



PEEL INSTITUTE ON  
VIOLENCE PREVENTION

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## International Women's Day – March 8

### RAPE CULTURE

The concept of patriarchy holds promise for theorizing violence against women because it keeps the theoretical focus on dominance, gender and power. It anchors the problem of violence against women in social conditions, rather than in individual attributes. In 1963 feminist author and activist Betty Friedan captured extraordinary attention with her book, *The Feminine Mystique*. She struck a chord for many readers and a nerve among her critics. She wrote about "the problem that has no name", the unhappiness and dissatisfaction experienced by many women in their roles as homemaker, mother, and feminine wife. At its source, she argued, was patriarchy— notions of privileged males resonated with the daily experience of many women, especially in the middle-class in Canada.

Inspired by *The Feminine Mystique*, and by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1948, translated into English in 1953), as well as by Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) a growing number of women across the western world, including women in Canada, launched a significant activist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Women's Liberation Movement aimed to empower women in both their private and public lives. This second wave feminist challenge staged public protests, producing iconic images that were easily consumed on television screens and often sensationalized. They challenged assumptions about conventional roles for women and the "normalcy" of patriarchy, leading to the establishment of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women on Canada's centennial year. The focus of the movement was women's sexual rights. <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/histpostconfederation/chapter/7-10-the-second-wave-of-feminism/>

The recent women's movement focus on violence against women as the root cause of women's oppression. Within the culture of violence against women, rape culture is a sociological concept that has taken global resonance in recent months. It stems from patriarchal notions in which men systematically hold more power in governments and society than women, who are often excluded. Rape culture refers to an environment where rape is pervasive and normalized by socially accepted notions of gender and sexuality, and victims are made responsible for their safety. It pressures women to sacrifice freedoms and opportunities to maintain safety. The loss of freedom and opportunities are considered to be the inevitable fate of women, while men are allowed to thrive on the benefits. Men are also victims of sexual assault and rape; however, the majority of people most affected by rape and rape culture are women.

Several social movements have emerged to resist rape culture and the idea that women are responsible for their safety, such as "Take Back the Night" and SlutWalk rallies. The former started in the 1980s. The latter began in Toronto in 2011, after a police officer suggested that women stop dressing like sluts to avoid sexual violence. Some women participating in these rallies dress as "sluts," wearing revealing, sexy attire such as short skirts and halter tops. This type of attire has become the signature dress code of these events. A more recent movement is the organized flash mob dance, performed to the music and lyrics of "A Rapist on your Path." The campaign started in Chile in November of last year and has since become a global phenomenon.

In this issue of the Peel Institute on Violence Prevention's newsletter, you will find more information on rape culture and the social movement "A Rapist on Your Path."

### A Rapist on Your Path

*Patriarchy is a judge who judges us for being born  
and our punishment is the violence you don't see.  
It's femicide, impunity for my murderer,  
it's disappearance, it's rape.  
And it wasn't my fault, where I was, or how I was dressed.  
The rapist is you, the rapist is you. It's the police, the judges,  
the state, the president.  
The oppressive state is a macho rapist.*



Last fall, a Chilean protest song about rape culture gained worldwide popularity and became a viral anthem for feminists around the world. The song, in its original Spanish version, is called "Un Violador en Tu Camino". Translated to English, it reads as "A Rapist on Your Path", "A Rapist on Your Way", or "The Rapist Is You". The song was composed by a Chilean feminist collective called "Las Tesis", or "The Theses" in English. They created the song and dance based on the insights of feminist anthropologist Rita Segato from Argentina. The lyrics denounce the state's role in the worst forms of gender violence, namely rape, disappearances and femicide. The anthem condemns the difficulty in tracing these crimes, as evidence is buried under a layer of silence.

"A rapist on your path" was first performed in the port city of Valparaiso, Chile, on November 20, 2019. Over a few weeks, the song was replicated hundreds of times all around the world. Videos of flash mob performances have gone viral. Performances have been staged by women in Paris, Barcelona, London, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Ankara, New Delhi, Bogota, Lima, New York, Berlin and Milan. Feminists around the world quickly adopted the song and dance moves because of the compelling way the lyrics address **violence against women**, a global Public Health issue. According to data from the United Nations, a third of all girls and women will suffer physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.

**The Rapist is you:** <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/feb/03/the-rapist-is-you-chilean-protest-song-chanted-around-the-world-un-violador-en-tu-camino>

### Rape Culture and How to Combat It

The concept of rape culture is complex. It is difficult to understand it without viewing examples of how it is portrayed and continually reinforced within society. Rape culture is implicit. It refers to cultural practices that tolerate and make excuses for sexual violence. It encompasses how society collectively thinks about rape. Although both men and women are susceptible to sexual violence and rape, it is crucial to recognize that rape culture is a product of a patriarchal system in which women are viewed as being subordinate to men. The statistics of male perpetrators and female victims are disproportionately higher than the numbers of female perpetrators and male victims, regardless of the combination.

Society tends to reinforce ideas that make rape culture acceptable. For example, the idea that women feel less safe walking alone at night than men strengthens the cycle of fear that constantly surrounds women. People blame victim behaviour, such as how someone is dressed. Phrases are commonly used, such as, "She was asking for it." In contrast, sexual assault and violent behaviour are trivialized by such statements as "Boys will be boys." This language attempts to excuse violent behaviour and reinforces victim-blaming. Society's definitions of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman further underpin rape culture. Characteristics of "manhood" are defined as being dominant and sexually aggressive, while "womanhood" is described as being submissive and sexually passive. Initiatives taken to prevent sexual assault through education, focus on advising women to take measures to prevent rape, rather than men being told not to commit rape.

With the prevalence of rape culture in society, there are several ways in which both men and women can combat its effects:

- Always take rape claims seriously.
- Understand rape culture and how it works: Locker-Room talk, victim-blaming language, the notion of sex as being an entitlement for men.
- Always call someone out: When you hear anyone using language that objectifies women, that blames or passes judgment on victims, or that justifies rape in any way, make sure to speak out.
- Create a culture of enthusiastic consent: Never assume consent from your partner/potential partner's behaviour to their agreeing to some sexually charged interactions, or to their deciding to go with you to a private place. If it is not an enthusiastic, "Yes", it is not consent.
- Listen to survivors: More survivors are coming out and telling their stories. They need to know that they are heard, seen, and believed.
- Be an active bystander: Every time you see a woman receiving unwanted sexual attention, assess the situation and figure out what kind of support you can provide, from asking the victim of harassment if she needs help, to call the police or a security guard. Many online resources can help with understanding what you can do to help in different situations.



Source: <https://www.marshall.edu/wcenter/sexual-assault/rape-culture/>



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