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The Cookie Jar Dilemma

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I stole the cookie from the cookie jar. I may have stolen several of them. Admitting it was not as hard as I would have thought. Now that I have admitted to it I can look forward to teaching my fellow cookie stealers to fight the urge until after dinner or at least bake a batch for themselves before they go stealing from the jar.

As kids it is much easier for us to admit to what we have done wrong. For one we hadn't really acquired our lying skills yet, but we were also much more attached to our moral self. Good kids got play time, and well, bad ones, they got to stand in the corner looking terribly sad and forlorn sometimes even a little angry. That moral self got shoved away to the attic along with our Doctor Seuss books and exuberant number of stuffed animals and action figures. Now, instead of owning up to anything, we have this necessary urge to fight the truth with threats and force. Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar? I stole the cookie from the cookie jar. I may have stolen several of them. However, we will blame the baker-- how dare he make them so delicious. Hell, we will blame the jar for being so easy to open before we say our own names. Just ask Zerlina Maxwell.

Zerlina Maxwell is a prominent journalist and feminist. She is also a rape survivor. After a controversial appearance on the Hannity show she has received a life time supply of threats, ranging from a slap to the face, to being raped again, to even death. She appeared on Sean Hannity's show for Fox News because they thought she would be a great source to affirm the need for arming women to reduce rape (*Zerlina Maxwell on Hannity*). After the show, posting to her Twitter feed, Michael Shapiro wrote, "Nigger! I hope you get raped and your throat slit!

May be then you understand why white women have to be armed! DIE BITCH!" (*Rape Survivor Zerlina Maxwell*)

What could she have said to prompt such visceral and angered responses? Children should be eaten? Murder is an art? What could be so grotesque to bring on the onslaught of thousands of citizens' threats? Teach men not to rape. That's it, nothing else. Stop leaving the responsibility up to women. In the interview Maxwell said, "I don't think that we should be telling women anything. I think we should be telling men not to rape women and start the conversation there with *prevention*." (*Zerlina Maxwell on Hannity*) There was no sinister plot to rid the world of the male gender; there was no implied idea of mass castration, just that we should reeducate the male society on rape culture. Maxwell fought that men need to be educated to not rape and to accept their part in the fight against it. Instead of owning up to anything, the public, males in particular went into an uproar with an onslaught of threats. They refused to admit to anything.

Society is doing something wrong when a rape victim is being threatened with rape. The responsibility of rape is a much heavier and grayer matter than where a few cookies went, but admitting that the problem exists, that something needs to change should be as simple and easy as acknowledging you took a few cookies. How can we logically blame the cookie jar for our own thieving here? We all hate to admit it, but it is much more prominent than we would like to admit. The threats aren't just whispers in a heated argument either. They aren't restricted to the confines of a household, a specific group of people, or a community either. We have allowed this behavior to surface, no, flourish in the public.

Scary isn't it? Watching the Hannity video, reading the threats and nasty comments I didn't care who was to blame. I personally had had similar thoughts as Maxwell before watching her argue them. What astonished me was how afraid, how against people were to letting rape be anything more than a women's issue. Not just men either. Katie Plavich, of Townhall.com responded with, "Maxwell's comments about 'not talking to women at all,' but instead talking to men is also ridiculous and a typical liberal way of taking responsibility out of the hands of the individual who needs it most." (Katie Plavich) The opposition all seemed to agree that men had no place in fighting against rape or in perpetrating the crime itself. It was utterly mind boggling. Especially, since our own Department of Justice cites that males account for 99.6% of all rapists in the United States (Greenfield 21). The system we have now isn't working. Rape and sexual assault only seem to be increasing issues worldwide. There is only so much you can do on the side of the victim, eventually, when all else is exhausted, we have to focus on the culprit.

How can we go through any process of reeducation if we don't acknowledge how we got there in the first place? Saying the world is round isn't profound until you juxtapose it against the belief that the world is flat. And you can't say the world is round until you've explored it for yourself, right? I am not here to place blame or call a gender out. I already know where I stand, but we need to explore why men and society as a whole are so terrified in making the responsibility for rape anything more than a women's issue. Why when even the mention of such a thought creates a societal uproar of threats and disgust.

It took two tries to get an interview with Ana Maria Garcia, the chair of Sociology for Arcadia University. I asked her her opinion on why men are so terribly afraid of taking any responsibility in the matter. After a little feminist theory here and some jokes made there, there came her own explanation: "rape is a heteronormative issue like race or gender, all sides are at fault." (Garcia). Get ready to face it girls. We are just as much at fault as men. We excuse the behavior, we allow men to skirt by without having to take any responsibility. We don't have to publically work against the idea of men needing to stand up like the aforementioned Katie Plavich, but by simply not doing or saying anything we are just as guilty. Garcia agrees saying, "I think we make men these kind of predacious people." (Garcia) By the gender roles we helped to create, whether by action or lack thereof, we have set the male population up to be irresponsible, to have the ability to avoid blame and be highly sexual over our own bodies. "We have created these roles for men and women that have to do with men entering the space of sexual prowess, sexual freedom the idea that they have to act on it, men have no control over their body. " (Garcia)

Even though we helped to create these roles, even though we have let them strive for so long, the world has obviously changed and evolved since we first instituted these behaviors. Why is it then that we still do not want to acknowledge that rape responsibility goes beyond the victim, beyond just a women's fight to bear? Were males to admit to their part in rape it would go much farther than them fighting against it. It would require an entire societal change in mind set.

If we accuse one man's sexual prowess as wrongful it is okay, but when people like Zerlina Maxell step up and say that the entirety of men's sexual abilities, conceptions, rights, and mind set need to be completely reimagined it is admitting that somewhere in the very beginning we messed up. We messed up pretty bad: men by asserting themselves in such an initial manner and women for letting it continue for so long. These arguments go beyond how we can shape the future, but having to go through a long line of history and trying to accept that we could have and should have done better from the start. This bears not only men, but woman too. It may be the reason why women like Katie Plavich are so adamant against the idea; they don't want to admit they're at fault too.

What gets me every time is that most men are not rapists, but they still refuse to admit it's a problem. I can see actual rapists denying it, due process, arrest, jail time and all that jazz. But men who have not committed it themselves? You wouldn't be incriminating yourself. Most people will admit that rape is a horrible thing, but never admit to their own responsibility. They too, much like Sean Hannity, are fighting to reduce rape throughout society. They will not however, say that they need to do anything to stop it. Again and again it is put on the victim to solve things for herself. One could look at it as being similar to asking a murder victim to solve his own murder. Well, uh Mr. John Doe, I know you're dead and all, but if you could just figure it all out yourself, that'd be great. Saves us a lot trouble down here at the station. It's like asking all potential murder victims to stay inside incase today is the day. We would laugh in the face of anyone who suggested such and maybe ask them to see someone for help.

We can have someone like Dean Saxton, however, a student at the University of Arizona and an ironically so self-proclaimed minister, scream at women on campus and hold a “You Deserve Rape” sign and few people do much about it. Surprisingly, he also feels that all rapists deserve the death penalty. Again, we are faced with a man who despises rape, looks down on those who commit the crime, but blames women over and over again. Luckily, there were a few men who stepped up and held opposing signs saying, “No one deserves rape.”(Kingkade)

There have been men who have stepped up; they have admitted that the way their masculinity is determined, the way society is run and their fellow men views on the topic need to altered, revolutionized. Men Can Stop Rape is an organization that has begun to achieve more popularity over the past few years. The organization does exactly what Zerlina Maxwell suggested. It is working to revolutionize and reeducate men. Men Can Stop Rape’s website proclaims,

“In 1997, the founders of Men Can Stop Rape pioneered a different way of addressing the epidemic of violence against women. Though the majority of violent acts against women are committed by men, the vast majority of prevention efforts are risk-reduction and self-defense tactics directed at women. The founders wanted to shift the responsibility of deterring harm away from women by promoting healthy, nonviolent masculinity. Their vision offered a plan for prevention that outlines positive, proactive solutions to engaging men as allies, inspiring them to feel motivated and capable to end men’s violence against women.” (Men Can Stop Rape)

In the male version of Maxwell's aspirations, shown through the programs for Men Can Stop Rape, focus on what is masculinity, which suggests the issue for most men in admitting their part in the prevention of rape comes from the hit that their masculinity would take. As if helping women would make them less masculine. Last time I checked helping women was the most masculine thing for man. After all it is always a *male* knight portrayed saving the princess from the clutches of the dragon. The previously mentioned Ana Maria Garcia alluded to such when she admits that the "man" we have created is not "tender". She believes masculinity is focused mostly through their sexual accomplishments and, "if you don't screw somebody, if you don't force her or act out on that sexual prowess you're not a man." (Garcia) Carole Sheffield, who sees rape culture and our society's current issues as sexual terrorism says, "sexual terrorism is maintained to as great extent by an elaborate system of sex-role socialization that in effect instructs men to be terrorists in the name of masculinity and women to be victims in the name of femininity." (Sheffield 48) Essentially, she believes that terrorism is winning out against knighthood for many men.

As I mentioned though, most men aren't rapists. This masculinity goes much farther than forcibly raping a woman. There would be so much guilt in tow if men were to do so. Admitting that the problem and responsibility of rape lay inherently within the male population meant that men would have to come terms with some of the not best decisions in their life. Any time there was a thought about using force to obtain sex or if a little too much coercion was used then the excuse that "well that's how it is" would not be able to be applied. Men would have to admit that their own actions, although not illegal in themselves, helped to fuel the fire that may have led other men to rape.

Logically then, there must then be some form of correlation between rape and the masculinity of certain areas right? Sweden oddly, has the second highest recorded rapes behind Botswana. I was overly shocked; Sweden has this connotation for equality among the sexes in comparison. "The statistics don't represent a major crime epidemic, rather a shift in attitudes. The public debate about this sort of crime in Sweden over the past two decades has had the effect of raising awareness and encouraging women to go to the police if they have been attacked." (Alexander) Sweden is one of the top countries for gender equality having the fourth lowest percentage for the gender gap (Hausmann 9). Sweden's higher rape number only helps to enforce the change that can be attributed to men stepping up. Their gender equality is so low that a woman and men alike fight against the numbers, that inevitably allows women to feel less shame in reporting the crime. The United States ranks 22 in the 135 countries listed in the study (8).

Maybe then, the issue is not in whether or not men will be less masculine. Rather the issue may lie in whether masculinity and males themselves would hold the same power throughout society. This could be the reason for men's lack of ambition in admitting to their part in fighting and preventing rape. Sheffield, the same woman who says that our societies handling of rape and women's issues is equivalent to sexual terrorism believes, "the right of men to control the female body is a cornerstone of patriarchy." (Sheffield 45) Obviously, I doubt that too many of today's men are in their basements toiling over how to continually suppress women, but I could see a very instinctual, primitive, and unconscious thought process throughout the masses controlling the way this issue is handled and portrayed. Rape culture

and the fear it produces in women is the final major frontier for women to overcome in their path to equal rights.

The one thing males have over us collectively is the fear that we must live with that they do not. Sheffield considers what we have today, “sexual terrorism because it is a system by which males frighten and, by frightening, control and dominate females.” (Sheffield 46) According to the World Economic Forum, the same group that determined the gender gaps for Sweden and the United States puts India at 105 out of the 135 countries mentioned (Hausmann 9). It was also rated to be the fourth most dangerous country in the world for women by the Thomson-Reuters Foundation decided by 213 gender specialists, Afghanistan being number one (*Worlds’ Most Dangerous Countries for Women*). The danger is most attributed to, “women who do attempt to speak out or take on public roles that challenge ingrained gender stereotypes of what is acceptable for women to do or not, such as working as policewomen or news broadcasters, are often intimidated or killed.” (*World’s Most Dangerous Countries for Women*)

In our own country of America, such occurrences are not as popular and usually highly looked down upon because women have made such strides in equal rights. Are men so afraid to admit their place in rape, whether it be fighting it, preventing it or unknowingly promoting it because doing so would knock their last foothold in maintaining a completely patriarchal society? Is the terrorism rape culture produces the only way men can combat the increasing power of women? Is forcing women to be fearful of being alone, being out at night, the implications of their choice in clothing a method in keeping women in their “place” of letting

them know where they stand in the grand scheme of things? Again I do not believe every man is doing so consciously, I am desperately hoping there is no largely definitive male Illuminati-esque conspiracy against women. I would become much more terrified than I already am. I can however, understand that our subconscious is much more powerful than we probably know and it could, unfortunately, have a great impact on the thought process.

The sad fact of the matter is that no matter what is restraining men in accepting and admitting they need to step up in the fight against rape, it needs to change. The implications of this are that not just men are going to have to change, women will need to also recreate their idea of the "man". It will be a process for all of society, but one that is becoming more and more of a necessity, overwhelmingly so as numbers of the crime continue to rise. It might be necessary that we, as a society, take a nice nostalgic walk into the attic and reacquaint ourselves with our moral compass. I'm sure it is right under the stack of Disney VHSs where you left it, mine was. Despite that gravity and the moral dilemma rape poses for us, knowing we need to do something to stop it and that men are just as responsible in this war should be as easy as saying you took a cookie from the cookie jar. Did you?

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