“ACQUAINTANCE RAPE AND DATE RAPE ARE MORE COMMON THAN LEFT-HANDEDNESS OR HEART ATTACKS OR ALCOHOLISM”
(Warshaw, I Never Called It Rape)

“When I was about sixteen, I went out on a date with a guy I knew from school. We went to the movies and afterwards he wanted to go for a ride. There was still time before I was supposed to be home, so I agreed.

He drove into the country singing with the radio. He pulled a beer out from under the car seat and started drinking it. He offered it to me. I said, “No thanks.” I was sort of surprised, but didn’t want to make a big deal out of it. Suddenly he turned down a small dirt road and stopped. He turned to me and pulled me over to him. I didn’t know what to say and he acted like it didn’t matter anyway. I tried to pull away from him but he wouldn’t let me. Then I got scared and said, “What are you doing?”

He said, “What do you think I’m doing? You wouldn’t have come here with me if you didn’t want it.”

I started for the car door but he grabbed my arm so tightly it really hurt. I was afraid he would hurt me even more if I didn’t do what he said. He raped me and then drove me home.

I didn’t tell anyone because I was too ashamed. My parents had told me not to talk to strangers and to never let a guy take advantage of me. Nobody had told me it was rape if you knew the guy.

I tried to forget about it.”

WHAT IS DATING VIOLENCE?

Dating violence is any sexual contact without mutual desire and consent, where the victim knows the assailant either casually or intimately. Acquaintance rape is intercourse that results from emotional blackmail, verbal pressure, or bargaining in which “No” will not be accepted as an answer. It is a victim submitting out of guilt, fear, confusion, or embarrassment – it is believing there is no choice.

Each year an estimated 500,000 women are the victims of some form of sexual assault. Friends and acquaintances commit about half of those rapes and intimates commit an additional 26% (National Crime Victimization Survey, 1995). Studies show that as many as 1 in 4 college women is a victim of rape or attempted rape at least once during her four years at college (Journal of American College Health, 1990).
Fifty-seven percent of all sexual assaults occur during a date (Acquaintance Rape: The Hidden Crime, 1991) and 90% of date rapes involved alcohol (National Collegiate Date and Acquaintance Rape Statistics, 1996). Seventy-five percent of male students and 55% of female students involved in acquaintance rape had been drinking or using drugs (National Women’s Study, 1992)

Diane E.H. Russell interviewed 930 women for her book Rape in Marriage (1984). She discovered that 14% of the women had been victims of rape or attempted rape by an acquaintance, 6% by a lover or ex-lover, 12% by a date, 3% by a boyfriend, and 6% by a personal friend.

Dating violence often masquerades as seduction, with the perpetrators rarely feeling they’ve done anything wrong. They believe that pressure is a legitimate way to get what they want from an acquaintance/date. Date rapes often occur as a result of misunderstood sex role behaviors and/or communication styles. People who regard sex as “scoring” and are aggressive often believe “No” can be changed to “Yes” with more persuasion or force.

During the 1984-1985 school year, Dr. Mary Koss oversaw a survey of more than 6,000 students at 32 colleges. Forty-three percent of the males in the survey admitted using violence to get sex while 27% admitted using lesser degrees of physical or emotional force (National Survey of Inter-Gender Relationships).

In a 1986 survey at UCLA by Neil Malamuth, 30% of the males said they would commit rape if they knew there was no chance of being caught. When the word “rape” was changed to “force a woman into having sex,” the percentage of men who answered yes rose to 50%.

In a survey of high school students, 56% of the girls and 76% of the boys believed forced sex was acceptable under some circumstances. A survey of 11-to-17 year-olds found:

- 51% of the boys and 41% of the girls said forced sex was acceptable if the boy “spent a lot of money” on the girl
- 31% of the boys and 32% of the girls said it was acceptable for a man to rape a woman with past sexual experience
- 87% of the boys and 79% of the girls said sexual assault was acceptable if the man and the woman were married
- 65% of the boys and 47% of the girls said it was acceptable for a boy to rape a girl if they had been dating more than six months.


The following are the percentages of male students who believe the named action means a woman is willing to continue sexual activity even though she says “No”

continues to be affectionate…………………………………42%
doesn’t put up a fight………………………………………9%
apologizes and isn’t angry…………………………….…..7%
seems drunk…………………………………………….…..4%
one of the above………………………………………..53%

The following are percentages of female students who believe the named action means a woman is willing to continue sexual activity even though she says “No”

continues to be affectionate…………………………….39%
doesn’t put up a fight…………………………………….14%
apologizes and isn’t angry…………………………….….7%
seems drunk……………………………………………..5%
one of the above………………………………………..55%

(Who’s Who Among American High School Students Survey, 1992)

These surveys and studies illustrate the ubiquitous nature of violence towards women, especially in a relationship setting. According to these numbers, many people still believe that “No doesn’t really mean No.” It is still believed that it is the woman’s sole responsibility to stop the sexual behavior rather than putting part of the responsibility back on the man. And what is even more unsettling is the prevalence of victim blaming. Regardless of their gender, a majority of the individuals polled believed the victim was to blame for the rape.

Attitudes like these are what keep many victims from reporting sexual assaults. Estimating rates of violence against women, particularly sexual assault and other incidents which are perpetrated by intimate offenders, continues to be a difficult task. Many factors inhibit women from reporting these victimizations both to police and to interviewers, including the private nature of the event, the perceived stigma associated with the victimization, and the belief that no purpose will be served in reporting it (National Crime Victimization Survey, 1995). The FBI estimates that only 37% of all rapes are reported to the police (NCVS, 1996).

THE VICTIMS

Individuals aged 16-24 are at the greatest risk for dating violence.

Acquaintance rape is most traumatic for those who are young and/or sexually inexperienced. People who have not been involved in long-term relationships may develop a distorted image of sex. This can lead to a regression, rather than a growth of self-esteem and personal identity.
The impact on teenage victims can be severe. They often experience feelings of guilt and responsibility. They believe it must have been their fault if things got out of hand or if the offender got the wrong idea. They may feel conned or cheated. Though they may not believe what happened was rape, they feel they didn't want the sexual activities to happen. They question why they “bought” the lines that led to the sexual activities. All of this leads to feelings of disorientation, humiliation, guilt, helplessness, anger, and a lack of self-respect and control. Most importantly, the assault results in a questioning of the ability to judge situations and people at a crucial stage in personal development. The lack of trust that results in themselves and others can be long-lasting and severe. Through the experience of humiliation and anger, the victim may lose confidence in the ability to make judgments or to trust anyone or anything. The question that remains for the victim is “How do I know the good guys from the bad?” Unfortunately, the answer is generally unknown.

The freshmen year of college is an especially vulnerable time for young people, with the chances of victimization most likely to occur on a second or third date with a peer. The Red Zone of danger is the period of time between move-in day and the first holiday break. Again and again, women are raped during these weeks by men they meet on campus. These women are good targets because they do not know campus routines or geography, they are feeling insecure and alone, yet may be eager to test the limits of a parentless society by drinking heavily and partying enthusiastically. Individuals who appear vulnerable and passive are often victimized by perpetrators who perceive relationships as a game with a little aggression as a normal part of the game.