

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Rape Culture

Tim Galbraith · Wednesday, July 29th, 2015

Evidence piled higher than mountaintops as far back as 2006 when comedian Bill Cosby, yet then lauded for his philanthropy as much as his jokes, settled a civil lawsuit with Andrea Constand. Even then there was enough smoke to suggest a five-alarm fire. As rumors and questions danced above the crackling flame of fact, no settlement was needed in the court of public opinion; no conviction had. While certainly a legion of longtime fans yearned to give the greatest benefit of the slightest doubt to a man who had been eliciting warm feelings and belly laughs for decades, one can't help but to wonder what sort of society would go to such lengths to deny reaching a conclusion so simple to reach.

Bill Cosby is a rapist, but until a sort of confession recently choked the rumor from the billowing cloud of misguidedly charitable acceptance that had embraced his empty denials, an appalling portion of our family, friends and neighbors tacitly sanctioned his deification. Yet behind the hero-worship, behind the perpetrator who has since fallen from the aforementioned heavenly heights of fame, still another, less obviously culpable culprit exists in this mad caper of a people's unwillingness to do the obvious right thing and serve justice to a very sick man and his victims: rape culture.

Rape culture? What is rape culture?

That's the question I was asking myself recently after apologizing for an insensitive joke I cracked. Although no one addressed the mistake with me personally, eight days after making it I felt a strong conviction that I needed to renounce it. My mouth, often when attempting to say something humorous, gets me in trouble. Personally, I hold very little so sacred that I cannot tolerate, and indeed respect, another person's stab at it. My closest friends and I have bonded over the exchange of our irreverent feelings and ideas. Yet I should know better than to project my tolerance of warped humor on others. I joked about rape, and rape isn't funny. Rape has the power to create and destroy, and yet I haven't met someone who has been touched by it that felt it was something to chuckle about. Rape is too powerful to take so lightly.

But what is rape culture? Wikipedia say that it's "a concept within feminist theory in which rape is pervasive and normalized due to societal attitudes about gender and sexuality." Fair enough, but is the concept really limited by the confines of feminist theory? Rape culture isn't a concept – it's a reality.

Wikipedia goes on to state that "Behaviors commonly associated with rape culture include victim blaming, sexual objectification, trivializing rape, denial of widespread rape, or refusing to

acknowledge the harm of some forms of sexual violence.”

Boom. The third one – that’s what I was guilty of when making that crass, insensitive statement. I’m okay with that. I’ve made my peace with it. I was wrong, and I know it, and I’m earnestly trying to make sure that I’m never guilty of it again. What bothers me is the knowledge that trivialization is not all that I have been guilty of. Objectification? Yeah man. Guilty again; aware again; willing to work to change, again. But denial? Have I been in denial of how widespread the problem is? Have I had the audacity to blame victims? Have I diminished how harmful sexual violence really is? My stomach churns as I wrestle with these questions.

The specifics of the joke I told are less relevant here than the ignorant belief I held that I was making a harmless crack. In my mind there was no target, no one to serve as the butt or bare the sting of functioning as the punchline. If anything, I thought, the joke was on me, as I was the foil, having cast myself as a monster with a wink toward those who “got it” and a finger toward those rubes who didn’t. A week or so and one good look in the mirror later and that wink vanished as I was finally able to put a finger on my own complicity in the fostering of a vile animal which I had lost my desire to feed. Instead of seeing the same twinkle that had been in my eye when I shot that tasteless thought into cyberspace from the safe, insulated confines of my living room recliner, I saw the tears of a woman who bravely shared her experience with rape in a crowded room of the initiated and ignorant alike. With the memory of that moment that she told her story propelling me, back to Google I go.

It doesn’t take a hell of a lot of digging for me to realize that either, yes, I have been in denial, or I’ve been worse; I’ve been apathetic. The problem is widespread. It exists in prisons, manifests itself in the military, and even dominates entire societies. It’s in my own backyard: one is three times more likely to experience it in Flint than the average American city. It happens in White Plains. It happens in Gardena. It happens. And one of the reasons it happens is because there are too many people, like me, who have been content to live in denial, or apathy, and idly allow the perpetuation of a culture that fosters it.

Rape culture is real, alive and well. That’s no joke.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, July 29th, 2015 at 7:24 pm and is filed under [Discourse](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.