

# LET'S TALK ABOUT RAPE CULTURE

The term 'rape culture' can sound pretty extreme and it elicits all kinds of responses, whether it's scoffs of anger about the terminology and what it represents, or a deep sigh at the state of things. But what does the term mean? Rape culture is used to describe the environment where sexual violence is normalised and excused – that it's "just the way things are".

Rape culture is perpetuated through media and pop-culture by use of misogynistic language and jokes, the objectification of women's bodies and the glamorisation of violence, creating a culture that ignores women's rights and safety and makes sexual coercion seem normal. Why is it so dangerous? Because it reinforces the continuum of sexual violence, starting with so called "jokes", and finishing with rape and murder.

**DO YOU LAUGH AT SEXIST JOKES?**

**ARE YOU SILENT WHEN YOUR FRIENDS MAKE THEM?**

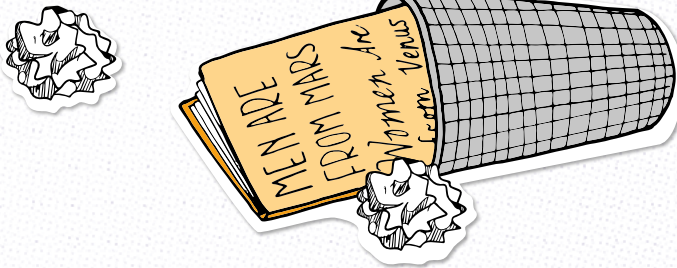


Phrases like “she asked for it” or “boys will be boys” are examples of rape culture; so too are attitudes based on gender stereotypes – that being a ‘man’ means you should be dominant and aggressive; that being a ‘woman’ means you need to be submissive and sexually passive; that men ought to score and women ought to be nice and not act so cold. Accepting rape myths only helps to create environments in which many individuals – women, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community – are disempowered.

Rape culture is tasking victims with the burden of rape prevention. Rape culture is encouraging women to learn self-defence as though that is the only solution required to prevent rape. Rape culture is warning women to “learn common sense” or “be more responsible” or “avoid these places” or “don’t dress this way”; failing to caution men to not rape. – Melissa McEwan, Rape Culture 101

The legacy of rape culture and victim blaming affects everyone, but let's focus on women as an example. Although most males are decent humans and thankfully many females are never the victims of rape, the existence of sexual assault and rape in our community means women do change their behaviour, whether it's learnt ("don't go out wearing that") or out of fear ("I should get home before it's too dark"). 50% of Australian women<sup>11</sup> for example, don't feel comfortable walking a short distance home after a night out for fear of being harassed or assaulted, whereas a guy more than likely would (79.2%)<sup>12</sup>.

Being on the receiving end of 'locker room talk', upskirting, catcalls, stalking, all the way to coercion, harassment and sexual violence can happen to our students. So who are we kidding? Let's all try to be better and speak up instead of staying silent. Let's put a stop to the behaviour that normalises rape culture.



## UNDERSTANDING PATRIARCHY

We cannot address rape culture without discussing patriarchy. Before some of you say “Patriarchy doesn’t exist. It’s 2018 god dammit! The marriage equality act was passed last year and Wonder Woman is arguably the most popular DC character in its current incarnation (‘cause she’s a badass)”, know that ‘patriarchy’ isn’t just a women’s issue, and it’s not a made up concept tied to feminism or trans and gay rights. Patriarchy is the term used to describe the political and social systems in which men are generally the beneficiaries (more power and more privilege). Patriarchy shapes and continues to inform largely ‘white’ male heterosexual identity and their sense of self from birth until death<sup>13</sup>, valuing stereotypically ‘masculine’ qualities – power and extreme competitiveness for example – inadvertently devaluing women, people of ‘other’ ethnic backgrounds and the LGBTQIA+ community in the process.

“Patriarchy has no gender” – bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*

The thing is, we can all be guilty from time to time of subscribing to these patriarchal norms, as we define ourselves and try to understand others around us – but men aren’t from Mars and women aren’t from Venus, you know. Patriarchy is generally not an explicit ongoing effort by men to dominate women. It is a long-standing system that we are all born into and participate in, mostly unconsciously<sup>14</sup>, feeding racism, sexism, homophobia and toxic masculinities in the process.

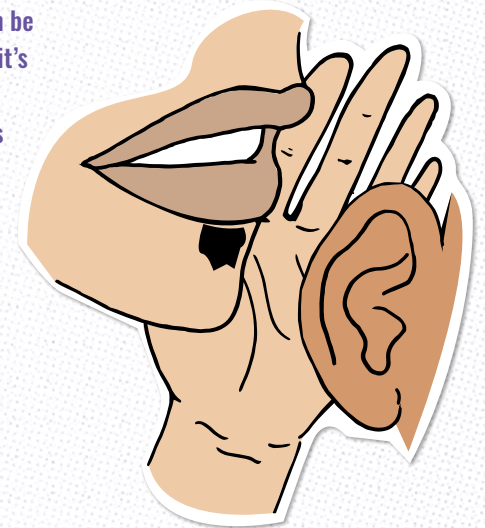
### WHAT TYPE OF PATRIARCHAL ATTITUDES DO YOU SUBSCRIBE TO?

## TOXIC MASCUINITY

Patriarchal attitudes are bad for everyone, even males who supposedly benefit the most from the socially constructed system. In recent years, the term toxic masculinity has been coined to describe the performance of being masculine, to be models of sexual conquest (of women) and violence; suppressing emotion and devaluing women in the process.

In order to prove one’s masculinity, to be a man and not a boy, men are told from an early age to distance themselves from femininity (“pink is a girl’s colour”); to suppress emotion (“boys don’t cry”); to be tough and aggressive (“don’t be such a pussy”); to be seen as sexual with women (“hit it and quit it”) and to prove one’s heterosexuality through homophobia (“don’t be a sissy”). This isn’t good for anybody, and only reinforces attitudes towards rape culture that excuses mens’ violence and focuses instead on women needing to protect themselves. These attitudes also stifle men from expressing themselves, leading to depression and contributing to a suicide rate three times higher than their female counterparts<sup>15</sup>.

Masculinity is not in and of itself bad, and it can be celebrated. But we also have to remember that it’s just a set of ideas, and being ‘masculine’ is not about subscribing to a set of misogynistic traits that assert power and dominance over people and objects. We say this because in order to address rape culture as a community, we need to change our attitudes around masculinity and maleness, and that includes making the alternative(s) an attractive option.

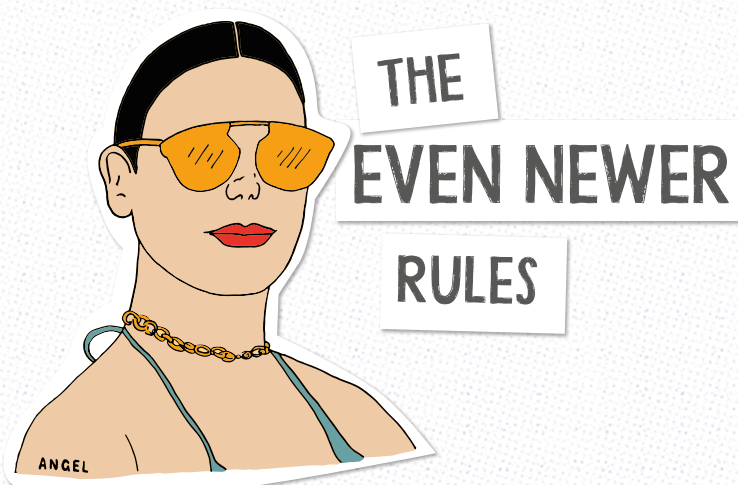


# BREAKING THE CYCLE

So what can you do to break the cycle?

- 1) Get to know yourself. Define your manhood, womanhood or whoever you want to be, free from stereotypes.
- 2) Think critically about the media's portrayal of gender identities, relationships, sex and violence, and be supportive of alternative portrayals – e.g. that men can be empathetic; that women can be assertive.
- 3) Avoid using language that puts people down, objectifies or degrades.
- 4) Speak out if you hear a sexist joke. It's not cool and it's just lazy.
- 5) Respect people's personal space and need for alone time.
- 6) Learn to communicate openly with your partner, lover or friend; that includes both the speaking and the listening parts.
- 7) Advocate and practice affirmative consent, never assume it's given.
- 8) Know that the myths we mentioned earlier are just that, myths. Take it seriously if someone tells you they were sexually assaulted.

When it comes down to it, this is an issue of equality, not in the sense of 'who has the most money or power' but equality in building empathy, mutual respect and the ability to enjoy the same rights.



# REFERENCES

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