



Report from the Friday Night Panel

During the *Feminisms Present and Future*, the panelists discussed various definitions of rape culture:

- a culture in which we are taught that male aggression and violence is an “ordinary” part of how we all interact
- the belief that men are entitled to women’s bodies—ideas like: “women are there for the taking”, “rape makes sense”, or that women who are raped deserve it—these ideas lead us all to believe that rape and sexual violence are natural and inevitable in all our lives
- the erroneous view that women attract violence—by the clothes they wear, or the time they are out at night. This is used not only to justify male violence, but to label women who are perceived as “different”, women who don’t conform, and the message is these women will be threatened with violence,
- rape culture purports that “some women cannot be raped”—such as women viewed as “sluts,” sex workers, disabled and racialized or women, and women who do not fit into models of conventional beauty or desirability
- the idea that there is a difference between real and legitimate rape and “sex gone wrong” which perpetuates the notion that women, and disproportionately marginalized women are, somehow deserving of the treatment they receive and not worthy of equal rights and protections

Consent Culture

“Just believe women. We know the majority of women don’t come forward to the police and may never disclose violence, so when a woman says she’s been assaulted, believe her. Just do this one thing. It’s an easy thing to do.”

- Heather Jarvis, panelist

There is no one solution to rape culture since it is endemic in social institutions, in media, in the way we live our lives. One response is to transform the way we have conversations and respond to sexual violence:

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- we can support a culture that believes women—all women, Trans, Aboriginal and disabled women-- when they say they have been raped or have been subject to violence;
- we can defend women's rights to bodily autonomy and the right to choose what happens to their bodies
- we can defend women's rights to services and support—such as the right to access reproductive health and abortion services across Canada

Creating consent culture is more than simply a question of consent, it is also about ethics and social responsibility for changing rape culture. Such responsibility would:

- acknowledge that rape culture perpetuates misconceptions about violence for everyone and that we must all be accountable changing these beliefs --the belief that when women are raped, it's not that bad, and that men who rape, did nothing wrong—these are prevalent in our culture
- do more than just re-victimize women and criminalize offenders since labels like “perpetrator” and “victim” are equally harmful in terms of who is constructed as deserving the scrutiny of the law, and we know that is often marginalized men and women
- current justice systems actually fail to address violence against women—women often do not report sexual assault because those who do are blamed, held responsible for what happened, or because women are encouraged to see what happened to them as anything but rape; also legal protections, such as protection and restraining orders, may actually cause women to be target of further violence, to be criminalized or deported
- recognize that it is all too easy to label individual men or criminalize whole communities so that these communities are somehow viewed as inherently violent or more violent than others—failing to provide support for perpetrators to end violence and failing to address the systemic causes of violence (such as gender inequity ingrained in institutions like the justice system, and beliefs and attitudes like women are deserving of violence). We need to develop more effective non-punitive approaches to violence. What would it look like to engage in conflict resolution and restorative justice that actually addresses the harm that is done not only to women but entire communities and look to communities for solutions?