



Rape Myths and Sexual Assault

Rape is the least reported violent crime in the U.S. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, only 54% of rapes are ever reported nationally. Survivors often do not report the crime because they believe and are told by their support system that the rape was their fault. Rape is the only violent crime in which blame is consistently placed on the survivor rather than the offender. We can look at the Kobe Bryant case as an example. There is a great deal of misinformation being circulated by the media regarding the case. The media argues that the alleged victim is just out to become famous and make money. Also, the media regularly reports Bryant's defense team's arguments that the victim had sex with multiple men in the days before the assault and therefore is lying about the rape. The Kobe Bryant case is an example of the social belief that women "cry rape" to get attention. The media's depiction of Kobe Bryant and his victim illustrate how rape myths are embraced in our society. Rape myths are the belief that the victim wanted or deserved to be raped.

The Impact of Rape Myths

- Rape myths discourage survivors from reporting the crime.
- Rape myths minimize the experiences of survivors.
- Rape myths discourage survivors from seeking therapy.
- Rape myths justify the actions of perpetrators.
- Rape myths incorrectly place blame on survivors.
- Rape myths reinforce stereotypes about who is victimized and who perpetrates.

A Look at the Rape Myths

Myth: Most rapes are committed by "weirdo's" and strangers.

Fact: Most people are raped by someone they know and trust. Rapists are usually people who look and act the same as everybody else.

Myth: When a man gets turned on he has to have sex.

Fact: Men do NOT physically need to have sex after becoming aroused. In fact, rape is not about the need to have sex - it's about the need to hurt, control, and overpower another person. Every man can control his behavior and stop at any time.

Myth: Men cannot be raped.

Fact: It is very difficult for a man to say that he has been raped. Most people do not

believe that a man can be raped because of his physical strength or other gender role stereotypes. However, statistics reflect that men experience sexual violence at an alarming rate. 1 out of 6 men and boys over the age of 12 are victims of attempted or completed sexual abuse or sexual assault. Those same gender role stereotypes that make it difficult for people to believe that a man can be raped also make it difficult for a man who has experienced sexual violence to report what has happened to him and seek help.

Myth: Women who dress sexy are more likely to be raped.

Fact: The way you dress has nothing to do with being raped. Rape is not about sexual attraction it is about power and control. Women who dress in baggy clothes that cover their bodies are just as likely to be raped. Rape is a crime of opportunity, NOT desire.

Myth: It is common for women to "cry rape" to get back at someone.

Fact: Nationally, false reports of rape account for less than 3% of all reported rapes. This false report rate is consistent with all other violent crimes. Most rapes are not reported. Only 54% of rapes are reported nationally.

Myth: If the victim doesn't fight back, it isn't rape.

Fact: Most acquaintance rape victims do not have any physical signs of abuse. Sometimes it isn't safe for the victim to fight back. Only the victim knows what to do during the assault and whatever she or he does to survive is the right thing. However, most people who fight back get away with fewer injuries.

Myth: The majority of rape victims are sexually promiscuous women.

Fact: 1 out of 5 women are victims of completed or attempted sexual abuse or sexual assault. Everyone knows someone who is a survivor of sexual violence. The person you least expect can be a survivor of sexual violence. Rape has nothing to do with sex. Rape is violence using sex as a weapon.

Myth: All men are rapists.

Fact: It is true that most rapes are committed by men. However, the vast majority of men are NOT rapists. All men play an important role in ending violence against women and children.

If you know someone who has been raped...

- Believe the survivor. You might be the first and only person to ever say, "I believe you".
- Tell the survivor that the rape was not their fault. They might need reaffirmation that what they experienced was a crime and not an act of sex.
- Remember rape is not sex! It is an act of power and violence
- Acknowledge that the only person who can prevent rape is the person who chooses to rape. Do not tell the survivor what they could have done differently.
- Encourage the survivor to seek help.