



## **We must stop asking the same, cruel questions of the victims and instead set our sights on the perpetrators.**

The numerous high profile cases concerning powerful men accused of sexual assault, abuse and rape has resulted in many a tongue singing the same refrains, “They’re only doing it for the compensation”, “How come, IF they’re not lying, they didn’t come out and tell someone before”, “It’s a witch-hunt”, “Why are we wasting public money on all of these women crying rape”, “It was a different time back then”.

When celebrities first began to be accused on a large scale Max Clifford poked his head above the parapet to say that his peers were being unfairly accused and that they were the innocent victims of a celebrity witch-hunt. No sooner had those words left his lips he was accused, and later found guilty, of numerous sex offences himself. In Clifford’s case his denouncement of the brave people who came forward served his own interests. By suggesting that this was just silly women “crying rape” to reap “compensation”, he attempted to sow seeds of doubts in the minds of the public in preparation to deflect blame from himself.

But it isn’t only sex offenders who benefit from assuming that victims are lying. It is so much easier to convince ourselves that rape is something which doesn’t happen on such a scale, and with men who don’t appear like the Child Catcher, but instead are revered family icons. In this manner even innocent parties become a part of the problem. By trying to deny rape culture, we ironically support it.

But what about when the evidence is overwhelmingly clear? What happens when we can no longer deny the veracity of the survivors? The song on the general public’s lips changes, but only slightly. Rather than all out condemnation of the perpetrator, there are still many who focus upon the victim. “Why couldn’t they just let sleeping dogs lie?”, “Why can’t the past stay in the past?”, and still they question, “Why are they only coming forward now?” To that last question the implication is always that they wished to make money. They are never commended for their bravery in coming forward. It is never understood just how difficult it is to share what you are made to feel ashamed of, how difficult it is to open up that can of worms, which you know will affect those you love, or how harrowing it is to face the fear of disbelief.

The victim isn’t seen as deserving justice. There is no comprehension of how the pain of abuse can last an entire lifetime. It is almost an affront to society that someone should have the audacity to come forward and ruin the public’s comfortable views of national treasures- even when they *know* the perpetrator is clearly guilty. Even in the case of Saville there are those who seek to protect his post-mortem reputation. The idea that a victim of rape could in anyway receive financial compensation for their experience seems so offensive to so many in the public, that they react as if the possibility (even when there isn’t any) of a victim receiving compensation is more offensive to their sensibilities than the acts of abuse.

And this belief in letting sleeping dogs lie is leading to dangerous calls. People like Nigel Evans MP, are trying to put in place a statute of limitations so that victims can no longer come forward in the future. So many people who were scared, as children, or as those with a substantial



power imbalance with their perpetrator, would not be able to seek justice once they were grown, or once they were in a stronger position to be believed. Many people didn't come forward during the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s because the culture of the time supported and covered up for men in powerful positions. Women, and children were placed in an incredibly subjugated position by today's standards. It was still illegal for people to sexually assault and rape them, but there was a conspiracy of silence within society, and a sense of honour amongst thieves. Though clearly the situation still needs to change today, those who were assaulted then are still in a better position to come forward now. Why should they be denied their right to justice simply because women were treated so routinely badly then?

We need to extend our sympathy to victims, and help them to become survivors. We must stop the enablement of sexual abuse by admitting to ourselves that it is happening on a grand scale. We must stop asking the same, cruel questions of the victims and instead set our sights on the perpetrators. Only then can we truly begin to challenge rape culture for the sake of historic victims, and those who are not victims yet, and who, with the right cultural shift, might never have to be.