Shattering Rape Culture

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Rape is one of the most under-reported violent crimes. Nearly 80% of rape cases are unreported, according to Justice Department analysis of violent crime in 2016.  
  
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While this is a doleful reality, it is even more disturbing that there are sets of benighted sociocultural attitudes and belief systems about rape that trivialise the depravity and nefariousness of rape.  
  
They enable a society that subtly justifies rape — taking away the blameful focus from the menace to the victim. This has downplayed the exigent attention that sexual violence deserves and bespeaks of the subtle approval of this atrocity.  
  
Having interacted with many rape victims, I observed there was rarely a case without the colourings of victim-blaming. Women get blamed for what they wore, for visiting him, for getting drunk, for going out late, or for their “behaviour”. There’s hardly enough attention on the crime itself — coercion and disregard for consent.  
  
It is bewildering how these unthinking men get to sustain an erection with a crying and traumatised woman. It is never about what she wore; no woman owes a rapist a “decent dressing.” I mean, even women in hijabs get raped. Rape is caused by rapists.  
  
“Men are moved by what they see” is a ludicrous statement used to romanticise how our African society spends more time teaching women how to look demure and shrink themselves than they spend teaching men about self-control. It’s gibberish if men can’t control what “moves” them and must have a seared conscience to not know the value of consent.  
  
Each time society blames a rape victim, the narrative sold is that men are unbridled, and taken over by their uncurbed wanton desires. We are teaching women that men should never be trusted behind closed doors or when secluded. We are fostering the disturbing toxic construct that men are natural disasters that women must avoid.  
  
Victim-blaming births stigmatisation; another stronghold that associates rape with the loss of dignity and fosters rape culture. Most times, when the family of the woman knows she has been raped, she’s cowed into silence. Because rape is largely viewed as colossal damage on her femininity. They mutter things like “Don’t let anyone know you were raped”, “Men won’t value you if they know..”, “It can scare your future husband away…”. Prevalent in the Nigerian society, it’s troubling that these reasonings are based on a woman prioritising the desires of men.  
  
Why must we coerce a woman to internalize trauma because of judgment from a hypothetical future husband? Why should that matter more than her truth? Why must we associate being molested and losing one’s volition with shame? Why must we shame a survivor? If there’s anyone that should live a life of shame, it should be the rapist; the one who defied a woman’s will. Shame on them!  
  
We should not stigmatise rape survivors. They are courageous; they are strong, and they should speak their truth.  
  
Last year, it was a national brouhaha when Busola Dakolo – wife of the popular musician, Timi Dakolo – revealed an account of how the popular pastor, Boidun Fatoyinbo, allegedly raped her many years ago.  
  
Social media was rife with infuriating questions underlining stereotypical expectations of how a rape story should sound, among others. People asked questions like “She claims she was raped downstairs while her sister was upstairs. Why couldn’t she shout?…”. Questions like this delineate how dangerously uninformed and negatively hurriedly conclusion the wider public is on the intricacies and realities of rape.  
  
Pop culture has done so much harm with its portrayal of rape scenes in films. What we often see is a hostile and physically violent scene that involves shouting. People go around expecting this scene to play out in every rape story; analyzing the stories as though they were for their entertainment. Rape doesn’t always involve shouting and aggressive struggling.  
  
Tonic immobility is a state of involuntary paralysis in which individuals cannot move or, most times, even speak. It is an adaptive defense to an attack by a predator when other forms of defense are not possible. A 2005 study by ScientificAmerican found that 52% of female undergraduates who reported childhood sexual abuse reported experiencing this paralysis. Rape accounts should not appeal to your expectations.  
  
Beyond anything, rape is more about a show of ostensible power than it is about sex. It’s a parade of male supremacy and male entitlement; men’s belief that their desires supersede women’s consent.  
  
To view rape in its true colours, we must break these sociocultural attitudes towards rape. There’s strength in speaking up. Rape is solely the fault of rapists! Period! Lead these conversations in your circles and groups, and join the revolution for a saner world for women.  
  
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