

WAGON

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WAGON Editorial

Jillian Adams and Sarah Lavorgna

The Women and Gender Studies Organization (WAGON) is a student group affiliated with The Women and Gender Studies Program at the University of Colorado at Boulder. WAGON is committed to bringing positive social change to our community on and beyond the CU campus. Every year WAGON coordinates events, guest speakers and charity drives at CU. The organization is still young but hopefully as it grows will grow in impact as well. We decided that one way to spread a feminist voice would be through student writing. This is what led us to create the first newsletter released by WAGON. With the publication of this newsletter, WAGON intends to bring awareness to persisting feminist concerns such as sexism, racism and classism.

This first issue focuses on sexual violence and rape, perhaps the widest reaching mechanism used for continued male dominance. According to the *Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network* website, an estimated one in six women will endure an attempted or completed sexual assault in their lifetime—that is approximately 2,500 women on the CU-Boulder campus alone. If you have not been affected personally by sexual violence, then surely your mother, sister, friend, or someone else around you has. WAGON hopes that the following articles will not only provide awareness and knowledge on sexual violence, but will also further act as a means of empowerment.

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WAGON members from left to right: Emily Williams, Sarah McCullar, Kris Mayer, Natalie Tsantes, Lindsey Tagen, Manaslu Bista, Brittany Burton, Jillian Adams, and Jonni Vonburg

Did you know...

Lindsey Tagen

- 1 in 6 women will be the victim of attempted or completed sexual assault in their lifetime
- College age women are 4 times more likely to be sexually assaulted
- Every 2 minutes someone in the U.S. is sexually assaulted
- 17.7 million American women have been victims of attempted or completed sexual assault
- Victims of sexual assault are 3 times more likely to suffer from depression, 6 times more likely to suffer from PTSD, 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol, 23 times more likely to abuse drugs, and 4 times more likely to contemplate suicide
- 60 percent of sexual assaults are not reported to police
- Only 6 percent of rapists will ever spend a day in jail
- Approximately 73 percent of rape victims know their assailants
- In 2008 there were 40 reported rapes in the city of Boulder, with only 6 arrests made
- In 2008 there were 105 reported sexual assaults in the city of Boulder
- In 2008 there were 11 total reported sexual offenses on campus, 10 in 2007, 19 in 2006, 29 in 2005, and 19 in 2004

These statistics were gathered from the Rape, Abuse and Incest Network www.rainn.org, the City of Boulder website www.bouldercolorado.gov and the University of Colorado's Police Department website www.colorado.edu/police/statistics/crime-reports.html.

Rape Avoidance vs. Rape Prevention

Manaslu Bista with Kris Mayer

Rape education can take many forms and cover many topics. A 'Women's only class' was held on Monday, 4th of April, 2009. Dr. Marti Hopper, the Prevention Education Director for MESA (Moving to End Sexual Assault) was the main speaker of the presentation who first gives us a brief idea on the 24 hour sexual assault hotline and other essential information on rape crime and its victims.

What we found most interesting about the information she gave on the 24 hour sexual assault hotline was that rape victims do not have to deal with the police at first but instead can have themselves checked out. We think that this information is very important because it encourages rape victims to step forward and go through a standard medical checkup which is an essential procedure if the case goes to court.

Her main argument of the presentation, however, was that although women daily try to protect themselves from rape, either by avoiding walking late at night or by carrying a pepper spray with them, these are nevertheless not acts of rape *prevention* but rather of rape *avoidance*. 'Rape prevention', as she puts it, can only be achieved when rape is completely stopped, when rape would only be present in the books of history. Dr. Hopper stresses the fact that rape can only be undermined when the practice of men viewing women, as sexual objects and objects of violence comes to an end. Finally, Dr. Hopper, successfully connected these two ideas of how undermining rape can be prevented by changing the way men perceive women by showing a mini video, the 'Undetected Rapist', a research carried out by Dr. David Lisak.

In "The Undetected Rapist," Dr. Lisak tries to disconnect a prevalent rape paradox that is especially common on college campuses. Many of the men interviewed on the video did not realize that some of attempts they made to have sex with women accounted to levels of sexual assault and violence. If they did realize at some subconscious level that their behavior was wrong, they attempted to downplay the severity of their actions by placing blame on the victim, claiming that the victim must have understood what was going to happen. These levels of assault or violence might be, purposely intoxicating the women to have sex, forcing them successfully but gradually, holding them down or even choking them. The interviewed men minimized their actions by placing responsibility and blame, by insisting that the women understood what they were getting into, even when reality contradicted their assertions.

This presentation was very informative. It presents a completely different view of rape than we are normally taught; that change in men's way of perceiving women and sex is more important than simply avoiding rape. There are several ways to build on the knowledge that was presented, such as reading books that specifically deal with subject of various rape myths and how to counter them. Good places to start are books such as *Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Power and a World Without Rape* by Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti, and *Politics of Rape* by Diana Russell, as well as websites such as MESA (www.movingtoendsexualassault.org) and RAINN (Rape Abuse and Incest National Network) (rainn.org). Awareness by far, is one of the most powerful tools we have for bringing about a better tomorrow.

Rape Prevention or Mere Blame Shifting?

Sarah Lavorgna

It is common, especially on college campuses, for women to be bombarded with tips, specialized classes and speakers that teach about rape prevention. We have all heard the strategies and precautions *women* must take to protect themselves from becoming a victim of rape. Many prevalent anti-rape discourses for women include not being out late at night (especially by yourself), not drinking too much at parties, and even carrying pepper spray on key rings. But this current strategy puts no responsibility on *men* to prevent rape.

To illustrate the fact that many prevalent anti-rape discourses only expect women to be the actors in rape prevention I typed "rape prevention tips" into Google to see what popped up. In doing this I was looking to expose the most common and accessible discourses that are available. I am in no way criticizing prevention strategies promoted by respectable organizations such as MESA, which unfortunately are in the minority. After browsing many websites I came to a conclusion that most of them contained the same material. I picked one to demonstrate my point.

One of the leading experts in travel safety, Kevin Coffey, has a whole page on his website about rape prevention. He advocates **SAFETY**, which stands for **S**ecure your car and home, **A**void unsafe situations and strangers, **F**lee if you are in a potentially dangerous situation, **E**ngage in passive or active resistance, **T**hink and **Y**ou are responsible for your own safety. Anti-rape discourses such as this one place all responsibility solely on women and suggest that men have no role to play in rape prevention. In fact **SAFETY** does not even mention men once. Therefore, if a woman gets raped it will be deemed her fault because she is the only one held accountable in anti-rape discourses.

Messages such as this one dominate the public sphere and inform women what they should and should not do in order to protect themselves. As Kevin Coffey would say, "you are responsible for your own safety", which implies you are also responsible for any assault that occurs. But what is this message really sending? Why are women forced to be the sole actors in the fight to prevent rape while letting men off the hook?

Current anti-rape discourses are important to question because of the harms that they cause. Making anti-rape discourses women's responsibility shifts the blame from the rapist to the raped. In other words, instead of focusing the attention on the rapist, if a woman is raped, she is the one usually blamed or seen at fault because she did not successfully prevent the rape. If a woman was raped at a party, she is blamed for drinking too much. If she was walking home late at night, she is blamed for putting herself in a dangerous situation. In other words, she was not acting "responsibly" for her own safety. If a woman does not actively fight back, she is thought to have implicitly "wanted it"—even though a freeze response in any other crime would never be viewed the same way.

Our current anti-rape discourse merely shifts the responsibility, and therefore the blame, of rape from the rapist to the raped. How can we stop sexual violence when we do not put our focus on the perpetrator? Why is the majority of our attention put on women? We are in desperate need of a new way to stop the prevalence of rape, one that focuses on the perpetrator instead.

Superman Brittany Burton

When you're out on weekends, what songs do you jam out to? Are they perhaps ones you always sing, without realizing that they actually perpetuate sexual violence against women? Songs that often find their way into our car stereos, our ipods, and soon enough our heads, all too often call to a world where sexual violence and the objectification of women become normalized. Below are two examples from mainstream songs which are violent and degrading towards women. These lyrics have been provided as a call to consciousness in the ways that we perpetuate sexual violence against women, in hopes that we can work to make sexual assault and violence against women unacceptable.

*- "Superman" - Eminem
There goes another lawsuit,
Leave handprints all across you,
Good lordy-wody
you must be gone off that water bottle,
You want what you can't have,
Ooh girl that's too damn bad,
Don't touch what you can't grab,
End up with two back hands,
Put Anthrax on a Tampax and slap till you can't stand*

Let's stop for a second and look at the last line of the above verse: "put anthrax on a Tampax and slap you till you can't stand." So basically, women have two choices; they can either submit to men, specifically those who pretend to claim authority over women's sexuality such as Eminem, or they can suffer having a toxic substance placed in the most vulnerable crevice of their body. We all understand the dangers of merely coming in contact with the toxic anthrax, so let's imagine what it would possibly do to the sensitive tissues of the vagina. But of course, questions like these are not pondered when we purchase albums or party with our friends on weekends. Below is an excerpt from another Eminem song, perpetuating the same notion that women are here for men's sexual needs alone and they had better submit or else...

*- "Shake That" - Eminem and Nate Dogg
We bout to have a party (turn the music up)
Let's get it started (Go head shake your butt)
I'm looking for a girl with a body and a sexy strut
Wanna get it poppin baby step right up
Some girls they act retarded
Some girls are bout it bout it
I'm looking for a girl that will do whatever the f***
I say everyday she be giving it up*

Can you hear the beat in your head? Do you recognize these songs? By playing these songs repeatedly and having these songs make their way into our heads, we are only perpetuating the notion that these are ideas we want in our head, and that we wish to be heard by others. By mainstreaming lyrics which are violent toward women we are thus condoning them, giving them value and thus framing violence against women as normal, and even cool. If we seek to problematize and end violence against women, then we must stop the mainstreaming of violent song lyrics that penetrate our sound waves-by stopping ourselves from purchasing albums from artists who contribute towards making violence

against women seem all too normal. As long as we allow songs like these to circulate our airwaves, sexual violence against women will never cease.

Damaging Words: Rape as a Miscommunication

Sarah McCullar

"Oh yeah, man, that test totally bent me over and raped me."

"My tuition this semester is going to rape my bank account."

"My schedule for next semester is going to rape my GPA."

Walking around campus at the CU Boulder, it is interesting to observe just how much a person can hear about rape pretty much every day and in a variety of situations. But people seldom stop to think about how their words impact the people around them, especially how survivors of sexual assault might perceive this insensitive choice of words. According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), college-age women are four times more likely to be sexually assaulted than other groups of women. Our words are powerful. The problem is that when we use the word "rape" to describe situations that have nothing to do with sexual assault, we make it seem as though sexual assault is a joke, something at which we can laugh and feel no twinge of guilt.

The more that people use rape to emphasize a point, the more it makes rape seem like a mundane occurrence instead of the act of control and violence that it is. As rape becomes something that we talk about every day in the context of our annoyances and our discomforts, the less we focus on the human impact that rape has. Victims become invisible and perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions when rape becomes something that we use to emphasize the ordinary annoyances in our lives.

Beyond that, it is hard to tell who our words affect when we nonchalantly drop the word rape in conversation. Sexual assault can touch the lives of anyone, and using rape as a verb to describe our tests, schedules, and other parts of our lives with no relation to sexual assault, victims or someone who knows a victim of sexual assault may feel like their experiences are somehow taken less seriously or that no one cares about how rape affects people's lives. This could make it so that victims have an even harder time speaking up about their experience. RAINN reports about 60% of sexual assaults are not reported to law enforcement. Silence characterizes the way that victims deal with sexual assault and part of that is due to the way that society treats their experiences.

As students, we are in a unique position to make a difference on campus and learn to impact the world around us. Changing the way we talk about rape will lead to a better understanding of how rape impacts our lives. The word rape loses its meaning when we use it out of context and its impact is lessened. If we truly believe that sexual assault must be stopped, we need to recognize that rape is neither a joke nor a mere metaphor, but a serious problem and a real experience for many women around us on this college campus.

Consent

Jonni Vonburg and Emily Williams

My no is not negotiable.

No means no!

Just a nod of the head?

Your “yes” is not mine.

When people are asked the question “what defines rape?” an ordinary response is “when there is no consent.” If the word “consent” can casually be used to answer the question of what defines the serious issue of rape, then it is necessary to ask the question: *what is consent?* Consent can be a very uncomfortable and controversial topic for many individuals. This is due to the numerous ways individuals have been lead to understand this seemingly simple seven letter word – C-O-N-S-E-N-T. Since consent seems to be a defining factor for many in regards to what defines rape and what does not, it is extremely important to examine what consent entails and can justly mean. It is also vital to recognize the typical ways in which consent is frequently skewed in not only its meaning to individuals, but the ways in which it can often be misunderstood when conveyed to others before being involved in any form of sexual activity.

Listed below are some of the various ways in which “consent” is defined by students on our CU Boulder campus.

“Consent is the approval of a person for sexual activities with another person by either 100% affirmative body language (like kissing or touching or whatever) or a verbal approval when that person is in a reasonable state of mind (call it the legal alcohol limit or whatever).”

-Senior Environmental Major, Myles McReynolds

“I think consent is when two people mutually agree on whatever actions are about to take place, and consent is not just used for intercourse.”

-Senior Psychology Major, Michael Shelofsky

“Consent is when a person agrees verbally and physically to participate in something, and clearly shows a sober, critical thinking approach to this consent. Consent is a two-way agreement, in which both sides must consent in order for the event to take place while being in a good state of mind.”

-Senior Broadcast Production Major, Melanie Cohn

“Consent to me should be a verbal yes or no but never is. It is more like a look, a silent agreement that it is okay to have sex. Also, not saying ‘no’ is consent too. You don’t actually have to say ‘yes.’ I guess consent to me is just not saying ‘no.’”

-Senior Communications Major, Jillian Kudrycki

Although there are numerous ways to define consent, there must be a basic understanding between sexual partners concerning what constitutes consent. The ability to give approval of a situation **un-coerced, without intimidation, and while conscious** should provide a basic understanding of consent, which should be utilized in every situation concerning a second party. While some only go as far as to obtain a verbal

“yes” while ignoring other crucial signs, others understand consent as not saying “no”. While there is much debate as to the various ways consent can be interpreted and conveyed, it is important to take action now to prevent further violence and abuse to non-consenting victims. Although the above definitions provide a broad basis, this understanding of consent must still be recognized to aid in specific situations in which a more narrow approach can be taken. Each individual’s perception as to what constitutes consent can be shaped by their background and experiences, which ultimately leads to varying definitions, as seen in the quotes supplied in this article. Between partners however, it is crucial to establish an understandable, just, and non-negotiable definition of consent, to aid in the intervention and prevention of further abuse.

Equipping Yourself: The Importance of Understanding Your Sexual Values

Natalie Tsantes

College is a time for young adults to explore who they are while simultaneously learning how to take on responsibility and develop values that will be useful throughout the rest of their lives. When it comes to sex, however, many of us have difficulty maintaining responsibility. It is paramount that we learn to make knowledgeable choices that take into account both our desires and principles.

Sexual values, which are unique to each person and can differ between people, are used for making sexual choices and set a precedent for the decisions we make. Such values look different for everyone and range from how soon to have sex to whether or not to tell your partner about your fantasies. Discovering sexual values can be a complicated process. However, the benefit of having a clear understanding of what we do and do not want strongly outweighs the possibility of not knowing our sexual values.

Having a set of sexual values does not guarantee clarity in all situations, but recognizing and respecting and most importantly *communicating* your own values can serve as a guideline when making a decision. As a result, sexual values may help protect us from potentially dangerous situations that end in unwanted or coerced sexual activities. Some examples of positive sexual communication and strong sexual values might be using protection; knowing your partner outside of the bedroom; using substances in moderation; knowing what you are physically comfortable with; equipping yourself with the proper language so that you can verbally express what you are and are not comfortable with in sexual situations. We can better protect ourselves both physically and emotionally during sexual encounters by defining our standards prior to being put in uncomfortable situations.

Although our sexual values are not always the easiest to discover, it is worth the time and effort to reflect and identify them. In addition, understanding our own sexual values creates inner strength and knowledge of one’s self so that we may make informed decisions.

Common Myths and Perceptions

Jillian Adams

In a survey recently conducted at the University of Colorado, students were asked to give their opinions on certain myths regarding sexual assault and rape. They responded by using a scale of *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *no opinion*, *agree* and *strongly agree*.

These myths and others are commonly held beliefs within our society, believed and internalized by both men and women. Myths, such as these, only aid in minimizing the severity of the incident and allow room for complacency. It is important to dispel these myths to ensure victims receive the best possible legal, medical and social care and attention.

1. Only women are sexually assaulted or raped, and only by men.

Men, heterosexual and homosexual, can be assaulted and/or raped. Also, women, heterosexual and homosexual, have the capacity to assault and/or rape, although this is not nearly as common as their male counterparts.

The majority of the students surveyed replied to this statement with *disagree*.

2. Someone who was drinking or drunk when sexually assaulted is at least partially to blame for the incident.

Alcohol and drugs may increase the risk of sexual assault and rape, and they also may impede someone's ability to give consent; however, victims of sexual assault should not be held responsible for such an attack. When a person is passed out and/or inebriated she is unable to fully give consent.

The majority of students surveyed replied to this statement with *no opinion*.

3. It cannot be considered rape if the couple involved is dating or is married.

Sexual assault and rape both occur whenever sexual contact is unwelcomed, unwanted and nonconsensual – no matter the status of the relationship. Some studies suggest that some of the most violent and harmful sexual assaults are committed by current or former intimate partners.

The majority of students surveyed replied to this statement with *strongly disagree*.

4. The majority of rapes are conducted by strangers.

In actuality, the majority of rapes are committed by someone whom the victim knows personally. Most women are sexually assaulted not by strangers but by dates, boyfriends, martial partners, family members or neighbors. Stranger rapes do still occur; however, they make up only 22% of assaults (Rape in America: A Report to the Nation).

The majority of students surveyed replied to this statement with *agree*.

5. Women often falsely accuse men of sexual assault or rape.

While this may sometimes occur, most women who report sexual assault or rape are telling the truth and should be taken seriously. In fact, rape is the most underreported crime, and victims are often reluctant to disclose information, especially to law and legal personnel.

The majority of students surveyed replied to this statement with *no opinion*.

6. Someone who has really been assaulted will be hysterical.

Everyone will have their own unique response, and each woman will have a differing reaction to the assault. While some women may be emotional and hysterical immediately following the sexual assault or rape, other women find themselves in a state of shock or disbelief. These women try to control their outward behavior to hide conflicting feelings, such as anger, disbelief or denial. For many victims, this works as a sort of coping mechanism.

The majority of students surveyed replied to this statement with *disagree*.

The survey also asked students to provide their definition of rape. An overwhelming amount replied that rape is sex between two people that is not consensual. While this is indeed an accurate definition, it can be very limiting. The definition of rape needs to be broader and must not only include penile-vaginal sex, but also oral sex, anal sex and the use of an object. The state of Colorado legally uses a more encompassing definition, such as this. It is also important to remember that rape is not always a physically forceful act, but can include manipulation or coercion.



Remembering Tito

Transito (Tito) Torres was born in Santa Anna, El Salvador on December 22, 1986. He moved to the United States in 1989, where he lived in East Palo Alto, a poor community rife with violence. Tito was given the opportunity to move beyond these modest circumstances when he participated in a Stanford Charter school, from which he graduated in the top 10% of his class. In spite of and perhaps because of a difficult childhood, Tito grew into a compassionate young man committed to fighting for social justice. His teachers remember him for his friendly soft-spoken demeanor and his passionate writing. His friends remember him for his incredibly warm smile, meaningful hugs, and his ability to see the beauty in all people. He is missed.

As a student majoring in Women and Gender Studies and active in many social justice oriented student organizations on campus, Tito fought for what he believed in. One of the many injustices for which the usually mellow Tito strongly spoke out against was that of violence against women. As a member of WAGON he participated in the creation of this newsletter, and it is to his memory that we would like to dedicate it. We know that if everyone engaged in the fight against gender violence with the same passion that Tito did, it would become a thing of the past.

In Memoriam of Transito Torres (1986-2009)

Untitled Poem Transito Torres

*Women, you have never been weak
You wield great strength a mere man will never possess,
generations of bodies beaten
They found land mines in broken women's souls
Some walk today with the feeling of that five-finger noose
around their necks, it was seven minutes of hell
And still we ignore your pain*

Women Stand

*No longer should your beautiful bodies be crucibles for pain
Take back your amputated wings,
hearts singing melodies of love
Composers of healing and peace
Your passion is humanity's orthodox elixir
And still we ignore your wisdom*

Amiable Courageous Women

*Be proud, your presence here is testament to your tenacity
This misogynistic culture will not break or demean you
And fuck the proposed ivory tower of complacency
Your sexuality does not need taming*

Women Make Your Stand

*History cannot forget you
So stomp those feet and pump those fists
Celebrate your femininity and the love of your body
Our beautiful woman president*

Women, You Were Never a Ghost

*So be seen
the Always Beautiful
the Always Wise
The Better half of our existence.*