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Rape Culture: A Problematic Mentality

In October 2014, I read an article about international pop star Kesha checking into Timberline Knolls, a rehab facility that specializes with eating disorders. I did not think much of her visit until she was released three months later, when she accused her producer, Dr. Luke of sexual and psychological assault. Since then, I had heard little to nothing on the subject matter until almost a year later. With the recent dispute between the two, Sony Records will not release Kesha from her constricting contract. This may not seem like a big deal to many individuals, but to Kesha, getting out of this contract meant that she was free from working with her alleged rapist. On February 26, 2016, the court ruled that Kesha would have to stay under her contract with Dr. Luke, even after her claims of physical and mental abuse he had inflicted on her throughout the years. This case goes all the way back to 2005, when 18-year-old Kesha signed a deal with Dr. Luke's record label, with her being so young, there was bound to be some miscommunications regarding the contract. Kesha filed a lawsuit stating that Dr. Luke "abused [Kesha] in order to destroy her self-confidence, self-image, and self-worth so that he could maintain complete control over her life and career" (Park para 9). The claims also included that he drugged then raped her (multiple times), as well as threatened that if she ever came forward and told people of her experiences with Dr. Luke, he would not only destroy her life, but her entire family as well. Dr. Luke denied all of Kesha's claims, and in February 2016, the court validated that Kesha cannot leave her contract until she fulfills it, meaning she has to write and record 5 more albums for Sony Records. These series of events eventually led to idea that the court does not take rape accusations as seriously as they should, which is what I intended to focus on with my research. Will all that being stated, Kesha is a victim of rape culture in the court of law. Instead of the court deciding that Kesha can leave her contract, they denied that Kesha's allegations even existed, meaning that they believe that Kesha made all her claims up.

The society in which we live in is made up on many types of social norms and structures; from the way we dress based on gender norms, all the way through how masculine a man is supposed to be depends on our. Rape culture mentality is one of the social and structural norms that the American society has commonly overlooked, not only throughout history, but in the present as well. Rape culture is defined as a "one-sided sexual action upon the body of a woman while blaming the victim for the acts of aggression" (Hewitt 615). Each year, there are over 200,000 victims of sexual assault in America, only 32% of rapes are reported to the police, and only about 3% of rapists spend even a day in prison (Hernandez 323). These numbers are unacceptable, and they eventually inspired me to look into why rape culture is so commonly overlooked

today. With this project I asked... What rape culture is and why it is still an issue in the court of law? To obtain more knowledge about rape culture and its effect in court, I researched the definition of rape and rape culture, as well as the effects of rape culture mentality pertaining to the court, the mental states of both the victims and the rapists, and how the media comes into play with this type of culture.

More women are being blamed for rape, rather than getting help regarding it, and it effects more than just court cases. It effects how one thinks of themselves, as well as how others in society view rape (Jiloha para 2). Rape culture mentality is also known to interfere with public school education for young girls. The over-sexualized nature of under-aged females is just as much of an issue as the legal aspects of rape culture in many instances. Individuals believe that rape culture does not exist, or that it is simply an overstatement, but as we can see, it is a major issue. The rape culture mentality is interwoven from ones childhood, then is further implemented with the media. With the rise of normalization of rape in the music, film, and porn industries, as well as the objectification of women throughout their daily lives, the mentality becomes normal, and the action of blaming the victim instead of the rapist is becoming increasingly common. With the music industries lack of respect for women's self-esteem, as well as objectifying them in order to sell more (regarding the phrase "sex sells"), women are not only mentally abused with the type of attention they get when in the industry, but also, in some instances, physically abused as well. Rape culture mentality must be eliminated because it negatively affects court decisions, as well as the mental state of rape victims.

Rape culture mentality is woven into many aspect of the society we were raised in; whether it is the lack of understanding exactly what rape means, how the mentality affects court decisions, or how the media plays into the complex. Rape culture affects more than just privileged women wanting to wear revealing clothing in a professional environment. It affects who is convicted (if convicted at all) of sexual assault, the mental state at which the victims are forced to withstand, as well as mainstream media almost disregarding how serious the act of sexual aggression is by the way it is incorporated into music, as well as political groups. Rape culture mentality is more than what it is usually played out to be.

To fully understand what rape culture is, one must understand the definition of rape. Rape cannot be limited to one definition, as Hernandez explains; rape has been "defined and redefined throughout American history" (324). Hernandez explains that throughout the 19th century people were classified into three types of groups; potential rapists (primarily black men), rape victims (rich white women), and activists, who were known for addressing their less popular opinions on sexual aggression. These three categories were tracked from the early 19th century to the 20th century to examine how "society's ever-changing definition of rape" had influenced the treatment under the law.

Throughout most of the 19th century, only wealthy white women were considered possible rape victims.

This mentality later evolved to white women and children, women of all color, then lastly people of both genders, regardless of race or socioeconomic status. As the states began to colonize, anti-rape laws were designed to protect men's privileged status in society (Hernandez 326). By having these laws in place, men could be considered high in status because people would not assume they could ever sexually assault anyone (immorality clause). Southern men could rape black women because in the early 19th century, black people were not considered moral, thus the morality clause discussed above. After the Civil War, rape regulatory laws began to be more race-neutral. Even though the court still favored Caucasian people more back then, the laws are still almost as ineffective as they were since the post- Civil War era. Women were thus (and still are) shamed and distrusted when accusing men of rape, which was the start of rape culture. Now, in the 21st century, rape is defined as any "one-sided sexual action upon the body of a woman" (Croskery 615). There is speculation regarding what exactly counts as a "sexual action", leading to the usage of the term "sexual assault".

One of the major flaws with the 21st century is the lack of consequences for sexual abusers. Most individuals ignore the fact that only about 5% of sexual assaults result in criminal conviction (Hildebrand 1060). This fact is commonly overlooked because of the rape culture mentality, which focuses less on what the rapist has done to the victim, but rather what the victims actions were leading up to the event of the assault. For example; most courts vote against the women, claiming that "drunken consent [to sex or other sexual actions] is still valid consent" (Croskery 615), thus leading up to no conviction for the rapist, as well as the victim being blamed for her actions. Another common misconception that resides with the topic of conviction is falsely accusing someone of sexual assault. Studies show than only about 2% of [reported cases of] men accused of sexual assault are innocent (Buchwald 37). Based on these statistics, one can come to the conclusion that sexual assault cases are taken very lightly in the court of law.

The next flaw with the justice system is that most women are not reporting instances of sexual assault. Hildebrand explains that 64% of cases go unreported due to the following; the women knew their predecessor, were not threatened with a weapon, or did not sustain physical injuries (1060). Women often blame themselves when victimized after leading out of the social norm; from having had too much to drink or inviting the man to her home. In many cultures, women are also often shunned for being sexually assaulted, and could be forced into marrying the man, which is common

in most third world countries, further proving that there is flaws with the system of dealing with sexual abusers not only in America, but other countries around the world.

Another aspect to touch on regarding rape culture is the mentality of the human psych. There are two perspectives to look into when regarding the mentality of rape culture; the rapist's viewpoints on sexual aggression, and the psychological impact on the victim. A recent study shown that one in three heterosexual men in college would rape woman if they knew they could get away with it, and only about half of that group would actually call their actions "rape" (Hernandez 323). College campuses are a hostile environment, and extremely prone to rape cases. Oluwole did a study on the perception of marital rape, involving undergraduates in Lagos State University. The study consisted of questions like if marital rape should be legal, and reasons that marital rape should be allocated. To Oluwole's surprise, about 56% of men and 44% of women thought that marital rape should be legal, and conditions for "why men would rape wife" included if the man feels neglected (in that case half the students said he has a right to rape his wife), and if the man is an alcoholic or drug abuser (about 41% of the students said that would be acceptable as well). This study indicates that there is a certain mentality that comes along with rape commonalities. The second perspective of rape culture to look into is the psychological impact rape it has on its victims. Rape and other types of sexual assault towards a minor can result in both short-term and long-term psychological effects, including depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and eating disorders. Additionally, childhood and adulthood victims of rape are more likely to attempt or commit suicide (Jiloha 254). There can also be educational or school related disturbances that come as an effect of a child being sexually assaulted, for that are more preoccupied with their train of thought.

Additionally, social media has a major impact on how society views certain aspects of rape culture. From pro-rape groups exercising their "God-given rights" to assert their masculinity on others, to problematic presidential candidates, to smaller, overlooked issues regarding mainstream music and dress codes, almost every aspect of our society influences how rape culture is perceived among other individuals. Recently, a man named Roosh V. set up "pro-rape" groups in 46 countries around the world. His intent was to fight for his "rights" to make rape and sexual assault legal. He was recently arrested for his acts, and ended up cancelling his meetings because he could not "guarantee his followers safety". On another note, Donald Trump's presidential campaign is in full swing, winning the New Hampshire primaries and all, but what most people do not know is that Donald Trump has been accused of raping and sexually assaulting his ex-wife, these claims re-emerged based on a documentary that came out right before the Iowa primaries. With rape accusations on the rise, Trump is still the leading candidate for the republican nomination. This goes to show that most

Americans almost do not care that marital rape is just as real as if Trump raped another citizen.

In a way, dress codes in schools can also perpetuate rape culture; the school is essentially letting young girls believe that the boy's education matters more than theirs. Laura Bates is the co-founder of "The Everyday Sexism Project", which is a social experiment that collects stories from minors explaining their stories of sexual harassment and gender discrimination. This collection was made to signify that there is a problem with the American public school system with sexual discrimination. Bates started this project to prove that there still is gender discrimination, as well as schools perpetuating rape culture mentality, by acting like the boy's education is more valued than the one wearing the clothing. In one instance, a student was forced to miss her final waiting in the principal's office waiting for her parents to come pick her up just because her shoulders were showing, all because dressing this way may "distract men" in the same educational environment. This type of mentality may damage the fragile psyche of a 13 year-old.

The last issue with having rape culture mentality associated in almost every aspect of the society is problematic pop music. *Blurred Lines* by Robin Thicke is a perfect example of how this type of mentality is weaved into the daily lives of average Americans. The song promotes gang domestic violence, and even though most people knew that the song promotes seemingly "vile" derogatory terms, it was a hit for months, and eventually won a Grammy (the biggest award a musician can get). The media, however, can have a positive influence on helping deal with the harsh realities of the subject of rape and rape culture mentality. Television shows, such as *Beverly Hill's 90210*, dared to touch on topics such as rape, and having to deal with the challenging aspects that come with vocalizing and accusing an individual of acts of sexual assault. AnnaLynne McCord was the actress for Naomi Clark, who was sexually assaulted in the show. The episode consisted of one of the main characters, Naomi, having to deal with no one believing that she had not been raped, but rather wanted attention. After the series of episodes aired, McCord claimed that she was flooded with comments of fans relieved that a popular show like 90210 touched on a serious topic like such, as well as praised her for helping them get through dealing with their own encounters with their rapists. That is just one of the many ways rape and rape culture mentality is portrayed in the media, which is followed by a positive response, instead of a negative one.

Even though most people believe rape and rape culture mentality is solved in the court, it has deemed to be false in many instances. For example, as stated above, pop star Kesha recently took her case to court, claiming that her manager had physically and mentally assaulted her, forcing her to lose weight as well as cases of rape. On February 19th, however, the court decided not to let her leave her label and to stick to

her contract, which explains that she cannot leave Sony Records until she's recorded at least 5 more albums, as well as writing off her accusations as just that – accusations by another pop star that no one wants to listen to anymore. The law does not “fix” anything, but other products claim that they can. Most of all of the products related to rape culture mentality involves awareness, whether it be parades all the way to rape prevention products, there are positive and negative effects of each of these situations, as well as the plausibility of how effective these products are in order to prevent rape culture mentality.

In fact, one of the first solutions I researched regarding how to solve rape culture mentality was something called a SlutWalk. The SlutWalk was inspired by a series of events that took place in Toronto, Canada. This string of events was carried out when a Canadian Officer offered a routine “personal safety” visit at Osgoode Law School at York University, and began his talk with a disclaimer, claiming that “women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized” (Ringrose 333). This rape culture-like mentality started the SlutWalk movement, which involved a small group of women determined to spread awareness, as well as a political outrage opposing a culture that is acceptable to blame victims for acts of sexual aggression done to them. The Canadian SlutWalk involved women of all ages who wanted to normalize the over sexualization of women's body parts, so they dressed in all types of clothing, which ranged from types of lingerie to nipple tassels as well as head scarves boiler suits. Many people believe that SlutWalk's are just an excuse to walk around half naked, but Ringrose describes it as an empowering movement, as well as a deeper political involvement (Ringrose 335). The movement started off relatively small, but soon expanded to other parts of the world. Since 2011, when the Canadian SlutWalk originally began, Amber Rose led a walk in October 2015, which involved meeting in Los Angeles to fuel and empower young women to take a stand against the harsh rape culture mentality. Amber Rose is also a major advocate for women's rights, stating in a recent interview that she could be laying down next to someone fully naked and still say no to anything regarding taking it any further with that person. Rose also claims that it does not matter what a person is wearing, no means no, regardless.

On the other hand, people believe that in order for there not to be a rape culture mentality, rape products should be distributed. This is not the case, though. Rape products teach women that if they are inherently sexualized, and are directly prone to rape. Products like the date-rape drug detecting nail polish and anti-rape condoms seem helpful, but these products further perpetuate the rape culture mentality most of which are trying to avoid. It is good to be protected in cases of an emergency, but one should not be living in constant fear that they are going to be sexually assaulted based on what they wear or how they act. Products like these are why I was inspired to do a year-long capstone project on rape culture mentality. To teach women that they are not

the problem when it comes down to being assaulted, physically or mentally. I personally do not agree with anti-rape products being an issue.

Regarding my end product, I wanted to make a product that would be perceived as useful. I did not want to reinforce that women are inherently sexualized with leg hair leggings or sexist dress codes, I wanted to do something meaningful with this year-long end product. My first vision of action was to design, create, market, and sell products and have all the proceeds go to the Dallas Area Rape Crisis Center (DARCC). That would have been useful because it is a local center (only about 10 minutes away from Richland College), and it is a non-profit, meaning that none of the money I would have been able to donate would have been put to good use. All seemed to be going well until the center would not approve of any of my designs; they also repeatedly remained extremely busy throughout, along with my hectic 8-5 school schedule, nothing seemed to be going as planned. It was shocking that I could even fill in an interview with the director of the center, let alone co-ordinate my plans with theirs. When I finally realized what I wanted to do regarding my project, it was too late to take it to the next level, meaning that I had no time to gather the money in order to donate a profitable amount to the center I had to start all over again.

With that context in mind, I was not going to let these minor setbacks hold me back from having a halfway decent end product. I wanted to take the easy way out and make an app, but that would not have made me feel any more accomplished than stealing an original idea from someone else. I wanted to mimic an app I saw on Twitter a couple of years ago, and it was made for domestic violence victims. Domestic violence is commonly under looked, even though it is reported that a little more than half of sexual violence cases involved two people that know each other, most of which are in long, committed relationships. It looked exactly like a regular news app, as well as showed the daily news, just like any other particulate news app. But, when the 'help' button was pressed, the app would inform the police that the victim was in need of assistance. This app blew me away with how brilliant it was. I wanted to do something like it, but I felt like I would have been copying someone else's original work, so I proposed something new, or at least something I could have made without feeling like I took the easy way out.

Specifically, I want to make an app that will help people, not only with the physical aspect of it all, in which getting them out of a bad situation, but also mentally. I have produced a blog-like app that acts like an online support group for rape or sexually assaulted victims. The application is called the Rape Culture Project (or the RC project for short). It can be anonymous, but does require some information input when being installed in order to give off the location the victim is in, so if they are a victim of sexual assault, the police knows where to find them, and how to contact them in their times of need. This feature also helps with log-in information so that the individual does not lose

their information with reinstallation of the application. With so many people owning smart phone, it makes sense to make an app that is free and available to everyone that needs it. Having an online support group also deems as beneficial to the victim, in cases of which they have no one to talk to along with their fragile mental state, as well as anyone else on the site, for they feel as if they are not alone as well. The domestic violence app really inspired me to do make this app, for it touched on simplicity, as well as usefulness, but it was not the only thing that inspired me to do what I want with this project. With the lack of awareness of rape culture and its mentality, the victim's mental health is also something that needs to be taken into consideration.

The first aspect I needed to touch on regarding the making of this app is learning how to make one. I did do a little research regarding how to make this app, but nothing deemed successful. I asked external forces, like my dad, for example, who is a software engineer but even he could not figure out how to successfully develop and monitor a phone application. I thought it would have been beneficial to ask my father for help regarding this end product because he will be easily accessible if I ever need help regarding the project right away, but I was wrong. I eventually asked a classmate for help regarding making an app, and she suggested MarvelApp. Creating this application was challenging at first, but my skillset improved with experimentation.

The other step I needed to touch on was spreading awareness to my project, as well as the application that came along with it. The RC Project was advertised on various types of social media, including Facebook and Twitter. Twitter was helpful because it is an extremely easy way to capture audiences of thousands of people in a matter of seconds. I also contacted "Twitter famous" individuals that ran major accounts to help me spread awareness to my capstone project as well as links in order to download the app, which evidentially made my project work as well as I needed it to.

The most challenging concept of this project was most probably going to be spreading awareness to the topic. Many claim that rape culture mentality does not exist, even though this mentality further perpetuates ones perception of the mentality itself. I wanted this app to reach out to everyone that has ever been a victim of sexual assault, physical or mental abuse, as well as victims of rape culture perpetuation such as losing educational experiences due to dress codes or any other factors involving over-sexualization of the human body, and it did. This application's was intended to be used by the victims I had just explained above, but eventually led up to a mixture of different individuals that just want to be there for the victims for moral support.

With my app, I had planned on not only empowering young women to go out there and take charge of their lives, but also everyone else involved with the app as well. I do plan on updating and monitoring the app as time goes by, but as for marketing it, I do not have anything more to market. I think this app has been extremely helpful for at least the mental state of the victims. Having them know that people care for them, as

well as having someone to talk to is a major aspect to consider when dealing with the mental effects of rape on a victim, such as depression, anxiety, and many other types of mental distortion.

One counter argument many individuals believe is that anti-rape products perpetuate rape culture mentality even more. With the rise of awareness of rape being an issue, four students from North Carolina State University developed a nail polish that detects date rape drugs by changing colors after dipped into the tampered drink. People claim that this product not only re-enforces the mentality of rape culture, but also almost normalizes rape culture mentality. Products for rape, such as condoms for women, the nail polish, and other types of anti-rape products indicate a deeper meaning to the whole issue of awareness in general. Katie Russell, from Rape Crisis England in Wales claims that her rape crisis center “does not endorse or promote such a product or anything similar. This is for three reasons: it implies that it’s the woman’s fault and assumes responsibility on her behalf, and detracts from the real issues that arise from sexual violence” (Ilsley, para 6). Even though some of these products are bizarre, I believe some of these products could potentially relieve the risk of rape for women everywhere.

In reality, with regard Kesha’s court case, there is no telling whether Sony will let her leave her contract or not, but most celebrities are trying to help. Lady Gaga performed at the Oscars and talked about raising awareness to sexual abuse along with Joe Biden in order to raise awareness to Kesha’s court case and situation. Along with Gaga, many others are not only being vocal about boycotting Sony Music, but also donating to Kesha’s legal bills, which tend to add up with a major court case like the one she is in. Kesha is also being vocal about the whole situation, thanking everyone for the support she has been receiving since last October. Doing this capstone project was very enlightening, it brought me to explore the facts about rape cases, and what we can do to stop rapists from getting away with everything they put their victims through. I plan on perusing a career as being a Speech Pathologist. This capstone experience, along with my service learning activities has helped me not only in the field of study I plan on perusing, but also with every-day interactions.

My end product related to some interpersonal skills, including assisting others, responding to concerns, and motivating people. These skills were important not only in developing the application, but mostly because that was what the purpose of the app was, to motivate and assist people in regard to their mental health and well-being. These skills will carry out towards my job, for it attends to helping assist the elderly, as well as children in different situations. This capstone experience also helped me with my organizational skills, which will help me in a job like setting. Even though my whole capstone essay was mapped out for me, I still managed to meet most of the deadlines, as well as learned some time management skills. Setting and attaining goals was also a

very important aspect of this project, if I did not have a set goal for when everything was due, I would have been failing this class.

Lastly, the mission of Richland College is teaching, learning, and community building. This capstone project includes all three of these aspects. My capstone project is all about teaching people that rape culture mentality does exist, and that it is not the victims fault when dealing with rape cases. I learned that time management and being organized is very important when trying to reach deadlines. This project was all about reaching deadlines and multitasking in order to finish everything on time. Community building is important to this project, and I incorporated it in my end product. I had the chance to build up an online community and a caring environment, something everyone, not only rape victims, need in order to maintain a healthy mental state. This research project will not only help me with what I will be dealing with in college, but also the management and communication skills I will need in order to do well in my work force as well.

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