

THE WEIGHT OF WORDS: (*inset*) Maddie Manke, a SIPA high school student, displays the effects of social stigma surrounding rape culture. “It happens, so unbelievably fast...the weight of the shame would be so overwhelming that it’s like you’re alone and you’re suffocating, except to everyone else, it seems like you’re just short of breath,” Manke said.

“Scary” -Josh, 18

“Life threatening” -Sydney, 17

“Horriifying” -Madison, 16

“Changing” -Chyna, 17

“Scarring” -Danni Jo, 16

“Overwhelming” -Eric, 16

“Black” -Kourtney, 15

“Prevalent” -Brooke, 17

“Unjust” -Marg, 16

“Debilitating” -Katherine, 16

“Corrupt” -Frank, 15

“Damaging” -Jake, 17

“Frequent” -Thomas, 18



THE SCARLET LETTERS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

SEXUAL ASSAULT, VICTIM BLAMING AND THE PREVALENCE OF RAPE CULTURE IN SOCIETY

BY FAITH DUTTON

*Well what were you wearing that night?
Were you flirting with them?
Maybe you shouldn't have had anything to drink.*

Boys will be boys.

These are all phrases that persist on the blaming of sexual harassment and assault victims.

Victims.

A word shrouded in social stigma of both question and pity.

Victim blaming.

The act of placing fault on the actions of the innocent rather than the predatory perpetrator.

Shame.

A word used to describe the burning pain of fault within a victim for actions taken against them.

In today's news, "victim" is thrown around for many topics including murder, theft and arguably the most common, sexual assault cases.

However, it is often found that the ball of proof falls in the court of the victim, not the accused.

Why?

The social stigma that has engulfed the attitudes and poisoned the ears of anyone capable of an opinion has created a cloud of uncertainty in the communities of the entire

world.

"Oh well she's probably lying for attention, 'Oh he probably enjoyed it anyway,' But we need to recognize the evil," Arman Bryan, a SIPA high school student, said.

It has become a topic of discussion if the victim of a sexual assault is in any way at fault for the incident. It has become a topic of discussion if the assailant intended the hurt the victim.

"A lot of times, people tend to blame the woman. But it shouldn't matter, why should we teach our girls to dress a certain

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way or act a certain way." Brenna Outten, a SIPA high school student, said.

What occurs every day in the streets, in clubs, and in homes, occurs in schools in the form of victim blaming and excuses.

"It doesn't matter what someone intended to do, what matters is the impact and effect it had," Nikel Bussolati, a SIPA high school English teacher said. "Ultimately, everyone is

responsible for their own actions. If men are objectifying women and sexualizing women...that is 100% the fault of the perpetrator."

A bias within rape culture has often dictated to the masses that it is only women that are sexually assaulted; however, the world proves the contrary.

"Women can do these things to men, they absolutely can." Bussolati said.

A different cloud of stigma follows male victims of assault, further damaging an already brutal social expectation for males.

"It's not taken as seriously so boys get brushed off while girls get victimized," Jada McBride, a SIPA high school student, said.

Within the classrooms of many schools, sexual assault and the prevalence of rape culture is a taboo topic not to be discussed among students. The inability to efficiently discuss this topic within classrooms on a curriculum basis is the biggest issue to Bussolati.

"Whenever something comes up that is on the subject of this... I have to address it," Bussolati said. "I don't want a student to leave my room thinking that some kind of comment that contributes to rape culture or victim blaming is appropriate."

LINDA STONE



"For the victim, I don't think that they'll ever think that that [rape culture] is ok. For the assailant, they'll always think that it's ok and they're right in their sick minds, because they feel as though maybe she was dressed inappropriately and was asking for it, or she spoke the man, or she was still talking and flirting a little too much...that she was asking for it...it's always a good excuse on their [the assailant] part."

RODOLFO PLANELL



"[Not talking about sexual assault] makes it worse...because if you're not talking about it you're not realizing what the problem is, and you can't do anything to solve it if you're not figuring out what the problem is. You need to talk about it in order to solve it."

MAIA MCDONALD



"I think there is [a different social stigma that follows male victims] that because people believe that men should be strong and buff people when you know they're sensitive and they have feelings too. So if a man says he was sexually harassed people make fun of them or think that it's not a big deal and it just diminished their whole voice so I think there is a stigma, absolutely."

EVELIO CUBA



"When it comes to dress code, some people might think that this is a little absurd, but I personally think that dress code should be a thing. Not only in a part that it keeps the educational society and the educational environment in a controlled manner, but also it controls how a person is viewed, like how that person wants to be treated.....so when it comes to sexual assault, I do think there is a correlation."