

Speak the TRUTH

Myths vs. Facts

Myth (mith)
A fiction or half-truth, esp. one that forms part of the ideology of a society.



THE MYTH :(Sexual assault is a rare occurrence.
Sexual assault doesn't happen around here.
Sexual assault only happens in urban areas.

THE FACT :) The reality is that sexual assault occurs in both rural and urban areas. Victims often choose not to report the assault for a variety of reasons, including fear of being blamed or not believed, fear of retaliation, shame about the nature of the crime or pressure from family or friends. Victims in rural areas may report at even lower rates because of confidentiality concerns due to living in a smaller, close-knit community.

Rapists are typically strangers.
Rapists are frequently deranged or mentally ill.

THE MYTH :(

The idea that sexually violent people are crazy strangers wearing ski-masks hiding in dark alleys is seductive because it allows us to feel safe as long as we lock our doors and stick to well-lit areas. The reality is the vast majority of sexual assaults are perpetrated by individuals known to their victims. They may be friends-of-friends, neighbors, dates, cousins, spouses, parents, teachers, coaches, therapists, or anyone else the victim knows. Because of the relationship that exists prior to the assault, victims are typically more trusting and do not "have their guard up."

THE FACT :)



"You can be arrested for sexual assault. There's no pride in that. But there is pride in letting her make up her own mind. And respecting her decision. **Respect her decision.** *Now that's something to be proud of.*"

Once aroused, men can't control their behavior.

THE MYTH :(

It is insulting to men to claim that they are helpless to control their actions; the implication of this thinking is that every male, given the right situation, could and would commit sexual assault. While it is true that the majority of assaults are committed by males, it is not true that the majority of males are sexually violent.

THE FACT :)

THE MYTH :(Victims bring it on themselves by the way they act or dress. Sometimes forced sex is justified. Some people deserve to be raped.

THE FACT :)

These beliefs build on the idea that men cannot control themselves and put the blame with the victim. It is believed that if only the victim had yelled or run away or hadn't been drinking, or an inmate, or wearing a revealing outfit, or a lesbian, or a prostitute, or gone to his room, or accepted the offer for a ride home, or gone out after dark, or flirted with him, etc., then this never would have happened. The victim is attributed with the power to make others commit crimes. The perpetrator is, again, not held accountable for his or her actions, and is almost considered a "victim of circumstance."

Another consequence of this belief is that women lose their freedom. They are not granted the right to behave in certain ways or to express their individuality; and if they insist on behaving in those ways, then they somehow deserve to be punished and shown their place.

The reality is that perpetrators assault because they feel they **can**, not because they are so impassioned that they **can't help but** sexually assault. Sexual assault is not a crime of spontaneous passion; it is a crime of power. Attractiveness is not a risk factor for being assaulted, but being vulnerable or having less social power is.

"So you pushed her to have sex.
You played her.
You pressured her.
You even forced a little.

**Does that make you feel like a man?
'Cuz you don't look like one to us."**

THE MYTH :(False allegations of sexual assault are common.

THE FACT :) The percentage of false allegations is no higher than for other types of violent crimes, yet the idea persists that people commonly make up stories of sexual assault for petty revenge or personal gain. The reality is that, given the invasiveness, length and difficulty of both the forensic rape exam and a criminal trial, it is a process that very few victims choose to go through, and even fewer people elect to endure it for frivolous claims.

A man can't sexually assault his wife.

THE MYTH :(

Sexual assault can't occur between two people who have had sex before.
Sometimes a person "owes" sex to another person.

The common element in each of these is that a person is perceived as having the right to override the personal sovereignty of another and force them to submit to sexual contact—essentially condoning sexual slavery.

THE FACT :)

Each person has the right to decide if, when, with whom, and to what extent he or she wishes to be sexual. If each party involved in sexual activity does not have that autonomy to freely choose whether or not to participate in the activity, then it is not only abusive but illegal, regardless of whether the individuals are married, partnered, have had sex previously, have been dating a long time, or if one has spent a lot of money on the other.

THE MYTH :(Women can't commit sexual assault.
Sexual assault doesn't happen within lesbian relationships.
Sexual assault doesn't happen within gay relationships.

THE FACT :) We tend to define sexual violence as something done to women by men. As we've established however, sexual violence is less a factor of gender than it is of perceived or real power differences.



"If she doesn't want it,
Stop.
There's no excuse not to.
***And if you're not sure what she wants...ask.
Because real men don't force."***

JUST THE FACTS

If the victim of a female perpetrator is male, there is considerable societal pressure on him to frame the contact as consensual. Boys are “supposed to” want as much sex as possible starting as young as possible; so if a male did not want the sexual contact with a female, his sexuality and virility may be called into question. It is also expected that strong, “real” men are invulnerable to victimization of any kind. For a male to admit to having been sexually assaulted may seem to him like an admission of weakness.

Lesbian and gay relationships, like heterosexual relationships, are not invulnerable to interpersonal violence, including sexual violence. The perpetrator in these relationships may wield the power to “out” their victim or they may use the victim’s own internalized oppression to make her/him feel that they “deserve” to be abused.



THE WILL SET YOU FREE

Sexual assault is commonly misunderstood to be a crime of passion, where men, who are presumed to be biologically unable to control their own sexuality, are provoked into lust by women wearing skimpy clothing and behaving in a sexy manner.

But if you examine the situations in which sexual abuse occurs, there is always a perceived or real power differential. The perpetrator feels entitled to take advantage of another person and believes that he or she can get away with the crime either because the victim will be afraid to tell, or because s/he is unlikely to be believed if s/he does tell.

Each of the misperceptions we have examined serves to protect perpetrators, blame victims, and make all of us more vulnerable.

“Hey girls! We know what’s hot.
When a guy respects a girl enough to ask,
and doesn’t just try to make a move on us.
We don’t want to be persuaded to have sex.
We can make up our own minds.
And when we say no, we mean no.”