

# Connections

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SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAMS

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Mural in Baltimore, Maryland  
Photo by Michelle Kwajafa

## The Parallels of Racism and A Rape Culture



Advocacy for Women  
of Color—Surviving in a  
Rape Culture

Why Do We Have to  
Talk About Racism?

How Rape is Normalized

Seeking Wholeness in  
a Race-Constructed  
World

Building Bridges to  
Promote Cultural  
Competency

The Truth About  
Our Work

20 Things You Can Do  
To Transform the  
Rape Culture

WASHINGTON COALITION OF  
SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAMS



*The Mission of the  
Washington Coalition  
of Sexual Assault  
Programs is to unite  
agencies engaged in  
the elimination of  
sexual violence  
through education,  
advocacy, victim  
services and  
social change.*

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THIS ISSUE:  
*The Parallels of  
Racism and A  
Rape Culture*

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**Managing Editor:**  
Renée M. Sparks  
[renee@wcsap.org](mailto:renee@wcsap.org)

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from the  
**Director's Desk**



Renée M. Sparks

BY RENÉE M. SPARKS  
ADVOCACY EDUCATION DIRECTOR, WCSAP

We have made amazing strides in technology, medicine and science. In this modern age, you can pay \$25,000,000 to be a space tourist. In a time frame as brief as thirty years, we have shifted from room-sized mainframe computers to a technological age replete with portable cell phones, laptops, Blackberries and “big brother watching.” In our homes we have experienced “shock and awe” as the media released headlines connecting civil rights activist Al Sharpton to the late segregationist Strom Thurmond’s family tree. We have witnessed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the declaration of his birthday as a national holiday, and the birth and death of civil rights icon Rosa Parks, a righteous rose of a lady who refused to surrender her seat on an Alabama bus, to be one day honored by the nation and to lie in state in the Capitol Rotunda.

We have hybrid cars, cloning and medical stem-cell breakthroughs. We have seen walls come down and borders go up. We are familiar now with terms such as “multiculturalism”; other terms, such as “melting pot,” are dismissed as irrelevant. Our varied demographics seem to symbolize our national motto: E Pluribus Unum, which means “Out of many, one.” Ironically, however, as the world turns in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we still have not settled a question posed by a man brutally beaten by four Los Angeles Police Officers over fifteen years ago: “Can’t we all just get along?”

Psychologist Dr. Robin Smith said, “We are a country with a hole in its soul.” That hole demands more than a “band-aid” approach. That hole demands that we deal with the root and core of this cancerous infection—racism. As long as we fail to treat this infection, we promote a false sense of equality and stay very far removed from changing the status of privilege in this nation.

Prominent social theorists have acknowledged race as a construct, as opposed to a biological difference, but it is a construct with profound effects. Author Toni Morrison explained race as a “metaphor necessary to the construction of Americanness; in the creation of our national identity, ‘American’ has been defined as ‘white.’”<sup>1</sup> Anthropologist Alan Goodman has said, “Race is not

<sup>1</sup> Takaki, 1998, p. 52–53



based on biology, but rather an idea that we ascribe to biology,” and, according to geneticists, only one out of every thousand nucleotides that make up our genetic code is different; we are among the most similar of all species. My personal response continues to be amazement that with all of our similarities we live in a racialized society.

Our society is enmeshed in rape culture and the sensationalism that is America. And for the most part, we remain in denial of this fact. America must step outside of its ascribed reputation and face its character, because character represents who we truly are. And the truth of the matter is that despite its many positive attributes, our society is imbued with rape culture and racism.

Therefore, this issue of *Connections* presents relevant information and dialogue on the parallels of racism and a rape culture for those of us who work in the anti-rape community and who advocate on behalf of victims and survivors. It is important that we break the silence and begin and continue dialoguing about these parallels to ensure that we continue to strengthen and cultivate a path that leads to social change and social justice. And as we continue on this journey of change, let us remember and be encouraged by the legacy of unsung sheroes and heroes, and glory songs that benchmark the stories of how far we’ve actually come. In so doing, let us also remember that there are unsung sheroes and heroes that daily work alongside us—and that unsung shero or hero could very well be you!



## Strong Branch Weak Tree

We are an extension of a people  
Who were a people  
Even before they marched from slave ships  
To the shores of this land  
Even before they worked from sun up to sun down  
And through the sweat of their labor  
Our ancestors danced, sung and held on  
Our ancestors released potential, cultivated, nurtured, multiplied and  
replenished  
Our ancestors held on

Each generation has left a bridge for the next generation to travel  
And each bridge has had its share of stumbling blocks and hardships  
But our ancestors didn't lose their way  
A mission they were on and they cleared the way

Another generation is up to bat  
Because it's not over yet  
Can't stop now, we've been commissioned  
And in this life we're living, we can afford to miss it  
Our lives, our vision, our mission are on the line  
What's your dream, your purpose, your ambition?  
What are you willing to march onward or die for?  
What active role will your life be noted for  
Strong branch or weak tree,  
Come forth, which do you claim to be?

Harperseed

## WHY DO WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT RACISM?

BY NORMA TIMBANG

Recently, talk-show host Don Imus described members of the primarily black Rutgers women's basketball team as "nappy-headed hos"—causing his termination on CBS radio and the MSNBC simulcast.

### Let's make the connections ...

Part of my job is to provide anti-racism trainings. When I begin my workshops, I ask people to monitor their own feelings about what is being discussed. If they feel discomfort, anger or fear, they are challenged to listen, stay engaged and explore why they are feeling this way. Immediately, I can see people fidgeting, people crinkling their eyebrows, doodling and averting their eyes.

### Why is it such a challenge for us to talk about race in public spaces?

The following are examples of responses I hear when I ask this question in trainings:

- "Aren't we all the same? We're all human beings. Aren't we all just one big melting pot? Isn't that what America is about?"
- "Why do we have to keep talking about this stuff? I'm tired of talking about how different we are. Why don't we talk about what we all have in common?"
- "I just went through a diversity training and feel like I am forced to have these conversations when I don't need to. I don't have a prejudiced bone in my body."
- "I've been through lots of discussions about racism. Why can't we just talk about how to apply this stuff to our work? What application does this have to service provision?"
- "I'm white and I've been in spaces where I am the minority and have been victimized by racism. I feel like I know what it's like."
- "I'm tired of the assumption that I am a racist. I am NOT racist. I was not raised that way!"
- "Some of my best friends are \_\_\_\_." (You fill in the blank. Yes, someone actually said this.)

Guess what? Does it surprise you to know that these are actual comments from white participants?

So what information do we need to know regarding race and sexual assault?

## *The following statistics are from the Oregon Coalition of Domestic and Sexual Violence:*

- In a content analysis of 31 pornographic websites, of the sites depicting the rape or torture of women, nearly half used depictions of Asian women as the rape victim. (1)
- About 9 in 10 American Indian victims of rape or sexual assault were estimated to have had assailants who were non-native. (1997 U.S. Department of Justice)
- Most sexual assaults perpetrated against African American women go unreported. For every African-American woman who reports her rape, at least 15 African-American women do not report theirs. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. department of Justice)
- A study of sexual abuse in the South Asian immigrant community conducted between 1991 and 1996 found that 60% of the women spoke of being forced to have sex with their husbands against their will. (2)
- 90% of Indian women in chemical dependency treatment are victims of rape and childhood sexual abuse. (3)
- Approximately 40% of Black women report coercive contact of a sexual nature by age 18. (National Black Women's Health Project)
- A report from the American Indian Women's Chemical Health Project found that three fourths of Native American women have experienced some type of sexual assault in their lives.
- In a 1994 survey of 243 women, the rates for adult rape showed African American women disclosing the highest rate, followed by white women, Latinas, and Asian Americans. (4)
- Among communities of color, American Indian/Alaska Native women were most likely to report rape victimization while Asian/Pacific Islander women were least likely to report rape victimization. (U.S. department of Justice)
- African Americans have the highest rate of violent victimization of any racial group (31.2 per 1000). (U.S. department of Justice)

[Sources: (1) Gossett, J.L. and Byrne, S. Click Here: A content Analysis of Internet Rape Sites Gender & Society, Vol. 16, No. 5 689-709, 2002. (2) Abraham, M. Sexual Abuse in South Asian Immigrant Marriages, Violence Against Women, Vol. 5 No. 6: 591-618,1998. (3) Henry. Tribal Responses to Violence Against Women. 1998. Presentation to Federal Bar Association Conference, Indian Law Section. (4) Urquiza, A.J. and Goodlin-Jones, B.L. Violence and Victims. 9 (3) Fall 1994: 223-232.]

These statistics are not presented in an attempt to create a racialized hierarchy of victimization. I provide them to emphasize that race is one of the most ignored vulnerabilities of women who have been victimized by sexual assault. Additionally, a great deal of research continues to identify issues of access and barriers to services for women of color. These barriers are part of a larger institutionalized system that perpetuates racist policies and practices.

In "Mapping the Margins," Kimberle Crenshaw writes about higher levels of sentencing for rapists who have raped white women as compared to lower levels of sentencing for rapists who have raped women of color. She also writes about the lack of justice women of color survivors of sexual assault experience because they are less likely to be believed.<sup>1</sup>

The 2002 Community Voices Report identified that resources for "communities of color and other marginalized communities" were disproportionate to services for majority communities. Unfortunately, these disparities are perpetuated by our current system of funding, law enforcement and criminal justice responses, and service provision. Unfortunately, these continued resource and access disparities are indicative of an institutionally racist system.

Why do service providers have to continue to talk about race? Because institutionalized racism exists.

Aren't we all the same? No, we are not. We must acknowledge individual identities and honor each person's cultural values. If we were all the same, racist institutions would not exist.

Can't people of color be racist against me because I am white? In the context of discussions of anti-racist and culturally relevant service provision, we need to understand institutionalized racism. This means that there are institutions that exist which were created by a white, dominant and privileged people—the race that was intended to benefit from these institutions. When thinking about institutional racism, we can also imagine how this impacts a person of color's level of vulnerability and mobility. For instance, people of color are more likely to be followed in a store because of racial profiling.

Why do I have to talk about racism when I have already been to a "diversity training"? Because learning about racism, culturally relevant service provision, and how to work towards social change is a lifelong learning process, not a one-shot deal.

<sup>1</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberle, *Mapping the Margins*, "Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement," pp 357-383. K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, K. Thomas, Eds. The New Press. NY, NY. 1995.

*Why do service providers have to continue to talk about race?*

*Because institutionalized racism exists.*



*Aren't we all the same?*

*No, we are not. If we were all the same, racist institutions would not exist.*



Resisting discussions of race puts distance between us and the values of the movement against violence against women. Distancing behaviors include minimization of racist comments and lack of attention to people who have been victimized by racism—not unlike the minimization and victim-blaming that happens when someone is sexually assaulted. Denying that institutionalized racism exists is like denying that sexual assault exists.

### What does it mean to be a white ally in the struggle against racism?

- Being a white ally means we actively seek out opportunities to change an institutionally racist system.
- Being a white ally means that you challenge people's racist comments.
- Being a white ally means you help build people of color leadership.
- Being a white ally means that you value and are committed to self-exploration of white privilege.

### A couple of my favorite examples of white ally thinking and action:

A white male friend of mine came to me after a meeting and said, "I had a lot to say in there, but made sure I limited how much I talked because I felt I had the most privilege in the room."

A white woman service provider came to me and asked for advice on developing culturally relevant services. "We have services, but women of color are not coming in." This woman and her co-workers received technical assistance on cross-cultural, anti-racist program development which helped to increase access.

A white woman friend of mine said to me once: "You know, when I first came to this country, I got rid of my accent. But, when I leave this room, I am still white. When you leave this room, you are still brown."

Another white woman friend of mine told me that she gave up a job offer to the next person in line because she found out that she was a woman of color with similar qualifications and expertise.

Yes. Imus needed to be fired. His racist and sexist remarks victimized women of color. The organization who fired him took one major step against racism.

Yes. We need to understand how these disparate systems prevail and take aggressive action to change the system.

Yes. We need to continue to talk about race.

Yes. We need to challenge our fears and anger about talking about race.

Yes. For white allies, this requires an understanding of privilege.

Yes. For all of us, we need to continue working in coalition and inquiry regarding best ways to honor each other in the work.

Why?

Because we are here to serve all people who have been victimized.

We are here to serve change.

*Norma Timbang provides private consulting on community program development, evaluation and cross-cultural services development for grassroots social-change organizations and community-based human services providers. She is one of the founding mothers and the former executive director of Asian & Pacific Islander Women & Family Safety Center in Seattle, and former executive director of Asian Pacific AIDS Council. She has worked with the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues, the Ford Foundation's publication on Asian women's issues and concerns, and the Washington State Task Force on Human Trafficking. She has served on the Minority Executive Directors Coalition, a national steering committee on queer Asian women-to-women violence, and the Violence Against Women online resources advisory board, and currently serves on the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum. Additional current projects include research on bride trafficking, Seattle grassroots youth programs and Washington's statewide response network to human traffic.*

BY MARCIE ROBINSON

For many in society, the perception of domestic and sexual abuse has existed as White women's or poor women's issues, but research does not support those perceptions. According to the Bureau of Justice statistics, African Americans experience rape and sexual assault, robbery and aggravated assault at higher rates than other races (Bureau of Justice, 2001). Additionally, African American women are more likely to suffer the most severe violence in comparison to other groups (Williams, 1997). The risk of sexual assault is heightened even further for low-income and poorly educated women of color. Not only must African American victims of sexual assault face racism and sexism, they must also confront societal images of themselves that not only perpetuate the violence, but also serve as barriers to sexual assault services. Experts agree that while many victims share painful similarities in the cycle of violence, African American victims, and African American women in particular, face staggering cultural and racial odds.

Destructive images and unrealistic expectations contribute to the physical, emotional and sexual abuse of African American women. They have been chronicled as long-suffering victims, fueling society's perceptions of them as passive and vulnerable to abuse. Barbara Smith, a feminist scholar, summed up this thought with her quote, "... it is not something we have done that has heaped this psychic violence and material abuse upon us, but the very fact that, because of who we are, we are multiply oppressed," (White, 1994). Despite a history that includes heroines like Oprah Winfrey, Maya Angelou, Barbara Jordan and Marian Wright Edelman, images of African American women are often reduced to self-sacrificing servants, sexually irresponsible predators and domineering "bitches." Assistant Professor Carolyn West of the University of Washington-Tacoma identifies three representations of African American women: Mammy, Sapphire and Jezebel (1997). These images can perpetuate the victimization of African American women.



Awareness  
of personal  
biases and  
acceptance  
of cultural  
differences  
can break  
down racial  
barriers.

The Mammy image originated during slavery in the South and defined an African American woman as an asexual, obese older woman with large breasts working in servitude. Her primary role was to be a subordinate who happily performed her domestic duties with a broad grin and no expectations of payment (West, 1997). Prissy, who “didn’t know nothin’ about birthin’ no babies” in the movie *Gone With the Wind* is an example of this societal image of African American women. The Mammy image contributes to African American women’s struggle and shame surrounding their physical features such as skin color, hair texture, and weight, which are all contradictions to the White beauty standards. These sensitive subjects can be used as grounds for humiliation during verbal attacks to exert control over the women. African American women experience low self-esteem and believe they have few options to leaving abusive relationships or reporting sexual assaults.

The Mammy image further contributes to the strained role expectations for African American women. They are expected to fulfill multiple roles without having their own needs met and to endure the abuse caused by relatives, spouses, boyfriends and others in their environments. Furthermore, they experience extreme amounts of loyalty to their abusers and feel pressure to endure the abuse rather than place their violent husbands or boyfriends in the criminal justice system. Some church members and community leaders encourage the abused African American woman to keep her family together despite the violence, linking their sensitivity to this negative depiction of women. Advocates and other service providers under the influence of this image overestimate the African American woman’s ability to cope with abuse and believe African American women are accustomed to adversity (West, 1997).

African American women portrayed as Sapphires are seen as bitter, hostile, dangerous and threatening to authority. Men can view violence towards Sapphires as an option for punishment for the defiant behavior of the African American women. Often, African American women will come to believe that the assault or abuse is deserved because of their own behaviors. Others may try to distance themselves from this image by becoming less assertive and more encouraging to male dominance. West pointed out that this leads to self-blame and false illusions of control over violence (1997). The Sapphire image can also cause an African American woman to underestimate her need for protection, emotional support and medical attention caused from an assault. She may feel she can handle it (abuse) because her mother and sisters did before her. Advocates and other service providers that support this myth can characterize African American women in this role as mutually combative and violent and overlook them for services.

The image of Jezebel can historically be traced back to White slave owners who used rape, forced breeding and the sale of slave children to exert control over African American women’s sexuality and reproductive activities (West, 1997). This sexual stereotype encourages sexual exploitation of African American women and the construction of an image that characterizes them as aggressive predators and sexually irresponsible. Under this image, society can believe that African American women cannot be victims of sexual assault or rape as they are constant seekers of sexual pleasures and provoke the violence

with their immoral ways. Men who perpetuate the Jezebel image see African American women as always-willing sexual partners and use violence when the woman resists. Community members and advocates who have internalized this Jezebel stereotype believe an African American woman has some fault in the sexual assault because “she got the man all riled up” (West, 1997).

The power of images should not be underestimated. The media, music videos, literature and films have presented these three representations of African American women in many combinations: highly maternal, family-oriented, argumentative, seductive and promiscuous. The long-standing myths and images of African American women only continue to yield insensitive responses to sexual assault victims of color. Awareness of personal biases and acceptance of cultural differences can break down these racial barriers. Dispelling the myths about African American victims will aid in reaching out to these victims and serving African American communities.

#### RESOURCES

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*Reprint permission granted by Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape, a grassroots, women-run collective working towards a violence-free world by providing anti-oppressive, feminist peer support to survivors of sexual violence through support, education and activism.*





# JUSTICE

I'm not America's illegitimate child  
And for the life of me  
I don't understand why people of color  
Are scrutinized to the third degree

I don't give up my birth rights to you  
My blood bleeds red and my flesh cuts too  
There's no doubt about it  
I'm a human being just like you

I'm not asking for your handouts  
But, I just can't be taken out  
With that old stereotypical, bias, ignorant  
Infested racism stemming from that old  
Deep south Jim Crows law

You got that!  
'Cause I ain't no sell out  
As for me, I ain't caught up in that role  
All I want is due justice,  
I want it right now, right here on earth

I want what my foreparents wanted  
Goodwill, equality and peace  
And I aint calling nobody massa to get it  
Cause, you see, I's been set free

My God ain't no earthly vessel  
And he sure ain't no made up tree  
My God is too high for you or me to formalize  
And in due time we all will see  
That these standards of injustice  
Are beyond you and me.

I'm telling you straight from the voice of truth  
Dehumanization must die at the root  
Because your prosperity will not remain  
In stolen pleasures and stolen grain

Your thieving hands and lying hearts  
Will come back to overtake you  
And should you choose to remain ignorant  
And indignantly justify the lie.

Mercy will abandon you,  
And your peace  
Lord, have mercy  
Your peace,  
Will pass you by.

Harperseed

## ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN OF COLOR—

# Surviving in a Rape Culture

BY NORMA WARD-SLEDGE

What do we have in common?  
Will she understand what I am going through?  
What does she know about working with a woman that looks like me?  
Can I trust her?  
What is she going to think of me?  
Is she going to think it was my fault and blame me?  
Will she understand what I am trying to say?  
Has this ever happened to her?

These and so many other questions come into the minds of women of color who seek advocacy services.

It is essential that cross-cultural efficacy, diversity and ethnicity are kept in the forefront when providing services and working with women of color who are impoverished. As an advocate or service provider, you need to always be aware of how culture shapes beliefs, influences behavior and determines what is and what is not appropriate.

Women of color are often reluctant to report violence-related incidents, or to obtain services or help, based on myriad beliefs ranging from believing that problems should be handled within the family or within your own religious community, concern for her or her partner's immigration status being discovered, to feeling pressured to keep silent rather than hand her man over to the system. Advocates need to be mindful of the fact that some women are not allowed to speak about what has happened to them—many may *not* see this as an opportunity to empower themselves and instead view this as a time for shame and silence.

Another aspect to keep in mind when working with women of color is the role that religious or spiritual beliefs may play in their lives. The church can influence how women are perceived in the community. While faith communities can provide support and help to sexual assault victims/survivors, they have historically played a role in condoning sexual violence by encouraging women to remain in abusive relationships and holding them accountable for their own victimization. It is important to learn about the different religious practices and belief systems in the area where you work.

There are particular issues that affect a woman of color's vulnerability and her response to being sexually assaulted. Institutionalized racism presents a set of shared commonalities for all women who are not white and who have been victimized. There is a historically dysfunctional relationship between minority persons and the criminal justice system. "The distrust by African Americans can be traced back to slavery and Reconstruction when criminal justice agents were used to support the slavery system and continue 'slavery' long after its abolition. Hispanics and Latinos have often viewed the police as oppressors who use immigration laws to harass them." (*Breaking Down the Barriers*, "Minority Community Victim Assistance: A Handbook," National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, prepared by Elsie L. Scott, Veda M. Shamsid-Deen, Andrea Black Wade). Various commonalities of these populations include a strong tie and commitment to family, religious values and/or spiritual beliefs, self-blame, previous experience with discrimination in the "system," systemic racism, distrust of the legal system and of health-care professionals, and a lack of responsiveness to victims of color. The victim is more likely to tell a friend about the assault than tell a professional.

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The use of sexual violence against African American women dates back to slavery. It was a way to maintain control and to guarantee submissiveness. During slavery, the rape of enslaved women by white men was common and legal. The rape of a black woman was not even considered a crime, even when rape became officially illegal; however, rape laws during Reconstruction from 1865 to 1877 made rape a capital offense only for a Black man found guilty of raping a white woman (Deb Friedman, 1979, "Rape, Racism and Reality," Quest 1).

Growing up in the African American community, you often heard that "you don't air your dirty laundry in public" and that you "don't take your business to the street." Intimate family issues were not shared outside of the house. In my work with survivors from the African American community, the church has often played the role of "family advocate" and the family minister may be the only other person who is privy to family issues or secrets. History has shown us that at the suggestion of the church, the victim was often not allowed to speak and could be sent away to stay with other family members, possibly in another state, so as to not bring "shame to the family" or until a final decision had been made. Today, in many families, this is still the norm. With the growing number of survivor groups, support networks, sister circles, and even chat rooms where your experience can be shared with others, and you can begin the healing process, it is unfortunate that many victims still remain isolated.

African American history, again, shows women teaching their children that they are strong and should not complain. It is important for advocates to recognize these and many other defense mechanisms these victims have developed in order to survive. For many, this is learned behavior, it has been passed down from generation to generation; therefore, it is important to respect a victim's survival techniques and to "meet her where she is"—to make her feel comfortable when she decides to share. *Be respectful to her, listen without judgment.*

Working with Latina women incorporates working with women from many different cultures: Mexican, Central American and South American. Keep in mind that all Latinos do not have the same Spanish dialect. Many speak English in varying degrees. Just because an advocate speaks Spanish does not mean that she/he understands the culture in which the victim or survivor lives. (Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance)

In my work with Latina survivors, I have observed their reluctance to address the issue of sexual assault. Their belief may be that the assault was their fault, that they are now "damaged," particularly if they have had no sexual experience before the assault. "In many Hispanic/Latino cultures, a woman or girl who loses her virginity to rape, incest or molestation is seen as a 'promiscuous' woman." (Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, *Sexual Violence Awareness Fact Sheet: Hispanics/Latinos*.) "In the Latino community, there is the 'blame the victim' mentality. Staying silent is all too common in the Latino community." (Juarez, Cassandra, *LatinaStyle Magazine* and "A Journey Through the Penumbra, Rape's Shadow"). Many Latinas

are taken advantage of by their perpetrators and suffer ongoing harassment and threats of deportation. This tactic is often used to silence the victims and hinder them from seeking help. Many will isolate themselves from friends and family. They do not discuss personal issues outside of the family or in public. The Catholic heritage of many Latinos can be seen as a roadblock to women speaking out about their sexual assault. When working with a Latina victim, family is important; it is rare that on her first visit she will come alone. Many married Latinas are less likely than other women to immediately define their experiences of forced sex as rape and are hesitant to terminate their relationship; some view sex as a marital obligation. (Bergen, R. K., 1996, "Wife Rape"). *Be respectful to her, listen without judgment.*

Many American Indian women rely on their culture and their native healers to offer assistance in dealing with sexual victimization and other problems before seeking outside assistance. They have spiritual and cultural resources that consist of unique cultural ceremonies that are an important resource for a woman healing from sexual victimization. These can include sweat lodges, talking circles and other rituals such as purifying with the smoke of sacred herbs.

When providing services to Native women, recognize that there is a strong history of discrimination, which may make them hesitant to share fully; when possible, try to have a Native American advocate at your facility and be accommodating to the family that has accompanied her; be open and flexible. A Native American woman may have deep-rooted distrust of white agencies and help providers that stems from a history of social and personal oppression, making it more difficult for her to report her crime or seek help. (National Congress of American Indians Resolution #TUL-05-101, Paragraph 21, Pg. 4).

The Violence Against Women Act 2005: Title IX Tribal Programs cites the fear of being ostracized by her family and tribe, along with complicated jurisdictional issues, further inhibits Native American women from reporting their victimization. It is also important to remember that all indigenous people are not the same; there are numerous tribes in this country. *Be respectful to her, listen without judgment.*

Building trust is mandatory when working with women of color and recognizing how they prioritize a situation that occurs in their lives. For many of them, violence and trauma has become an accepted part of their lives. It is important to keep in mind that these women face a variety of personal issues. All women experience the same array of feelings, anxiety, depression, anger and shame. A woman's willingness to reveal violent relationships and to participate in family violence or sexual assault advocacy services is driven greatly by her life experiences and circumstances. All women who are victimized respond differently to their own experiences.

*Norma Ward-Sledge holds a master's degree in counseling and psychology, with an emphasis on chemical dependency. She has worked with women and families, focusing on substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault and family reunification, for over 25 years. She is certified to work in domestic violence and sexual assault services and is a Registered Addiction Specialist. She also trains service providers to effectively work with victims and their families. Ms. Ward-Sledge is a member of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Oakland Bay Area Chapter.*



**e**verybody talking,

But I wonder who's really listening?

We talk about change

We sing about change

And some folks, like me, even write about change

But, too many of us choose not

To sacrifice or commit enough

to bring about change.

Too many of us choose to live our lives

Carelessly and aimlessly

And never contribute to change.

We talk about freedom,

Then walk as slaves

Enslaved to envy, jealousy,

And hypocrisy

Some thinking they are better than others,

So they become self-righteous,

critical, and downright judgmental of some.

It's time out for polluted solutions

When we face the rough edges in life

And just complain and do nothing...

Harperseed

## 10 THINGS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RACE

Our eyes tell us that people look different. No one has trouble distinguishing a Czech from a Chinese. But what do those differences mean? Are they biological? Has race always been with us? How does race affect people today?

There's less—and more—to race than meets the eye:

1. **Race is a modern idea.** Ancient societies, like the Greeks, did not divide people according to physical distinctions, but according to religion, status, class, even language. The English language didn't even have the word "race" until it turns up in 1508 in a poem by William Dunbar referring to a line of kings.
2. **Race has no genetic basis.** Not one characteristic, trait or even gene distinguishes all the members of one so-called race from all the members of another so-called race.
3. **Human subspecies don't exist.** Unlike many animals, modern humans simply haven't been around long enough or isolated enough to evolve into separate subspecies or races. Despite surface appearances, we are one of the most similar of all species.
4. **Skin color really is only skin deep.** Most traits are inherited independently from one another. The genes influencing skin color have nothing to do with the genes influencing hair form, eye shape, blood type, musical talent, athletic ability or forms of intelligence. Knowing someone's skin color doesn't necessarily tell you anything else about him or her.
5. **Most variation is within, not between, "races."** Of the small amount of total human variation, 85% exists within any local population, be they Italians, Kurds, Koreans or Cherokees. About 94% can be found within any continent. That means two random Koreans may be as genetically different as a Korean and an Italian.
6. **Slavery predates race.** Throughout much of human history, societies have enslaved others, often as a result of conquest or war, even debt, but not because of physical characteristics or a belief in natural inferiority. Due to a unique set of historical circumstances, ours was the first slave system where all the slaves shared similar physical characteristics.
7. **Race and freedom evolved together.** The U.S. was founded on the radical new principle that "All men are created equal." But our early economy was based largely on slavery. How could this anomaly be rationalized? The new idea of race helped explain why some people could be denied the rights and freedoms that others took for granted.
8. **Race justified social inequalities as natural.** As the race idea evolved, white superiority became "common sense" in America. It justified not only slavery but also the extermination of Indians, exclusion of Asian immigrants, and the taking of Mexican lands by a nation that professed a belief in democracy. Racial practices were institutionalized within American government, laws and society.
9. **Race isn't biological, but racism is still real.** Race is a powerful social idea that gives people different access to opportunities and resources. Our government and social institutions have created advantages that disproportionately channel wealth, power and resources to white people. This affects everyone, whether we are aware of it or not.
10. **Colorblindness will not end racism.** Pretending race doesn't exist is not the same as creating equality. Race is more than stereotypes and individual prejudice. To combat racism, we need to identify and remedy social policies and institutional practices that advantage some groups at the expense of others.

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## Seeking Wholeness in a Race-Constructed World

BY SUZANNE PLIHCIK, DISMANTLING RACISM WORKS

I seek meaning and always have, as far back as I have memory. While this “will to meaning,” as Victor Frankl called it, has, from time to time in my life, been replaced by a will to power (job, position, title) or a will to pleasure (travel, food, material things), the need for meaning always returns and informs my deepest self. I do not believe I am alone in this; rather, I believe “a will to meaning” is what we all seek and when it is replaced, sublimated or just plain ignored, we cease to be whole.

As a white woman living in a racist society, my “will to meaning,” my wholeness, is challenged by the racism I carry. That sometimes conscious, often unconscious, racism that tells me I am not socially and culturally powerful, that people of color are not suffering because of their race and that my privilege and prosperity are earned, while at the same time my personal pain and suffering neutralize the effects of systemic oppression.

In other words, the legacy of racism is a powerful distorter of reality. As a white woman, I can choose to live in that distortion, but if I do, I will damage both the work I do and create an inner conflict, or cognitive dissonance. For when I believe that everyone is fully human, that we are all one, that justice must prevail, but behave in ways that contradict those beliefs, even unconsciously, my humanity is compromised in the tension of that inconsistency.

As a white woman, I have advantages I can choose not to see. Almost nothing happens to me because I am white. I am not followed in stores unless I act suspiciously, my points of view are most often listened to unless I am being particularly ridiculous, and I never fear the police even when I have been speeding or otherwise disobeying the law. The negative things that might occur in my life do not occur because of my race. It is possible for me to go through life seeing myself as normal, average, in possession of human rights, not privileges. When I choose not to see my privilege, I can then deny my power in a society where white is the dominant culture and there will be no consequences for me. This denial causes me to misrepresent who I am, not to mention who others are. For in this country, I do have power that People of Color (POC) do not experience. It is indeed a privilege not to have to think about my race as I navigate the systems and institutions of this nation—or simply the highways.

Reflecting on my privilege, becoming conscious of it, makes me begin to see that if I do not understand my own reality, I can not be true to myself. When I can see that I am privileged in relation to People of Color, even when I may be oppressed in other ways—class, gender, religion, age—I can begin to address the power dynamic between me, as a part of the collective called white, and People of Color. With more reflection, I can even begin to see how the very existence of racism, putting me in the collective that targets People of Color even when it is not my intent to do that, diminishes my humanity.

In a country where our systems were in place by the time we had the Constitution of the United States and most of our institutions were in place before the Supreme Court ended legal segregation (*Brown vs. Board of Education*), our systemic and institutional legacies are racist. They could be nothing else, as they were created by and for white, wealthy citizens. And while I did not do this (being slightly under the age of Thomas Jefferson and the founding mothers and fathers), I have none the less inherited it and benefit materially, socially and culturally everyday from its lasting influence. Therefore, when I challenge

injustice of any kind, the outcomes I produce will disproportionately advantage white people if I am not addressing race. Not because I am without care, good intent or intelligence, but because I live out the racism built into our systems and institutions in my work, if I am not consciously and intentionally anti-racist.

My challenge is: I have never lived in a non-racist country, and I was never taught growing up that, for every oppression suffered by People of Color, I received an unearned benefit. This has come as startling, unwelcome news in my adult life. Yet it answers so many questions and informs my search for wholeness and meaning beyond what I could have imagined. I find myself on an expedition of sorts and suddenly as I learn to sort through the lies, denial and racist propaganda I can see a new vision of wholeness. And somewhere along the road, I realize this is not, after all, about me but an opportunity for me to be a part of a movement for justice and to find, in the small part I am to play, who I really am.

Without similar realization among those of us who have come to be called white, the movement to end sexual assault is threatened with going the way of other movements for justice. Not only will white, mainstream advocates tend to apply the approach they know and understand that too often benefits white, often middle-class women and disadvantages women of color, but lacking a systemic race analysis will impact our ability to create sustainable change. It has been said that being white in the United States is like being a “fish in water”—we don’t know we’re wet. As people working for justice, it is now incumbent upon us to know we are wet and to study the nature of wetness. It is heartening to see and know so many women in the movement to end sexual assault addressing racism. Your activism, resistance and leadership are to be commended. It is often threatening to even raise issues of race, and for those of us who have come to be called white, our journey is never complete. We will need to remember that no individual has ever become anti-racist alone, and just as individuals need to be in collectives to change and grow, so do organizations. As anti-sexual assault agencies, you could not be better positioned. Hope lies in our ability to stay on the journey together.



# Rape is Normal

BY ROBERT JENSEN

It is not surprising that we want to separate ourselves from those who commit hideous crimes, to believe that the abominable things some people do are the result of something evil inside of them. But most of us also struggle with a gnawing feeling that however pathological those brutal criminals are, they are of us—part of our world, shaped by our culture.

Such is the case of Richard Marc Evonitz, a “sexually sadistic psychopath,” in the words of one expert, who abducted, raped and killed girls in Virginia and elsewhere. What are the characteristics of a sexually sadistic psychopath? According to a former FBI profiler who has studied serial killers, “A psychopath has no ability to feel remorse for their crimes. They tend to justify what they do as being OK for them. They have no appreciation for the humanity of their victims. They treat them like objects, not human beings.”

Such a person is, without question, cruel and inhuman. But aspects of that description fit not only sexually sadistic psychopaths; slightly modified, it also describes much “normal” sex in our culture.

Look at mass-marketed pornography, with estimated sales of \$10 billion a year in the United States, consumed primarily by men: It routinely depicts women as sexual objects whose sole function is to sexually satisfy men and whose own welfare is irrelevant as long as men are satisfied.

Consider the \$52-billion-a-year worldwide prostitution business: Though illegal in the United States (except Nevada), that industry is grounded in the presumed right of men to gain sexual satisfaction with no concern for the physical and emotional costs to women and children.

Or, simply listen to what heterosexual women so often say about their male sexual partners: He only seems interested in his own pleasure; he isn't emotionally engaged with me as a person; he treats me like an object.

To point all this out is not to argue that all men are brutish animals or sexually sadistic psychopaths. Instead, these observations alert us to how sexual predators are not mere aberrations in an otherwise healthy sexual culture.

In the contemporary United States, men generally are trained in a variety of ways to view sex as the acquisition of pleasure by the taking of women. Sex is a sphere in which men are trained to see themselves as naturally dominant and women as naturally passive. Women are objectified and women's sexuality is turned into a commodity that can be bought and sold. Sex becomes sexy because men are dominant and women are subordinate.

Again, the argument is not that all men believe this or act this way, but that such ideas are

prevalent in the culture, transmitted from adult men to boys through direct instruction and modeling, by peer pressure among boys, and in mass media. They were the lessons I learned growing up in the 1960s and '70s, and, if anything, such messages are more common and intense today.

The predictable result of this state of affairs is a culture in which sexualized violence, sexual violence and violence-by-sex is so common that it should be considered normal. Not normal in the sense of healthy or preferred, but rather an expression of the sexual norms of the culture, not violations of those norms. Rape is illegal, but the sexual ethic that underlies rape is woven into the fabric of the culture.

None of these observations excuse or justify sexual abuse. Although some have argued that men are naturally sexually aggressive, feminists have long held that such behaviors are learned, which is why we need to focus not only on the individual pathologies of those who cross the legal line and abuse, rape and kill, but on the entire culture.

Those who find this analysis outrageous should consider the results of a study of sexual assault on U.S. college campuses. Researchers found that 47 percent of the men who had raped said they expected to engage in a similar assault in the future, and 88 percent of men who reported an assault that met the legal definition of rape were adamant that they had not raped. That suggests a culture in which many men cannot see forced sex as rape, and many have no moral qualms about engaging in such sexual activity on a regular basis.

The language men use to describe sex, especially when they are outside the company of women, is revealing. In locker rooms one rarely hears men asking about the quality of their emotional and intimate experiences. Instead, the questions are: “Did you get any last night?” “Did you score?” “Did you f--- her?” Men's discussions about sex often use the language of power—control, domination, the taking of pleasure.

When I was a teenager, I remember boys joking that an effective sexual strategy would be to drive a date to a remote area, turn off the car engine, and say, “OK, f--- or fight.” I would not be surprised to hear that boys are still regaling each other with that “joke.”

So, yes, violent sexual predators are monsters, but not monsters from another planet. What we learn from their cases depends on how willing we are to look not only into the face of men such as Evonitz, but also to look into the mirror, honestly, and examine the ways we are not only different but, to some degree, the same.

Such self-reflection, individually and collectively, does not lead to the conclusion that all men are sexual predators or that nothing can be done about it. Instead, it should lead us to think about how to resist and change the system in which we live. This feminist critique is crucial not only to the liberation of women but for the humanity of men, which is so often deformed by patriarchy.

Solutions lie not in the conservatives' call for returning to some illusory “golden age” of sexual morality, a system also built on the subordination of women. The task is to incorporate the insights of feminism into a new sexual ethic that does not impose traditional, restrictive sexual norms on people but helps create a world based on equality not dominance, in which men's pleasure does not require women's subordination.

*Robert Jensen is a professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin and co-author of “Pornography: The Production and Consumption of Inequality.” He can be reached at [rjensen@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:rjensen@uts.cc.utexas.edu). Reprint permission granted by Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape. TRCC/MWAR is a grassroots, women-run collective working towards a violence-free world by providing anti-oppressive, feminist peer support to survivors of sexual violence through support, education and activism.*



# The TRUTH About Our Work

BY CATHERINE A. CARROLL, WCSAP LEGAL DIRECTOR

As invisible to most as our rape culture is—so is racism. I believe that the parallels of rape and racism are quite profound. I do not believe one could exist without the other because they both exist and thrive in our societal landscape of oppression. By ignoring or denying their parallels, we continue to cultivate the oppressive landscape in which we live and work.

When prejudice and negative stereotypes about women and people of color live in the minds of individual people, particularly those men and women who hold positions of power, those biased, prejudiced and false beliefs permeate the systems in which we live and work. The tangible impact of those false and prejudiced beliefs is largely manifested as social norms that serve to legitimize forms of oppression within our systems of government, education, social service delivery and our laws as well as the private sector.

This institutionalization occurs within agencies that are working for social justice—and in our case, those working to end sexual violence. None of us is immune from the environment and social paradigms that frame our very existence—no matter how versed we are at identifying, critiquing and rejecting those forms of oppression. To deny this truth is to espouse enlightenment akin to Gandhi. It also serves to perpetually keep us from truly accepting that skin color, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, culture and class do pose differences—wonderful differences that should be recognized, celebrated and understood as part of the richness of human beings. In contrast, however, these differences are used as reasons, justifications, and finally systematic weapons of war to devalue, marginalize, objectify and even kill one another.

One of the great privileges I enjoy in my position at the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs is working with a staff and board that is largely very tuned into these issues and very concerned about how our work to end sexual violence relates directly to ending racism, sexism, classism and other forms of oppression. I am not suggesting that “we” are enlightened by this shared value, but rather that we all agree that there is much work to be done in order to be truly anti-racist and anti-oppressive in the movement to end sexual violence.

In my experience, to work at being anti-oppressive is much more than an intention. It is more than a commitment. It has to become a way of being—which, for those of us who do not experience oppression on a daily basis (which I don’t), it certainly can become easier to talk than walk. I have consciously created a work/life balance that insulates me from being subjected to sexism. Because I am surrounded by strong, powerful and very conscious women, I often do not experience sexism. But when I drive down the street, turn on the television or answer the phone and find myself talking with another advocate or a survivor, I am quickly reminded of what plagues us and prevents us from ending rape. It is sexism. It is sexism that says women are liars, women are revengeful and women are less credible than men. Let’s not forget, it is the reason we only make seventy four cents on the dollar to what men earn.

As a lawyer, I observe and often respond to the overt oppression or gender bias that I see rape victims experience. It is pretty clear to me they experience such prejudice



simply because they are female. I also see how a woman is further oppressed if she is poor or Black, or of limited English proficiency. Just like anywhere else, in the legal world there is a compounding of oppressions. However, it is masked by what many legal professionals refer to as objectivity. Everywhere else it is masked by social norms and denial.

From the courts to legal pleadings and judicial opinions, the arguments and legal analyses conducted by lawyers, prosecutors and judges are often full of oppressive undertones. Sometime the racist and sexist attitudes and beliefs are quite overt and full of righteousness. Last year we worked on an amicus brief (a friend-of-the-court document) arguing to the Supreme Court of Washington that as a matter of law (not fact) a thirteen-year-old girl cannot be held at fault for being sexually abused by her teacher—no matter what she did or did not do. Thankfully, our high court agreed. However, quite disturbingly, the argument was that she was a liar, that she kept the “relationship” secret and then denied it when confronted. These arguments are not new and are an attempt to pathologize female teens as manipulative, seductive, sophisticated and, most importantly, on equal footing with their much older male teachers and coaches.

Sadly, many states do hold women and girls at fault for their own victimization and have apportioned fault to them (e.g. reducing a damages claim by the percentage of fault the victim was assigned). I may be cynical, but it is difficult to imagine this type of fault being apportioned to a heterosexual male rape victim, no matter how much alcohol he may have consumed prior to the assault.

The longer I work in this field the more I see how rape myths literally inform everyone and everything. Our work to dispel these myths in the media, in the courts, in the schools, and in our communities and systems of government is righteous and powerful. Confronting rape culture is fundamental to changing it. Indeed, confronting all forms of oppression help us as we strive to end rape. Oppression exists because it comes from the same place in the minds of individuals, within our beliefs, not our hearts. Whether it is a prejudice towards women or Muslims or African American young men, it is that place in the minds of individuals that we must focus our resources. In doing so, we are better able to understand and speak to all forms of oppression. This requires that we understand the connectedness of rape and racism and are prepared to change how we walk—not just how we talk.

Working to end sexual violence, I believe, requires that we have a broad understanding of rape and its parallels to all forms of oppression. It is understanding that power and control exist in larger systems and that the power and control that gets exerted in abusive relationships or in a sexual assault all stem from the same beliefs and belief systems that cultivate the oppressive landscape in which we exist. If we change the beliefs, we can change the landscape—and wow, wouldn’t it be beautiful!

*We must be the change we wish to see in the world.*

— Mahatma Gandhi

*Catherine A. Carroll, J.D., has worked in the field of domestic violence and sexual assault for 13 years. She has worked with abused women incarcerated in the San Francisco County Jail, with the California Coalition for Battered Women in Prison, the California Alliance Against Domestic Violence, Bay Area Women Against Rape, and WOMAN Inc. in San Francisco. Formerly, she was a staff attorney at the Support Network for Battered Women and at the Family Violence Law Center, both in California. Prior to her move to Washington State, she was the Director of Legal Services at STAND! Against Domestic Violence in Contra Costa County, California. Ms. Carroll graduated from New College School of Law in San Francisco and is licensed to practice law in California and Washington. Since 2002, Ms. Carroll has been the Legal Director at the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs.*



## 20 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO TRANSFORM THE RAPE CULTURE

1. Speak up. Don't listen quietly to sexist jokes or comments. Tell your friends you're uncomfortable with how they portray women.
2. Teach your children to respect children of the opposite gender. Model for them that each sex has an immeasurable value and that neither should be seen as better, more powerful, smarter, than the other.
3. Talk to boys about their sexuality. Tell them about their responsibility, too.
4. Talk to girls about their sexuality. Give them the information that will enable them to make intelligent, thoughtful, responsible decisions about their sexuality. Tell them their body is their own and is for their pleasure.
5. Support your daughters, nieces and neighbors. Encourage them to relish their mental and physical strength.
6. Don't be silent when you see a T-shirt, sign, poster, movie, or anything you find offensive to women. Say something.
7. Insist that your clergy talk about ending violence against women in your church or synagogue.
8. Don't use words that perpetuate the language of the rape culture. Ask yourself if you would use the same word for a man. Ask yourself what the word you want to use implies.
9. Call your public officials. Find out what they're doing to transform the rape culture. Insist on their involvement.
10. Boycott movies that show women being sold, raped and hurt by men. Help send a message that these portrayals of women will no longer be commercially successful.
11. Ask at your child's school if there is a sexual harassment policy. If not, volunteer to serve on a committee to develop one.



12. Encourage men you know to explore and then act upon what it means to be anti-rapist and non-violent. Insist they have the courage to behave in ways that promote a safer society.
13. Make your home free from violence and sexism. Don't watch or allow your children to watch television, movies or read magazines that perpetuate violence and the rape culture.
14. Ask your employer if your firm or organization has a sexual harassment policy. Have they provided or will they provide training for employees on harassment? If not, form an employee committee to advocate for a policy and training.
15. Write letters to establishments you find offensive and tell your friends and colleagues to do the same. Write to companies and marketers that use offensive materials in their advertising campaigns. If there is no response, be prepared to take more direct (non-violent) action through information picketing, flyering, etc.
16. Have conversations of consent with a potential sexual partner. Verbally explore each other's comfort level with the activities taking place.
17. Learn to say "no." Learn that it is okay to be assertive. Know that it is possible to be respectful of others while asserting your feelings.
18. Support and promote women who provide positive role models. Celebrate the accomplishments of women with your children, partners and friends.
19. Remember: the rape culture is one for which we're all responsible, but don't blame the victim.
20. Dare to dream of a culture free of sexual and all other forms of violence ... a rape culture transformed.



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WASHINGTON COALITION OF  
SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAMS  
2415 Pacific Avenue SE  
Olympia, WA 98501

360.754.7583  
360.709.0305 TTY  
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