



Campus Sexual Assault, Gender, and the Moral Misdirection

Zoë D. Peterson

University of Missouri-St. Louis

Overview

- Common media characterizations of campus sexual assault.
- Gender stereotypes communicated in the media coverage of campus sexual assault.
 - Women as sexually vulnerable.
 - Men as sexually aggressive.
- Implications of those stereotypes for sexual consent.
- Suggestions for changing the conversation.

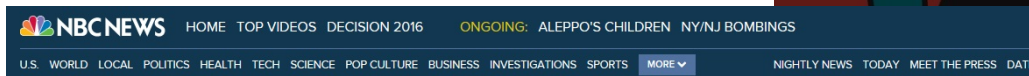
Media Characterizations of Sexual Assault : An Epidemic



CONTRIBUTOR

The Sexual Assault Epidemic Is Real

🕒 08/25/2016 12:51 am ET | Updated Aug 29, 2016



POLITICS > 2016 ELECTION

CONGRESS WHITE HOUSE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT NATIONAL SECURITY ELECTIONS FIRST RE

POLITICS
SEP 14 2015, 1:27 PM ET

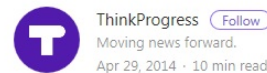
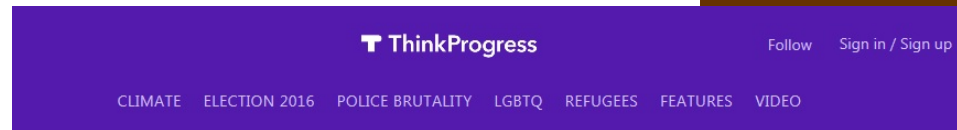
Clinton Pushes Crackdown on 'Epidemic' of Campus Sexual Assault



Is EPIDEMIC correct?

- The problem is common and widespread.
- But there is no sudden outbreak.
 - Earliest research on “forced sex” found rates at least as high as current rates (Kanin, 1957; Kirkpatrick & Kanin, 1957)
- The implication of contagion is problematic!

Media Characterization of Sexual Assault: A Crisis



The College Sexual Assault Crisis Turns A Corner



Here Are The Staggering Numbers Behind The College Sexual Assault Crisis



Is CRISIS correct?

- The problem is serious.
- But the high prevalence of sexual assault *is* the status quo, not a *deviation from* the status quo.
- And our country has not reached a breaking point at which our ability to cope has reached its limits.
 - The Obama administration has made the issue of campus sexual assault a political priority.

Media Characterization of Sexual Assault: A Moral Panic



THE BIG IDEA

Don't Blame the Frats

We've seen moral panics before. They don't end well.

By PEG TYRE | December 15, 2014

TIME

ALL CONTENT

MAGAZINE

VIDEOS

Campus Sexual Assault

Rape Culture is a 'Panic Where Paranoia, Censorship, and False Accusations Flourish'

NATIONAL POST

FINANCIAL POST • NEWS • COMMENT • PERSONAL FINANCE • INVESTING • TECH • SPORTS • ARTS • LIFE • HEALTH •

COMMENT • FP COMMENT • LETTERS TO THE EDITOR • GARY CLEMENT • LIVE COMMENT

FULL COMMENT

TRENDING • Workers Without Borders | Snowden | Trump | Clinton | NY bombs | World Cup of Hockey

Barbara Kay: Rape culture proofiness feeds moral panic over non-existent epidemic

Campus Sexual Assault

LIVING SEXUAL ASSAULT

Rape Culture is a 'Panic Where Paranoia, Censorship, and False Accusations Flourish'



“A condition...emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media...Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight.”

-Cohen (1972, p.1).



Is MORAL PANIC correct?

- The problem is real.
- The consequences are serious.
- BUT the nature of recent media attention does serve to fuel rigid or conservative gender stereotypes and encourage fearful avoidance rather than productive action.

Moral Misdirection

- The sensationalized discourse about campus sexual assault is misdirecting our attention from a productive dialogue about solutions, and instead taking advantage of a very real problem to reinforce morally conservative gender stereotypes.

Women are Vulnerable



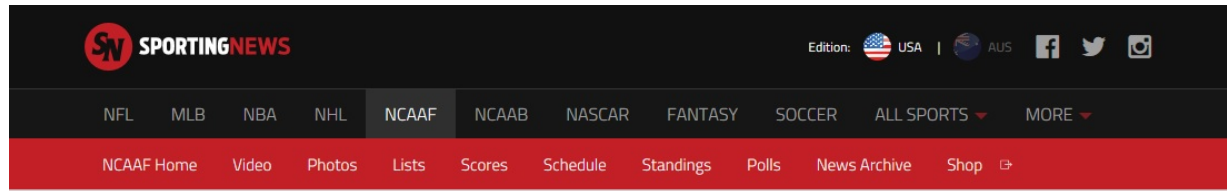
Fear of Rape

- Women's fear of crime is 2-3 x greater than men's fear of crime.
- Men are more likely to be victims of crime than women.
- Women's greater fear of crime as compared to men is attributable to their fear of rape and sexual assault.
- Women fear rape more than any other crime, including murder.
- Fear of crime—and fear of rape specifically—has been shown to be associated with avoidance behaviors.

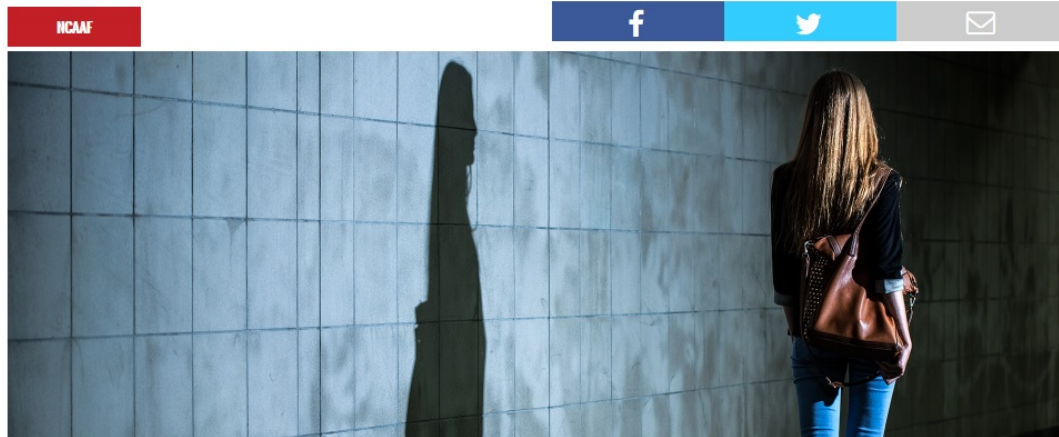
Dobbs et al. (2009); Ferraro (1996); Hilinski (2009); Warr (1984)



Fear of Rape



As a college student, I live in fear of sexual assault



At New Brunswick, New Jersey

Why Sexual Assault Is My Biggest Fear In College



Aug 30, 2016 // At New Brunswick, New Jersey [Follow](#)

We all hope we don't become the next statistic.

Paternalistic Protection of Women



Kasich advises female college student: Don't go to alcohol-fueled parties

By NOLAN D. MCCASKILL | 04/15/16 02:43 PM EDT | Updated 04/15/16 04:32 PM EDT

John Kasich advised a female college student on Friday to avoid parties “where there’s a lot of alcohol” to reduce the threat of encountering sexual violence on campus.

COLLEGE

University Of Missouri Considers Banning Women From Fraternity Houses During Party Hours

© 06/09/2015 03:30 pm ET | Updated Jun 09, 2015

330



Riley Griffin

Campus Editor-At-Large, Duke University



CAPNRI/FLICKR

TRENDING

Donald Trump Fell For Hillary Clinton's Trap At Monday's Presidential Debate



Trump's Debate Performance Was The Worst Ever



10 Times Women





Paternalist Protection: Trigger Warnings

“‘Sleepwalker,’ has become a source of apprehension, fear, and triggering thoughts regarding sexual assault for some members of our campus community,”

-Zoe Magid,
Wellsley junior in a
petition to have the
statue moved inside.





Paternalistic Protection of Women

- Avoiding reminders of a trauma does not protect against PTSD; it is a hallmark symptom of the disorder.
- Avoidance serves to maintain the other symptoms of PTSD.
- Suggests that victims must forever be defined by their sexual assault experience.

Denying young women's sexual desire and agency



SUBSCRIBE



FOLLOW US



TOPICS > [NATION](#) > [NEWSHOUR BOOKSHELF](#)

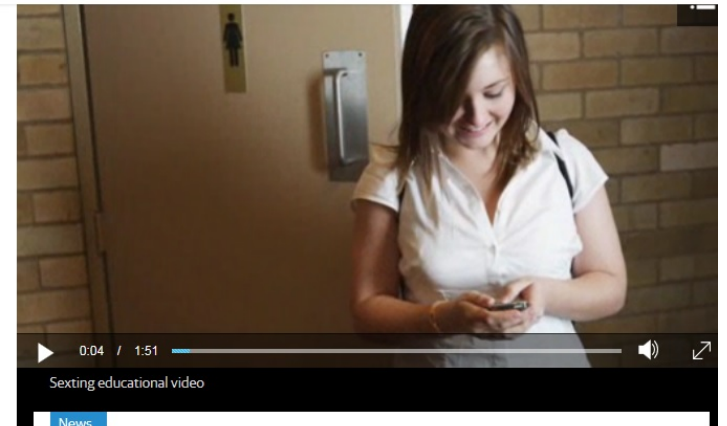
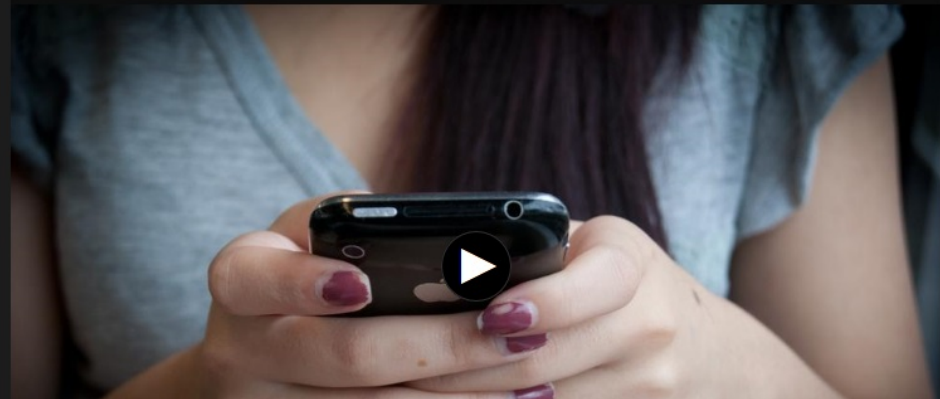
Sex, social media and the pressure on teenage girls

April 4, 2016 at 6:20 PM EDT

SUPPORT FOR PBS NEWSHOUR PROVIDED BY

Herald Sun

[Download this video](#)



Sexting complaints explosion: Girls as young as 13 blackmailed into sending explicit photos

Elissa Doherty, Education Reporter, Herald Sun
September 9, 2016 4:00am



Denying young women's sexual desire and agency

Home » Opinion



MARGARET WENTE

How hookup culture hurts young women

MARGARET WENTE

The Globe and Mail

Published Saturday, Jun. 18, 2016 8:00AM EDT

Last updated Friday, Jun. 17, 2016 4:46PM EDT

PLAYING THE GAME

Most women don't enjoy hookup culture—so why do we force ourselves to participate?





Denying young women's sexual desire and agency

- Fine (1988): “Missing discourse of desire”
 - Sex as inherently violent
 - **Sex as victimization**
 - Sex as individual morality
- Discourses of women desire have not dramatically increased in prominence in the last three decades.



Men are Aggressive?

- Men are conspicuously ABSENT from most of the media attention on campus sexual assault.
- When they do appear, it is usually to highlight the atypicality of male rape.



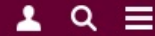
Men are Aggressive?

XXfactor

WHAT WOMEN REALLY THINK

MAY 1 2014 11:58 AM

Slate



Rape Victims Are Common. Rapists Are Not.

By Amanda Marcotte

ThinkProgress

Follow Sign in / Sign up

CLIMATE ELECTION 2016 IMMIGRATION SCOTUS TAX RETURNS FEATURES VIDEO



Tara Culp-Ressler [Follow](#)

Senior Editor at ThinkProgress. Contact me: tculp-ressler@thinkprogress.org

Jun 14, 2013 · 3 min read

How Colleges' Lenient Sexual Assault Policies Allow Serial Rapists To Escape Punishment



NEWS OPINION VIDEO SHOWS
SECTIONS U.S. INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY TECHNOLOGY
TRENDING ELECTION 2016 IMMIGRATION DRUGS SPECIAL

FLAGSHIP BLOG

SHOWS / AMERICA TONIGHT / THE FLAGSHIP

OCT
28
12:00 PM

Serial rapists commit 9 of 10 campus sexual assaults, research finds

by [Dave Gustafson](#) - [@DaveGustafson](#)



Men are Aggressive?

- Lisak and colleagues: Sexual assaults on college campuses are perpetrated by a few “undetected” serial rapists.
- These serial predators are quite similar to violent, incarcerated offenders in terms of their callous attitudes and their repeat sexual offenses.



Men are Aggressive?

'Monster' rapist James Keaney jailed for 12 years

11 December 2013 | Glasgow & West Scotland

Share



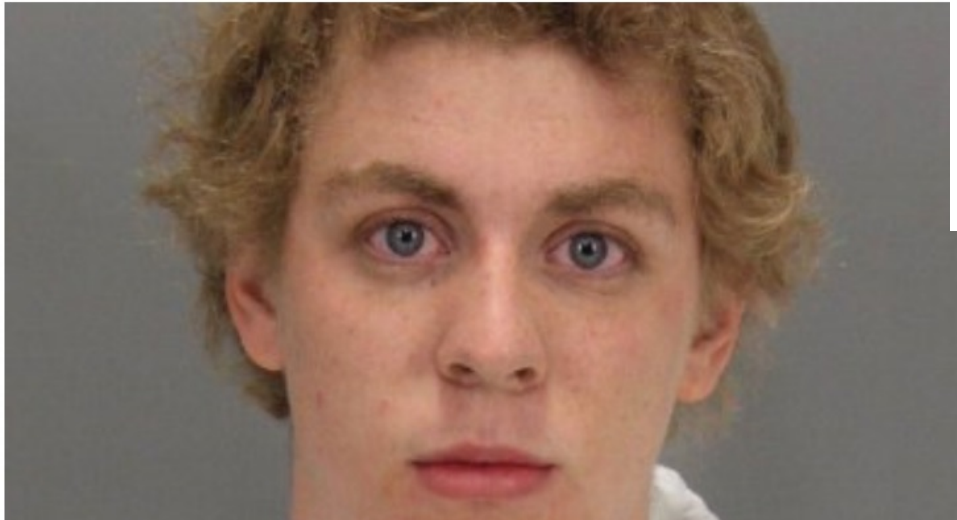
World

The Stanford rape: Is Brock Turner 'a party school monster'?



By Harriet Sinclair

June 7, 2016 13:39 BST



Keaney began abusing the two women after they became pregnant

A security guard has been jailed for 12 years after being convicted of raping and physically abusing two girlfriends.





Men are Aggressive?

- In more recent studies, 30% or more of men report perpetrating sexual assault
- Consistent with the idea that sexual assault is part of a larger rape-supportive culture.
- From this perspective, changing the behavior of men who do sexually assault is possible by changing the culture itself and, perhaps, by training men at risk for perpetration in positive sexual ethics.



Implications of the Moral Misdirection

- The moral misdirection about sexual assault may actually contribute to the very beliefs that underlie the problem of sexual assault.
 - Young women are poorly prepared to effectively communicate what they want/don't want and to resist coercive sexual behavior when they see themselves as exclusively vulnerable and lacking in agency.
 - Young men who accept traditional scripts are more likely than other young men to sexually assault perhaps because they are taught to ignore nonconsent.

Suggestions for Redirecting the Conversation

- Avoid sensationalizing the problem!
 - The co-occurring narratives that rape is inevitable and a fate worse than death create fear in women who are not victims and may promote hopelessness in women that are.
 - Following sexual assault, most women recover on their own within about three months.
 - For those that don't, there are effective treatment options



Suggestions for Redirecting the Conversation

- Reject the “crisis” narrative that leads to a search for the fastest and simplest stopgaps
 - For-profit companies producing online sexual assault prevention programs have taken advantage of the moral misdirection.
 - In peer-reviewed research, brief one-time sexual assault prevention interventions have been shown to be ineffective at best and harmful at worst (DeGue et al., 2014).



Suggestions for Redirecting the Conversation

- Attention on campus sexual assault is at an all-time high!
 - Feminist researchers, educators , and activists need to take this opportunity!
 - We should advocate for what is really needed:
 - Research on the correlates of perpetration and interventions aimed at changing the behavior of potential perpetrators.
 - COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION

Thank you!

Contact me at: peterzon@umsl.edu