



## Complaint to BBC re: #R4Today July 1st 2014

We have sent the following comment in an email to [feedback@bbc.co.uk](mailto:feedback@bbc.co.uk). If you'd like to complain, please copy and paste the text into an email and send it to the BBC. The more complaints we can generate, the more likely we are to be heard.

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I am writing with regard to the broadcast of 'Today' on July 1st, specifically the discussion between DPP Alison Saunders and John Humphrys regarding Rolf Harris. Harris was found guilty of all 12 counts against him, by unanimous verdict.

I was expecting this interview to discuss issues such as the courage of victims in these cases, the attempt by perpetrators to build a 'public' profile that manipulates us into thinking that he is a good man, one who doesn't abuse women and children. I was hoping that we would hear a discussion about how damaging this betrayal of trust is to victim-survivors and their families, and how these 'public' personas prevent victims from coming forward to report abuse, being believed when they do come forward and managing the associated media coverage when the perpetrator has such a high profile.

I would have expected Humphrys to celebrate the achievements of the CPS and discuss the ways in which the difficulties with non-recent sexual abuse and violence can be overcome in order to improve the response to victim-survivors; not only in cases where the perpetrator is a celebrity, but in all cases.

In this case, following as I previously stated, a unanimous guilty verdict on all counts, I was to be sorely disappointed. John Humphrys claimed that as there have only been "2 out of 17" prosecutions under Operation Yewtree, that this operation is considered a failure. What this figure suggests is that the CPS are applying both the public interest test, and the likely conviction test in these cases - something that Humphrys fails to address.

Humphrys then proceeded to mix up recent cases, referencing both the 'Hacking Trial' and Operation Yewtree - cases that are particularly distinct in the offences committed and the verdicts reached. This conflation is unexplainable.

This is not the first time that John Humphrys has shown both his ignorance of sexual violence and his disbelief of those who allege such crimes - in fact, in November 2013, during the publicity for the Children's Commissioner report 'If Only Someone Had Listened', Humphrys made this statement:

["And it really is rape. It's not a question of young children 11 -12 years old going out in a gang and perhaps getting hold of some alcohol and engaging in consensual sex. It's a question of young girls being physically attacked and raped by boys?"](#)



There are so many things wrong with this brief statement that it is hard to know where to start unpacking it. Firstly, sex without consent is rape. Asking if it is really 'rape' is a deeply offensive question lacking any empathy for the child victims of serious sexual offences. Secondly, alcohol prohibits consent. A child who is drunk does not deserve to be sexually abused or raped

Thirdly, children aged 11 – 12 cannot legally consent to sex. The sexual offences act makes it very clear that any intercourse with a child under the age of 13 is rape. Non-consensual offences against children under the age of 13 include sexual assault by penetration, sexual assault and causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity. It is paramount that the media be very clear on this issue: children under the age 13 cannot legally consent. Ever.

Fourthly, Humphrys seems to be implying that rape requires force, which it does not. Rape is sex without consent. Physical force may accompany it but it is not necessary for legal prosecution. Lack of consent includes women and children who are intoxicated, asleep, drugged, coerced, blackmailed or simply in a position where they cannot say no. Implying that rape requires force is an incredibly harmful myth that directly impacts the ability of victims to seek legal recourse.

Fifthly, Humphrys confuses rape and sexual abuse with the laws concerning age of consent. The age of consent is 16 to protect children from other sexually abusive children and adults. Adults over the age of 18 are legally prohibited from having sex with children under the age of 16 for obvious reasons. The laws around age of consent do take into consideration the fact that teenagers can engage in consensual sexual relationships with other teenagers and we have not yet come across a prosecution of two similar aged teenagers who have had a consensual sexual relationship. This said, the laws concerning age of consent are a red herring here. These are very clear cases of sexual abuse and rape, regardless of the age of the perpetrator and the victim. Invoking the age of consent laws only further obfuscates the systemic abuse of young girls. The implication here, from Humphrys, is that some of these cases are only being investigated because of the age of the victim and that some of the very young girls, legally considered to young to consent, were willing participants. This type of inference is incredibly damaging to young victims of sexual violence. It is also blaming the victims for being victims.

This is yet another example of a flagship news presenter perpetuating harmful myths and stereotypes about sexual violence and abuse, myths that actively harm those who have disclosed sexual abuse and those who are currently being abused.

### **Questions:**

Why does the programme editor allow Humphrys to speak on issues that he is not only ignorant of, but also unwilling to listen and learn about?

Does the editor consider discussions such as this to be responsible broadcasting?

Do you intend to continue allowing the BBC flagship news programme to perpetuate myths and ignorance around sexual violence?



## Everyday Victim Blaming

challenging institutional disbelief around domestic & sexual violence and abuse  
<http://everydayvictimblaming.com>

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I look forward to hearing your response.

Best wishes