

Support Survivors.

**“BLACK WOMEN
WERE AND
CONTINUE TO BE
SORELY IN NEED
OF AN ANTI-RAPE
MOVEMENT.”
—ANGELA DAVIS**

Challenge rape.

Confront oppression, since it contributes to violence.

Racism, classism, and sexism are the root causes of violence in our communities. Historically we can see the link between oppression and acts of violence. For example, the lynching of Black men in the U.S. is clearly linked to racism/white supremacy. Black women also have a history of being lynched. Often the Black women who were sexually assaulted and lynched. This kind of hate violence is used to create fear and enforce racist and sexist forms of oppression.

Recognize sexism in our communities.

Sexism is about objectifying Black women and girls. When a woman or girl is objectified or viewed as an object—not as a human being—it becomes acceptable to treat her in any way. This is similar to how racism works. Racism allows white people to view people of color as inhuman, as objects that can be treated in any way.

Hold rapists accountable.

One way to hold rapists accountable is to report them to the police. But, this is not the only way. If a survivor does decide to report, she is protecting herself. Don't blame her for hurting the community or 'airing dirty laundry.' The rapist—not the survivor—is to blame.

Listen to and believe survivors.

Too often survivors of sexual assault are not taken seriously. Black women who tell of incidents of sexual assault often are personally blamed for the assault and face being charged with trying to 'bring down a Black man' or with lying about a rape and only making racism against Black communities worse. This can impact the survivor for the rest of her life, cutting her off from her community and/or from opportunities for support outside of her community.

Let survivors make their own decisions.

Telling a survivor of rape what she should or should not do is not helpful. It may be experienced as a re-victimization. When a person is raped her power and control is taken. So it becomes important for the survivor to regain control of her life. Letting the survivor make her own decisions and supporting her in the decisions she makes can help. Allow the survivor to heal in her own way.

Support survivors' feelings.

Many painful and confusing feelings can come up after a sexual assault. One way to honor a survivor's feelings is to let her know that what she is feeling is not strange or abnormal, but comes from having survived a horrible trauma. Sexual assault can cause many survivors to feel vulnerable, weak, ashamed. Recognizing her strength in surviving the assault, while being clear she does not need to be a 'Superwoman,' may be healing and comforting.

Help survivors understand that violence is not their fault.

So often the message about rape is that the survivor did something to cause it—dressed too sexy, led him on, used bad judgment, etc. Some survivors begin to believe these messages. That is why it is important for those who want to offer support to be clear that the fault for any rape lies with the rapist, not with the survivor.

Give survivors appropriate information.

This brochure may provide some of that information.

Challenge myths about rape, be clear that rape happens in all communities, talk about sexual assault in our communities, and demand our right to live without violence.

In Our Own Words: Rape Survivors Speaking Out

**“Our silence will not protect us.”
—Audre Lorde**

The following statements are those of Black women who have taken these words of activist and poet Audre Lorde to heart:

*“This is a poem I wrote after the last time I was raped: Jesus is the only man I trust because his hands and feet are nailed to the cross where they can't hurt me.”
—Sumaiya*

“After my step-brother raped me I blamed myself, felt too ashamed to tell anyone. It wasn't until I began talking to people about having been raped that I began to heal and regain my sense of power and control over my life. I've learned to place the blame where it belongs—on my step-brother—and I've learned to be proud of the strength I've had to survive.” —Johanna

“I still have a hard time defining what he did to me as rape. My 'closest friend' said that because he and I were together that he had a right to my body whenever he pleased. All I know is that he didn't take no for an answer and, after five years, my rage still feels strong. What about my rights? Don't I have a choice?” —T.C.

Sexual assault is a painful and difficult experience. After an attack, survivors may feel anger, unable to trust others, guilt, shame, confusion, depression, fear, and isolation. These feelings are normal and may last a long time. Sometimes it can help to talk to someone. You may want to talk to a friend, relative, or someone else you feel close to. Or you may want to contact San Francisco Women against Rape.

Sexual Assault, the Police, and Black Communities

The history of the police targeting Black communities and the need to protect our communities from racist attacks might make a survivor decide not to report a sexual assault. The U.S. system of justice may not have a history of protecting Black communities. But, our communities can take a strong stand against sexual violence—making it clear that there is zero tolerance for sexual abuse and perpetrators will be held accountable by the community. Taking the collective stand of calling out perpetrators of sexual assault and holding them responsible for their actions can have the effect of discouraging sexual assault.



3543 18th Street #7
San Francisco, CA 94110
tel. 415.861.2024
fax. 415.861.2092
www.sfwar.org
info@sfwar.org

What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault is a broad term and includes any sexual activity that is forced on a person. The force used during a sexual assault can be physical, but it can also include the use of threats, pressure, fear, manipulation, and/or drugs and alcohol. Sexual assault does not always include penetration. If something has happened to you that you feel uncomfortable about, you may want to talk to a friend or call a crisis line.

Rape is a specific type of sexual assault and occurs when any person is forced to have sex. A person does not have to be beat-up to have been raped or sexually assaulted. A person can be assaulted if they are too drunk to say yes or consent to sexual activity. It is against the law to force any person—whether they are a date, partner, spouse, child, relative, student, church member, friend, or a stranger—into any sexual activity they do not want.

Ritual abuse is any systematic or regular physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse. It may include torture, brainwashing or ritual sacrifice used to break a person's spirit. Ritual abuse may be connected to any religion or philosophical system of beliefs.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted and unwelcome sexual behavior. It is words or conduct of a sexual nature that offend, shame, lower, frighten, threaten, or objectify you because of your sex or gender identity. Sexual harassment can be physical (touching, grabbing, rubbing, patting, pinching, groping, kissing, hugging, blocking), verbal (comments about your body; sexual suggestions, questions, sounds, jokes; spreading rumors; persistently asking for a phone number or date; honking; whistling), or visual (pornography or pictures of sexual situations or objects, obscene gestures, staring, masturbating/simulating sex in public, offensive written words).

What Does It Mean?

We use these words throughout this brochure. We define them here to create a common understanding.

SURVIVOR: We refer to individuals who have lived through and are healing from sexual assault as survivors, instead of victims. This term recognizes the power of an individual to make it through a trauma like sexual assault.

CLASSISM: A system of institutional practices and individual actions that allow a few people to control most of the wealth and power in our society to the disadvantage of the majority of people.

HETEROSEXISM: Institutionalized policies and individual actions which promote a heterosexual lifestyle above all others; a belief that heterosexuality is superior to other sexualities.

HOMOPHOBIA: Fear and intolerance of homosexuality.

TRANSPHOBIA: Fear and intolerance of people whose gender expression is not the same as their biological sex.

SEXISM: All the ways men mess over women from the cradle to the grave and which are painfully evident in all rituals, institutions,

educational systems, cultural expressions, family structures, religions, and economic systems. It is impossible to live in America and not be tainted by sexism and a participant in it, whether as a victim or a perpetrator.*

SEXIST: A person who practices sexism, consciously or unconsciously, by living in a way that endorses, perpetuates, and prolongs it.*

RACISM & RACIST: Is to Black people what sexism and sexist are to women. White people have been raised by their culture to be racist [mess over people of color...] in order to maintain status or control.*

WHITE SUPREMACY AND MALE SUPREMACY: Systems of oppression designed to control, confine, and exploit one group of people (the oppressed) for the benefit of another group of people (the oppressor). In discussions of white supremacy, Black people and other people of color are oppressed and white people are oppressors. In discussions of sexism, women are oppressed and men are oppressors.*

* We use the work of writer and Black feminist Pearl Cleage (1993) to define these terms.

If you were sexually assaulted, **REMEMBER:** It was not your fault. You deserve support. You are not alone.

Rape is happening in all our communities.
By working together we can make a change.

This brochure was created by the **SFWAR Women of African Descent Task Force**—a working group of Black volunteers, staff, and board members.

Women of African Descent Task Force Mission Statement

We recognize that sexual violence exists within our communities and we work to end that violence in all its forms. We support each other in our efforts to educate one another about sexual violence and its impact on our lives. As we heal as individuals, we heal our communities.

San Francisco Women Against Rape provides free and confidential services, including: Crisis Phone Counseling, In-Person Counseling, Support Groups, Advocacy Services, Self-Defense Instruction, Youth and Adult Education Programs, support Mobilizing Communities to confront and end rape, and Multi-lingual Services. SFWAR serves all survivors of sexual assault, including their families and friends, and all communities working to end sexual assault.

San Francisco Women Against Rape
415.647.RAPE/7273 (24-hour Rape Crisis Line, collect calls accepted)
415.861.2024 (Business Line)
www.sfwar.org (Website)
info@sfwar.org (Email)
3543 18th Street #7
San Francisco, CA 94110

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Building Community



Challenging Rape

The Women of African Descent Task Force of San Francisco Women Against Rape

Recognizing the Facts about Rape and Black Communities

80-90% of rapes occur between people of the same race.

Many people in the United States wrongly believe that the majority of rapes are committed by Black men against white women. This destructive myth was created after Black slaves in the U.S. were freed. It was used as an excuse to lynch Black men and terrorize Black communities. Rape happens in all communities and most rapes in the U.S. are committed by white men. But, Black men are still put in jail more often for rape.

Black women are raped at a higher rate than white women.

Approximately 19–36% of Black women will be raped in their lifetime. Racism and sexism work together and increase the chances of Black women being raped. Black women survive rapes by white men, in addition to rapes by Black men and other men of color. Myths such as Black women are promiscuous, always ready for sex, and basically 'unrapeable' have led to the disbelief of Black women who are rape survivors. These ideas leave Black

women more vulnerable to attack and have helped erase the history of rape and violation of Black women by white men and men of color.

Black girls are more frequently the victims of child sexual abuse than white girls.

Most child sexual abuse happens at home and is perpetrated by someone known and trusted by the survivor, such as a family member, neighbor, baby-sitter, teacher or minister. This fact is difficult to own up to and is something that our communities may want to deny. The stereotype that Black girls develop faster makes them more at risk of sexual abuse.

Most rapes occur between people who know one another.

While a rapist can be anyone, it is more likely that the rapist knows his victim. Approximately 75% of sexual assaults are perpetrated by an acquaintance. About 60% of sexual assaults occur on dates. And it is estimated that 1 out of 7 married women are raped by their husbands.

& Challenging the Myths

Black men and boys are raped.

About 1 in 6 males are the victims of sexual abuse. Male rape survivors are most often raped by other men. Most men who rape identify as heterosexual. The idea that gay men rape straight men/boys is a homophobic myth, similar to the racist idea that Black men only rape white women. Black males may have a particularly difficult time coping with rape. This is because appearing strong—at all times and in all situations—is a way they may deal with racism and other oppression.

Black women are less likely to tell someone they have been sexually assaulted.

Myths about Black women's sexuality and our communities play a large part in silencing us. Many Black women fear that speaking out about sexual abuse may only cause people to think that Black families/communities are more violent.

Homophobia and transphobia stop Black lesbians, gay men, and transgender people from speaking out about experiences of sexual assault.

The stigma associated with not being straight or being transgender can keep Black lesbians, bisexuals, gay men, and transgender people 'in the closet.' It is a risk for Black lesbians, bisexuals, gay men or transgender people to admit sexual abuse by their same sex partner or acknowledge being a survivor of hate violence. Doing so can mean 'outing' themselves and facing intense homophobia and isolation from Black communities.

Rape is about power and control.

Many people believe that rape is about sex or desire. But, the fact is that rape is a violent act about dominating, humiliating, and controlling another person. Rape happens among all age groups, from infants to elder women, among all economic classes, from rich to poor, and among all races of people. The goal of a rapist is to dominate his victim and the weapon he uses to dominate is sex. Rape has nothing to do with how the survivor was dressed. But rapists—and society for that matter—may use how a survivor was dressed, where she was, whether she was drinking or using drugs to justify a rape.