

# Rape Culture: Ending Victim Blaming

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**SASH  
CLUB**

**Students Against  
Sexual Harassment**



# Content Warning

**\*\*SASH Club Power Topics may include sensitive content that may be difficult to present and may possibly be triggering to some participants.\*\***


**You may want to seek the support of an ally during this presentation, especially if you're a survivor of sexual violence.**

# What's Ahead:

- > What is rape culture and how does it impact everyone, especially survivors?
- > What is victim blaming and how does it contribute to rape culture?
- > Why do people victim blame?
- > Why we need to change rape culture and end victim blaming?
- > What we can do to make positive change?

# What is Rape Culture?

- > Widespread false beliefs embedded in society about rape that justify sexual aggression and downplay the seriousness of sexual violence
- > Behaviors include but are not limited to:
  - Victim blaming
  - “Slut-shaming”
  - Sexual objectification
  - Trivializing rape
  - Not recognizing the harm sexual violence causes



Rape culture reinforces the belief that victims are responsible for what has happened to them.

# How Does Rape Culture Impact Survivors?

- Hurts survivors and silences many who want to share their story
- Causes others to think that trauma from the sexual assault is not severe
- Breeds a culture of **victim blaming** where survivors are believed to be responsible for what has happened to them

# How Does Rape Culture Impact Survivors?

Causes our society to isolate survivors of sexual assault, making it less likely for them to:

- Come forward
- Share their story
- Report to police or school
- Seek support

As a result, survivors:

- Are further injured when they can't obtain help
- Experience greater difficulty healing
- Lose the opportunity to see justice for crimes committed against them

# Rape Culture: The Impact

- > In their lifetime:
  - 1 in 5 women experience rape or attempted rape
  - 1 in 6 men experience some form of sexual contact violence
- > Nearly 1 in 8 girls in grades 9-12 report having been raped 1 in 3 girls in middle school report having been forcibly “kissed, hugged, or sexually touched”
  - 1 in 10 report having been “made to do something sexual”
- > People of color, LGBTQ+ people, and those with disabilities are more frequently victims of sexual violence

# Rape Culture: The Impact

- Overall, only one-third of rapes are reported to police
  - Among students, as few as 5% of rapes are reported to police:  
Most survivors do not even tell parents or friends
  - Why? Emotional pain/trauma, shame, fear: of not being believed – of being blamed – of retaliation – of loss of privacy – that nothing will happen
- False reporting of sexual assault to police is very rare
  - Multiple studies conclude only 2-8% of accusations are false, the same percentage as false reports for other felonies
  - Yet 60% of men, and 51% of women, believe that false accusations of sexual assault against men are “very common”



# Talk About It



What signs of rape culture do you see at school, in the community, online, or in music/TV/movies?

How do you think this might impact someone not reporting sexual violence to friends, parents, the school, or the police?

Are you aware of examples of particular races, ethnicities, genders, or orientations being victim blamed?

# Victim Blaming: Definition

- > When a victim is judged and thought responsible, even partly, for an offense committed against them
- > Rape culture contributes to victim blaming in sexual offenses:
  - “They asked for it”
  - “It wasn’t really rape”
  - “They liked it”
  - “They already had sex before”
  - “She has a boyfriend so obviously she’s lying that it was rape”

# More Victim Blaming Examples

- “It’s hard to believe it was really an assault, you don’t have any bruises.”
- “You weren’t screaming or crying afterward, so it must not have happened.”
- “That skirt is too short, no wonder you got raped.”
- “You walked through a dangerous neighborhood, what did you expect?”
- “Why didn’t she fight back? She must be lying.”
- “They were wasted – they deserved it.”
- “Girls like her, when they say no, they mean yes.”
- “You outed yourself as trans on a website, no wonder you were beat up.”

# Talk About It



What other  
examples of  
victim blaming  
have you heard?

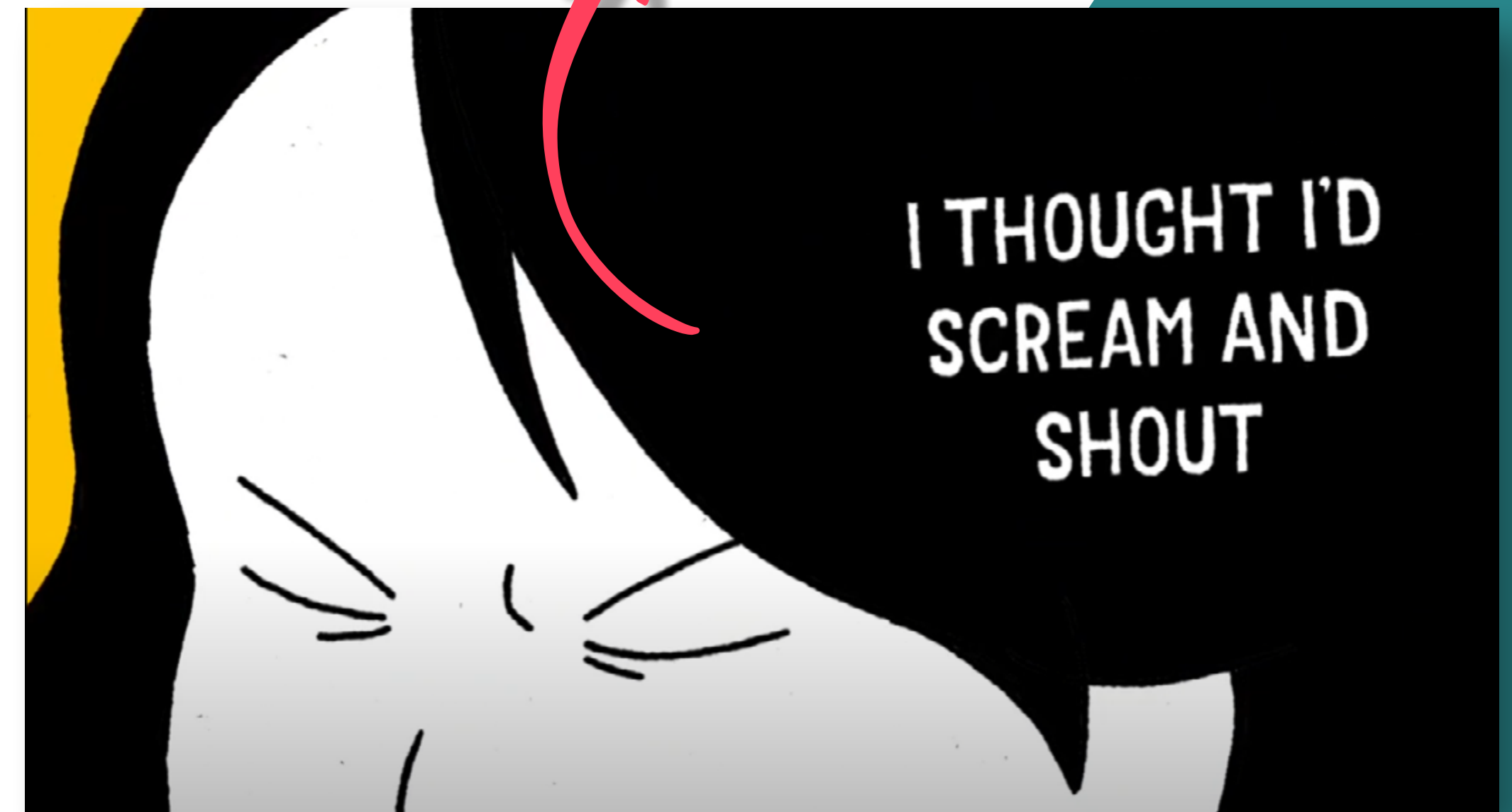
# Truths

- > A victim often doesn't have bruises or other visible signs of physical abuse or struggle.
- > Many victims enter into a state of shock and may appear like a "zombie" afterward.
- > No one asks for an assault. No type of clothing worn, flirting, or being intoxicated excuses rape.
- > Not fighting back or crying out for help does not equal consent:
  - A lack of "no" does not mean "yes"
  - Shock or fear often take over

# 1-Minute Video “Fight or Freeze: I Just Froze”

Here is a short video from Rape Crisis Scotland that challenges common misconceptions that there is a right or wrong way for people to react during or after a rape.

Click to watch



# Talk About It



- Have you ever frozen when something frightening happened to you?
- Beyond freezing, what are other reasons someone might not fight back?

# Why Do People Blame Victims?

- 1 We want to believe that the world is safe, fair, and just; that people get what they deserve**
  - “Good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people.”
  - This belief is challenged when we learn of someone suffering random misfortune.
  - We may therefore feel the victim “deserved it.”
  - We don’t want to believe “this could happen to me” as a way of coping and feeling protected.



# Why Do People Blame Victims?

- 2** When bad things happen to other people, we tend to blame it on their personal faults or poor decisions instead of their environment.
  - But if something **bad happens to us**, we tend to blame it on our environment.
  - And if something **good happens to us**, we tend to credit our own personal strengths.

# Why Do People Blame Victims?

- 3 We don't want to think we are vulnerable.**
  - We blame the victim so that we feel safe.
  - We do not want to feel that we can lose control over our life and our bodies.
  - “She was raped because she walked home alone in the dark. I would never do that, so I won't be raped.”

# Talk About It



What other examples can you imagine for why people might blame someone for something bad that happened to them?

# Why We Need to Change Rape Culture and End Victim Blaming

➤ Taking action to help change false beliefs to end victim blaming can produce:

- More survivors speaking up: Getting support and being supported by friends/family/professionals
- More people believing survivors
- More reporting of offenses: to schools and to police with more cases tried, with more just outcomes
- Others speaking out which can educate even more people
- Future offenses reduced

# What We Can Do to Change Rape Culture and End Victim Blaming

## Start with yourself:

- Examine your own beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.
- Avoid using language that blames victims.
- Do not let stereotypes shape your actions.
- Understand that some populations are more vulnerable to abuse and victim blaming.

# What We Can Do to Change Rape Culture and End Victim Blaming

## Reach out to others:

- Let survivors know that **it is not their fault.**
- Work to be a role model and ally for others.
- Speak up if others reinforce rape culture:
  - » Call out rape jokes, victim-blaming speech.
- Reach out to educate others in the school and community:
  - » Write an article for a blog or newspaper.
  - » Organize a school or community presentation.
  - » Organize a complete campaign with daily education, activities, and commitments from others to work against rape culture and victim blaming.

# Do More:

- In what other ways can you personally change to help end rape culture and victim blaming?
- What other activities for the school or community can you think of to educate others and help change the culture?

# Sources & Acknowledgments

- University of New Hampshire Sexual Harassment & Rape Prevention Program (SHARPP) Webpage: Rape Culture
- The Canadian Resource Center Centre for Victims of Crime: Victim Blaming
- RAINN: Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC)
- AAUW: Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School
- CDC 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Study
- Young, Amy M., et al. “Adolescents’ Experiences of Sexual Assault by Peers: Prevalence and Nature of Victimization Occurring Within and Outside of School”
- The Making a Difference (MAD) Project
- US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics: “The Sexual Victimization of College Women”
- “Ipsos/NPR Examine Views on Sexual Harassment and Assault”



# To Do Immediately if Sexually Assaulted

- > Get away from the attacker to a safe place as fast as you can.
- > Then call 911 or the police.
- > Call a friend or family member you trust.
- > You can call a crisis center or hotline to talk with a counselor.
- > One 24/7 option, for all genders, is the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE(4673).
- > RAINN will connect you with a rape crisis center in your area.
- > Visit the [Survivor Support page](#) for more helpline options and details.

# To Do Immediately if Sexually Assaulted

- > **Preserve the evidence, even if you are unsure you will report.**
- > **Do not:**
  - Wash, comb your hair, or clean any part of your body
  - Brush your teeth
  - Change clothes, if possible, so the hospital nurse can collect evidence
  - Touch or change anything at the scene of the assault
- > **Seek medical attention ASAP at your nearest hospital ER:**
  - You need to be examined, treated for any injuries, checked for possible sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or pregnancy, and can receive preventative medicine.
  - The nurse or doctor will collect evidence the attacker may have left behind.
- > **Ask hospital staff to connect you with a local rape crisis center**

# If You are Sexually Harassed

**It isn't your fault... and you can get help to make it stop.**

- Reach out ASAP to a friend, school counselor or trusted adult for immediate safety & support to bring the issue to your Dean of Students, Principal, or Title IX Coordinator.
- Confidential National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673  
[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)
- Learn about your rights and how to take action on the [Stop Sexual Assault in Schools website](http://StopSexualAssaultinSchools.org)

# Feedback & Suggestions:

SASH Club welcomes your feedback and suggestions on the content of this presentation. Contact us via:

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> Contact an adult advisor with your questions or concerns about local issues.



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