



## Sarah Vine and rape apologism

As a wise woman (who happened to be on twitter) [once said](#),

why this myth about a) women regretting sex and b) therefore claim to be raped because of regret. Women who regret sex think “that was shit” Sisterhood (@sisterhooduk)

As someone who has had her fair share of crap sex – including that time when, midway through, my lover got up to vomit in the sink before telling me, helpfully, “that wasn’t your fault” – I can confirm that this is true. Sex-based regrets, I’ve had a few. None, however, have led me to think “I know! I’ll say that I was raped! And what’s more, I’ll go through the whole traumatic, long drawn-out process of reporting it to the police! That’ll teach Mr Luminous Green Sink Puke a lesson!”

And yet, strange as this may seem, such a thought process seems [perfectly plausible to the Mail’s Sarah Vine](#). In a piece in which she clearly yearns for the good old days, when rape meant your archetypal stranger in an alley and a husband had a legal right to penetrate his wife whenever he wished, Vine expresses great distress at the fact that these days, women are becoming more vocal about their right to be treated as human beings:

Unless you’re a saint, the chances of getting through life without making at least one disastrous sexual choice are very small.

The point is to live and to learn. To acknowledge when you’ve made a mess of things, and to avoid making the same mistakes again. [...]

There is, of course, another way. You can blame someone else. You can make excuses. You can attempt to alleviate your own feelings of guilt and self-loathing by pinning responsibility on another.

And, in this day and age, that means crying rape.

This is a ludicrous, not to mention deeply harmful, assertion to make. It flies in the face of everything police and prosecutors are telling us about who reports rape and why. The Metropolitan Police’s Martin Hewitt estimates that [75% of rape victims are still not coming forward](#). False accusations of rape are [both rare and subject to prosecution](#). Moreover, the profile of those accused of making false allegations is not “woman who got pissed off with self for shagging someone she didn’t like.” In 38% of cases the allegation has been made by someone who was not the accused (this rises to 50% for under 18s, where those making the accusation tend to be parents). There are cases of women being prosecuted for [falsely retracting rape allegations](#) and others in which women end up [saying they lied just to end the horrific process of reliving the assault and not being believed](#). These are all complex, traumatic cases. The idea that women willingly trot off down to the police station having realised they’d drunkenly pulled minger is absurd. To do so we’d have to be a) immoral, b) ignorant of contemporary attitudes to rape and c) deeply traumatised by what is the sex equivalent of



having a shit meal out or watching a duff film. It doesn't make any sense.

Of course, one possible answer to this puzzle is that, when Vine writes about a “disastrous sexual choice,” this isn't what she really means at all. Indeed, I think what she really means is an encounter that would indeed be legally defined as rape. For instance, look at how Vine describes how women used to cope with a “regretful” shag in days of yore:

They took a shower, gave themselves a stern talking to, maybe told a friend about it, had a bit of a cry — and then moved on as best they could, vowing along the way never to end up in that kind of damn stupid situation again.

This is not a response to a bad evening out. A response to a bad evening out might be to think “bloke from last night's a wanker.” What Vine is describing is a response to trauma and it is the rational response of women who know that their trauma will not be taken seriously (and this conviction that their trauma will not be taken seriously is shared by most rape victims today). Presumably we are meant to think of such women as plucky, responsible ladies, brushing themselves down and getting on with life without making a fuss – a kind of Blitz spirit applied to the “inevitable” onslaught of rape. But we know these women. Some may have confided in us, some may not. They need our support and they need a space to speak.

Vine is clearly puzzled by [DPP Alison Saunders' call for the CPS to be given greater guidance on the circumstances in which a person can consent to sex](#). Harriet Harman has [done her best to explain things to her](#), but since Vine doesn't actually care about rape victims obtaining justice, it seems a pointless task. Vine argues that “changing the parameters of what can be construed as rape to serve a clear politically correct agenda — not just to improve conviction rates for rape, but also to appease hard-line feminists — is very dangerous”:

Not only is it deeply insulting to those women who, through war or religious bigotry find themselves victims of rape, it will not help safeguard women from violent sexual offenders such as serial rapists.

Nor will it make any difference whatsoever to domestic abuse cases — the average wife-beater doesn't generally ask for permission in triplicate before he smashes his woman's face in.

It will, however, destroy the lives of young men who are not habitual sexual offenders, but who pay for one act of grotesque idiocy by having their lives and reputations forever destroyed.

I don't think there is any room for doubt here. She is arguing in favour of a world in which men are perfectly entitled to “one grotesque act of idiocy” – rape, that is – without having to face any further consequences at all. As long as it's not “habitual” (who would know?) or motivated by “war or religious bigotry” (nice bit of dog whistle racism), we're not supposed to do anything. It's only one little rape (can you imagine the Daily Mail publishing an article on any other crime – apart from, perhaps, motoring offences – in which “just the once” is seen as okay?).

And yet no one is even attempting to change “the parameters of what can be construed as



rape.” Saunders is arguing in favour of clarification, not law change. What Vine, on the other hand, seems to want is for rape to become more socially acceptable. Let’s stop calling it rape! Let’s go for a rebrand! Let’s call it an “act of idiocy”! No. Let’s not.

This is not a play-off between the distress of rape victims and the distress of men accused of rape. It all comes down to some basic questions: is it ever okay for a man to stick his penis into an unresponsive female body? Is there ever a point at which women renounce their right to be treated human beings? Do some women, sometimes, become nothing more than penetrable objects? The answer to all these questions is no. We shouldn’t have to say it out loud. Any humane, decent person should just know.