPE CULTURE

Understanding rape culture means recognizing that there are deeply held, socially reinforced ideas in our culture that not only are unsupportive to survivors, but that also excuse and even promote sexual violence. This section explores rape culture and its manifestations in our culture.

GROUP BRAINSTORM

Invite participants to take a few minutes to write down connotations they have with the term “rape culture.” You may wish to set a timer for three minutes. After participants have had time to reflect on their own, ask participants to share out highlights from what they wrote down. Trainers may consider jotting themes on a flipchart or board.

Be sure to process anything challenging that may come up in this share out. For example, it’s possible that a participant might have an adverse reaction to the term, have no previous exposure to the term, or outright deny that rape culture exists.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

After participants have had a chance to share their general associations with the term, provide participants with the “Examples of Rape Culture” handout included in this module. As a group, read through the sections and examples, pausing after each section to allow time for participants to reflect and pose questions. Once the group has read through the entire handout, invite the group to offer reactions and questions.

Questions that may help guide the discussion include:

- *What do you think of these examples?*
- *Does anything on this list surprise you?*
- *Does anything on this list feel controversial?*
- *What would you add to this list?*

LESSON 2: HOW RAPE CULTURE IMPACTS SURVIVORS AND OUR COMMUNITIES

As we work to understand rape culture, it's important to think about the ways that rape culture impacts the survivors we work with and our communities. This section provides an opportunity for participants to learn about the many ways that rape culture impacts survivors and advocacy work.

AROUND THE ROOM ACTIVITY

Prepare flipchart paper with the following question prompts, one prompt written on each sheet of paper, allowing plenty of room for participants to write responses below the prompt.

Place prepared flip chart papers around the room, either set on tables or posted on walls, whichever is easiest to access in your space and for your participants.

Instruct participants to get in pairs, and in these pairs, move to each of the five prompts, writing down thoughts in response to each question. Participants should discuss the question as a pair and then write bullet points, sentences, or general ideas on the flipchart paper. Groups should respond to all five prompts. They will have an opportunity to elaborate on their points when the group comes back together.

Questions

- *How does rape culture shape how society teaches young kids about gender roles, bodily autonomy, and sex?*
- *How does rape culture shape how society views people across genders related to power, equity, bodily autonomy, and sex?*
- *How does rape culture shape how society responds when people disclose they have experienced sexual violence?*
- *How does rape culture shape how society views a person using power and privilege to commit sexual violence against someone else?*
- *How does rape culture shape how survivors navigate choices related to violence they have experienced?*

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Bring the prompt sheets to the front of the room and ask for volunteers to read aloud each sheet to the group. Encourage pairs who wrote down examples to expand upon what they wrote down if they would like.

Common responses might include:

- **How does rape culture shape how society teaches young kids about gender roles, bodily autonomy, and sex?**
 - *It reinforces stereotypical gender roles*
 - *It makes girls believe they should be submissive*
 - *It makes boys believe they should be dominant*
 - *It others or makes invisible kids outside the gender binary*
 - *It teaches hypersexualization in some senses, but makes open communication about sexuality and bodies taboo*
 - *Abstinence education doesn't provide kids with useful information to navigate real life scenarios*
 - *It sends mixed messages about what's normal and healthy*
 - *It makes girls feel like they aren't in charge of their own body*
 - *It can make girls and non-binary kids fearful*

- **How does rape culture shape how society views people across genders and races? How does this relate to power, equity, bodily autonomy, and sex?**
 - *Some women of color are fetishized and hypersexualized*
 - *Some women of color associated with purity myths and are made invisible*
 - *Trans people are targeted*
 - *Women are expected to be more complacent*
 - *Men are taught to pursue and conquer*
 - *Men have power over women and trans and non-binary people*
 - *Racism devalues the bodily autonomy of people of color*
 - *Men are applauded for sexual conquests*
 - *Women are slut-shamed*
 - *Women may feel voiceless or that their voices and needs will not be heard*
 - *Women are taught to submit to men, and may do so out of fear or obligation*

- **How does rape culture shape how society responds when people disclose they have experienced sexual violence?**
 - *It makes society doubt survivors*
 - *It makes society not believe survivors*
 - *It makes society more likely to disbelieve survivors of color*
 - *It makes society think what happened “wasn’t that bad”*
 - *It normalizes sexual violence so people struggle to see what happened as wrong*
 - *It makes society characterize sexual violence as things like “a misunderstanding” or “regretted sex”*
 - *It makes juries and judges not convict people who commit sexual violence*
 - *It makes the police not take survivors seriously*
 - *It makes families and friends victim-blame when survivors disclose to them*
 - *It scrutinizes survivor behavior in an effort to discredit them*
 - *It allows people to try to suggest that survivors are at fault for what happened to them because of what they wore, because of a previous relationship they had with someone, or because they “led them on”*

- **How does rape culture shape how society views a person using power and privilege to commit violence against someone else?**
 - *In situations where there is a difference of power and privilege (class, celebrity status, authority role, etc.), survivors are often characterized as lying about sexual violence to try to achieve fame or money*
 - *In situations where there is a difference of power and privilege, survivors are often told they should feel “lucky” about what happened*
 - *Survivors who have less power and privilege are often made invisible in society, because they are seen as less than. They may be targeted specifically because they are perceived to be less believable or less likely to have access to help.*

- **How does rape culture shape how survivors navigate choices related to violence they have experienced?**
 - *It makes survivors less likely to disclose*
 - *It makes survivors feel like they won't be believed*
 - *It makes survivors second guess themselves*
 - *It makes survivors fearful of telling anyone what happened*
 - *It makes survivors skeptical of formal systems like police or court systems*
 - *It makes survivors afraid to tell their family and significant others*
 - *It makes survivors weigh out whether telling their story is worth it*
 - *It makes survivors suffer alone instead of getting help if they fear that they won't be believed*
 - *It makes survivors feel like they have to justify their every action out of fear of being blamed*

Process the group's responses to the prompts, identifying any themes and allowing time for questions. If groups struggled with different prompts, invite them to discuss why that might be with the group. Reaffirm for the group that these are examples of the very specific ways that rape culture impacts our society and has significant implications for survivors of sexual violence.

LESSON 3: REFLECTING ON MANIFESTATIONS OF RAPE CULTURE

It's important to recognize that even as advocates, we too are inundated with messages that often reinforce problematic beliefs and stereotypes that we must continually challenge and unlearn. This part of the module will provide participants a chance to reflect on their own experiences with different aspects of rape culture.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Ask participants to get into groups of three and assign each group a set of questions to discuss from the list below. You may choose to write the sets of questions on flipchart paper and give each paper to the respective group, or write the questions on the board, or create handouts. Ask that someone in each group serve as a note-taker. Groups should rotate through at least two sets of questions.

Questions

◦ SET 1

- What examples do you see, in culture, the media, and in your own community, that shame survivors of sexual violence?
- What other examples of rape culture do you see in your day-to-day life?

◦ SET 2

- Why do you think society has a difficult time seeing men and boys as victims of sexual violence?
- What do you think we can do to change it?

◦ SET 3

- What were you taught about sexual violence?
- Where do these beliefs come from? Do you think they are accurate?

◦ SET 4

- How do you think you perpetuate rape culture?
- What do you think you can do to change/end rape culture?

After groups have had time to transition through at least two question sets, bring small groups back together as a large group. Beginning with question set 1, ask for groups to report out on their questions and discussion. Invite the larger group to add to the discussion for each set of questions as time allows. Take time to discuss themes and to process anything difficult that comes up in conversation.

LESSON 4: CHALLENGING RAPE CULTURE

As we bring this module full circle, participants will reflect on their role in challenging rape culture, within their advocacy work and in their personal lives.

REFLECTION AND GROUP DISCUSSION

Ask participants to individually reflect on the following two questions. They can jot down some notes or reflect quietly at their seat. After individual reflection, participants will have an opportunity to share out with the full group if they would like.

- *How can your understanding of rape culture impact the ways you support survivors in advocacy?*
- *How can your understanding of rape culture present opportunities for you to challenge it in everyday life?*

Invite participants to share their responses to the questions with the group.

Remind participants of the important role advocates have in being an empowering and non-judgmental support in survivors' lives, and our ability to help provide counter messages to survivors that remind them that they are believed, that it was not their fault, and that this never should have happened to them.

EXAMPLES OF RAPE CULTURE

Rape Culture: Behaviors and Practices

Some of the most overt behaviors and practices that create a rape culture are acts of sexual assault, but there are others that also play significant roles in creating such a context. These include:

- Sexualized online harassment and bullying
- Harassment and intimidation of, and threats made toward, women and girls, even those that are framed by aggressor[s] as “playful” or a “joke”
- Denying that rape is a widespread problem
- Diminishing or trivializing the trauma and violence of rape and sexual assault
- Victim-blaming
- Accusing survivors of lying
- Sexual objectification of women and girls
- Violence, including sexual violence, targeted at members of trans and queer communities
- Men and boys talking/bragging about sexual assault
- Equating masculinity with sexual dominance
- Revenge porn, both independent of physical assault and post-assault
- Ignoring the sexually violent crimes of celebrities or people in power or authority
- Neglect of untested evidence collection kits
- Support for accused men and boys over concern for welfare of victims
- Systems having low/poor response rates for taking reports of sexual violence seriously, for example, unlikelihood to investigate cases of sexual violence and hold those who commit sexual violence accountable

Rape Culture: Beliefs, Assumptions, Myths, and World Views

- Cultural expectation that men have to coerce women into having sex, and that women and girls want to be coerced
- Belief that men and boys are entitled to the bodies of women and girls
- Socialization of girls that they have a duty to serve the demands of male sexuality
- Socialization of girls to expect sexual violence and aggression
- Belief that discussion of sexual activity and affirmative consent are not sexy
- Belief that rape and sexual violence are the inevitable expressions of masculinity
- Belief that rape is an everyday occurrence that cannot be changed
- Fear among victims and their families that they will be stigmatized and further traumatized by reporting the rape
- Belief that rape is just rough sex
- Belief that rape is the result of one party “regretting” sex
- Belief that women and girls provoke sexual assault with their behavior and dress
- Attitude that is the responsibility of women to defend themselves and prevent rape
- The hypersexualization or purity myths used to stereotype and misrepresent women of color
- Belief that only “bad men” rape and only “bad women” are raped
- Belief that there is no such thing as intimate partner rape
- The “slut-shaming” of women and girls who pursue and/or engage in consensual sex
- The attitude that only certain survivors are to be believed [often tied to age, race, class, and other forms of status]

Rape Culture: Language and Discourse

- Language that minimizes rape and by calling it sexual intercourse, non-consensual sex, inappropriate behavior, or sexual misconduct
- Using terms like “acquaintance rape” or “date rape” and “real rape” to make false distinctions about the crime of rape
- Referring to trafficked child rape victims as “child prostitutes”

Rape Culture: Representations of Rape in Cultural Products

- Rape jokes and memes that mock rape
- The use of rape as a plot point and for economic gain in film and television
- Video games with rape scenarios
- Songs and music videos that glamorize sexual coercion

From *Definition of Rape Culture with Examples: On the Behaviors, Ideas, Words, and Representations that Compose It*, by N. L. Cole, 2017. Retrieved from ThoughtCo.: <https://www.thoughtco.com/rape-culture-definition-and-examples-4109257>. Copyright 2017 by Dotdash. Adapted with permission.

