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Media Coverage Style Guide on

Protecting

BLACK SURVIVORS



#ProtectBlackSurvivors

trigger warning

The **#ProtectBlackSurvivors** Media Style Guide contains content related to sexual violence, domestic violence, physical violence and other traumatic experiences. **Color Of Change** acknowledges that this content may be difficult and encourage you to care for your well-being.



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A close-up portrait of a young Black woman with a gentle expression, looking slightly off-camera. She is wearing a vibrant red lei with large, colorful flowers. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

intro

Sexual violence against Black women and girls constitutes an epidemic, with 1 in 4 Black girls experiencing some form of sexual abuse before age 18, and 1 in 5 Black women experiencing sexual assault at some point in their lifetime.¹ However, these victims/survivors don't typically receive the justice, resources, or support they deserve. In fact, for every Black woman that files a police report, at least 15 do not.² This is due in part to the unreliability of law enforcement to adequately serve Black communities; but it can also be attributed to the stigma, victim-blaming, and retaliation Black women face as a result of coming forward—all of which **the media plays a foreleading role in, being the spokes-entity for rape culture.**

Far too often, the media ignores or villainizes Black women who have experienced abuse. When their perpetrators are high-profile or wealthy, outlets sometimes enable the intimidation tactics of them and their legal teams. These barriers not only thwart victim/survivor efforts to receive justice, but also contribute to further trauma and harm. The vile mistreatment of Black survivors must end.

Media outlets, especially those committed to uplifting Black voices and experiences, have the opportunity and the responsibility to change the narrative about

sexual violence against Black women. As Black victims/survivors continue to come forward to disclose physical and sexual abuse, it is essential that news publications adopt an anti-racist and survivor-centered approach in covering gender-based violence. Words hold weight, and irresponsible journalism can have grave implications for Black lives.

To combat the prejudicial and misleading depictions of Black survivorship, Color Of Change has created the Media Coverage Style Guide on Protecting Black Survivors. It includes survivor-affirming language to adopt when framing sexual assault, trauma-informed techniques to use when interviewing Black victims/survivors, and harmful terms to avoid when pitching or writing articles on the subject. Our ultimate aims are to bring about a seismic shift in reporting on gender-based violence and create a culture that believes, listens to, and supports Black victims/survivors, as opposed to one that sensationalizes abuse and glorifies abusers.

We hope that you will join us in making these aims a reality. We ask that your publication issue a “Statement of Solidarity and Support for Black Survivors,” and commit to the adoption and utility of the Style Guide in order to uphold competent, unbiased, and anti-racist journalism that centers justice for those who need it the most.

¹ “Black Women and Sexual Assault,” The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community, October 2018, <https://ujimacommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Ujima-Womens-Violence-Stats-v7.4-1.pdf>.

² Ibid.

four steps

Four steps to **change the narrative** about Black women & sexual violence.

STEP ONE

Read the Guide.

Color Of Change's **#ProtectBlackSurvivors Media Style Guide** provides media outlets with a basic editorial framework for fair and accurate reporting on sexual violence against Black women and girls. This style guide should serve as a starting point for contextualizing the distinct experiences of Black victims/survivors within broader structures of power and privilege. Your publication should share this document with all members of its editorial staff and interrogate its role in creating harmful narratives about Black survivors.

STEP TWO

Take Responsibility.

Media outlets can reinforce prevailing and often harmful narratives surrounding Black women and girls who have experienced sexual violence. Your publication should **work with an expert consultant** in this field to determine modifications to its editorial guidelines and to implement long-term strategies to ensure anti-racist, anti-misogynist, and nuanced reporting.

STEP THREE

Go Public.

Issue a **"Statement of Solidarity and Support for Black Survivors"** and adopt the media style guide on your publication's official website and social media channels. Your publication should acknowledge the media's responsibility to avoid or discontinue coverage that causes harm to survivors.

STEP FOUR

Do the Work.

Shifting rape culture narratives does not happen overnight. It will require years of active engagement to unseat the prejudices that are deeply embedded in the content produced by media outlets and in our society at large. Your publication must **continue to educate its editorial staff on this issue**, through workshops or training, as well as introduce new initiatives and programming to create safe spaces for Black women and girls. See additional educational resources in the appendix of Color of Change's media guide.



coverage & interviews

Victim/Survivor-Affirming Coverage Best Practices

*Beyond specific language and terminology to use when addressing sexual violence, putting practices in place that affirm survivors and center their narratives is extremely impactful. We have laid out the following **best practices for coverage**.*

Disclaimers and Content Warnings

Utilize content and trigger warnings to flag content about sexual violence/abuse as well as categories and tags that accurately reflect the violence and abuse against Black women and girls. Avoid using clickbait, misleading titles, false statements, or partial quotations that sensationalize sexual abuse, undermine the seriousness of gender-based violence, or perpetuate anti-Black or misogynist stereotypes.

What works: *“Why the ‘Tea’ Metaphor for Consent Is Problematic: Content Warning for Rape.”* ([Affinity Magazine](#), December 2016)

What doesn’t work: *“It is no secret that T.I. and Tiny are swingers who love to have sex with other people. These allegations are crazy and we have details below from the women who are accusing T.I. and Tiny.”*

([Hip Hop Overload](#), February 2021)

Disclaimers can be a powerful tool in affirming and showing solidarity with victims/survivors, while maintaining journalistic integrity in your reporting. While words

like “alleged,” “accused/accuser,” and “accusations” are distinctions that can help avoid libel or interference with public perception of certain cases, they can often be weaponized against survivors/victims to cast doubt on their experiences. Consider drafting a statement condemning sexual violence against Black women and girls, validating and affirming victims/survivors, and offering victims/survivors a list of supportive resources; and include this statement in any coverage about sexual violence. **Here is a sample disclaimer to get you started:**

[Outlet name] believes in objective reporting and a fair trial for those accused of a crime. However, given the pervasiveness of gender-based violence, we think it is important that we clarify our values and position: We believe and support survivors of sexual assault and harassment. If you or someone you know has been a victim of sexual violence, contact the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.4673.



Gender-Inclusive Language

Rape culture often works in tandem with sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. Adopt gender-inclusive language and refrain from the use of demeaning descriptors when referring to victims/survivors.

What works: *“Upstate Cops Allegedly Mocked, Sexually Assaulted Trans Woman”* ([Gay City News, February 2021](#))

“Her name is Chanel Miller, not ‘unconscious intoxicated woman’ in Stanford assault case.” ([The Washington Post, September 2019](#))

Community Management

Your audience is a reflection of your outlet’s values. Monitor and moderate comments section on any of your social media accounts or forums where information about the sexual abuser or victim/survivor has been posted. To the best of your ability, create a mechanism within the comments section to remove any statements that glorify sexual violence or the sexual abuser, demonstrate hatred against Black women and girls, or attempt to humiliate victims/survivors. Your outlet’s social media and online community management staff should be well versed in this guide and your commitment.

Additionally, do not promote, name, or hyperlink any platforms or third-party streaming services where readers may access content produced by or starring sexual abusers. **Here is an example of proactive community management:**

Ask the Post: Discussion and Submission Guidelines: You agree not to submit inappropriate content ... [which] is libelous or defamatory ... is predatory, hateful or intended to intimidate or harass, or contains derogatory name-calling.”

([The Washington Post, June 2018](#))

Prioritizing Victim/Survivor Voices

When running media exclusives, statements, op-eds, or pitches, center the experiences of survivors when framing “justice” and reporting on the sexual abuse. For instances in which your publication must accept or report on statements from sexual abusers (or their teams), you should adhere to the following protocols:

- Situate the sexual abusers’ comments within the broader context of the gender-based violence epidemic. This would include, but not be limited to, mentioning the following: statistical data on sexual assault (and reporting), manifestations of sexual trauma, and the disproportionate impact on Black women specifically.
- Omit any quotes from sexual abusers that attempt to threaten, manipulate, or intimidate known victims and survivors.
- Balance the sexual abusers’ account of events with written statements from the victims/survivors (or their teams), including full-length quotes.

In order to further center survivor voices, entirely avoid reporting on any community members’ reactions to the sexual assault, mentioning the sentiments of the perpetrator’s family and friends, or framing the sexual assault as a “source of contention.” You should be acknowledging the emotional, psychological, and physical harm done to the victims/survivors.

What doesn’t work: *“On Tuesday (April 6), Tip and Tiny’s attorney, Steven Sadow, released a statement to XXL on the Harrises behalf: ‘The Harrises continue to wait for the accusers to reveal themselves publicly. By hiding behind anonymous allegations, the unnamed accusers effectively render themselves not credible and unworthy of belief.’”* ([XXL Magazine, April 2021](#))

Character Accounts

Don't promote, highlight, or name any accomplishments of the perpetrator(s) when covering the incident(s) of sexual violence, abuse, or harassment. This includes mentioning, highlighting, or introducing any facts or anecdotes that might frame the perpetrator as an "unlikely" abuser, the sexual abuse as "out of character," or the victim/survivor as "gullible," "unsuspecting," or "deserving" of sexual abuse. Reporting on things like the mental health and criminal record of the victim/survivor should also be done with extreme caution and discernment.

Alternatively, sexual violence should be situated within the perpetrator's documented history of sexual, emotional and/or physical violence against Black women and girls.

What works: *"R. Kelly's Two-Decade Trail of Sexual Abuse Accusations"*
([The New York Times](#), May 2018)

What doesn't work: *"Incredibly difficult, even for an outsider like me, to watch what happened as these two young men that had such promising futures, star football players, very good students, literally watched as they believed their lives fell apart."* ([CNN](#), March 2013)

Naming Crime

Always contextualize sexual abuse, sexual assault, kidnapping, and the forced ingestion of drugs as crime. Don't devalue or undermine the seriousness of the sexual violence by referring to it as "a sex scandal," "bullying," or other harmful terms.

What works: *"Whatever Weinstein's Intent, a Grope Is Still a Grope"*
([The New York Times](#), October 2017)

What doesn't work: *"R. Kelly Proclaims Innocence in Teen Sex Scandal"*
([MTV Entertainment](#), February 2002)

Necessary Information

Include only those facts deemed "necessary" to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding the sexual violence (e.g., location where the sexual assault occurred, biographical information of the perpetrator) and vet sources for implicit or explicit bias (e.g., anti-Black racism, misogynoir, homophobia, transphobia) to illustrate an accurate depiction of the victim/survivor's experience. Don't report on, respond to or re-share content that shames the victims/survivors, taunts the victims/survivors, or makes light of the gravity of the sexual abuse.

What works: *"Everything You Need to Know About Stuebenville High's Football 'Rape Crew'"* ([The Atlantic](#), January 2013)

Social, Political, and Historical Context

When covering sexual violence, it should be situated within broader systems of power and inequality. Power differentials such as transphobia, respectability, classism, misogynoir, and anti-Black racism all place Black women and girls at higher risk for racial and sexual violence. Rape is about power, not sex, and is often perpetrated by those with power or authority. Your coverage should exist within a framework that considers how factors like socioeconomic status and a discriminatory justice system create a harsh environment for survivors to come forward, and often cause more trauma. **Acknowledge the social, political, and historical context for sexual assault against Black women and girls**, which is a public health issue that impacts communities and requires collective action.

Within this framework, there is little to no room for discourse that suggests victims and accusers are "opportunists" who are seeking "fame," "money," or "revenge." Nor should your outlet ever consider perspectives that claim or imply that victims/survivors bear responsibility for the sexual/physical abuse because of factors like their attire, level of intoxication, prior relationships with their abuser or others, etc.

Victim/Survivor-Affirming Interview Best Practices

Interviewing survivors of sexual assault is a delicate matter. They are reliving a painful, traumatic experience for the public, so you don't want to add to their stress or pain. **Here are six best practices to implement when speaking with survivors:**

ONE

Support.

Allow the victim/survivor to invite persons to the interview for emotional support. They should also have input on how the interview will take place (virtual or in person), location, and length of time.

TWO

Permission

Ask for permission before any physical contact with the survivor. This would include, but not be limited to, hugging, shaking hands, and patting.

THREE

Identifiers

Ask survivors for their preferred pronouns and other identifiers.

FOUR

Email the List

Consider emailing the victim/survivor a list of interview questions beforehand and allow them to determine which questions will be asked or discarded. Don't intimidate or pressure victims/survivors to answer any questions that are leading, salacious, inflammatory, or potentially triggering.

SIX

Preview before Publicizing

Consider granting victims/survivors special permission to preview an article or interview and provide feedback before publication.

FIVE

Anonymity

Respect the victim/survivor's right to anonymity. Don't intimidate or pressure them to reveal personal information, such as full name, occupation, or location.

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affirming language

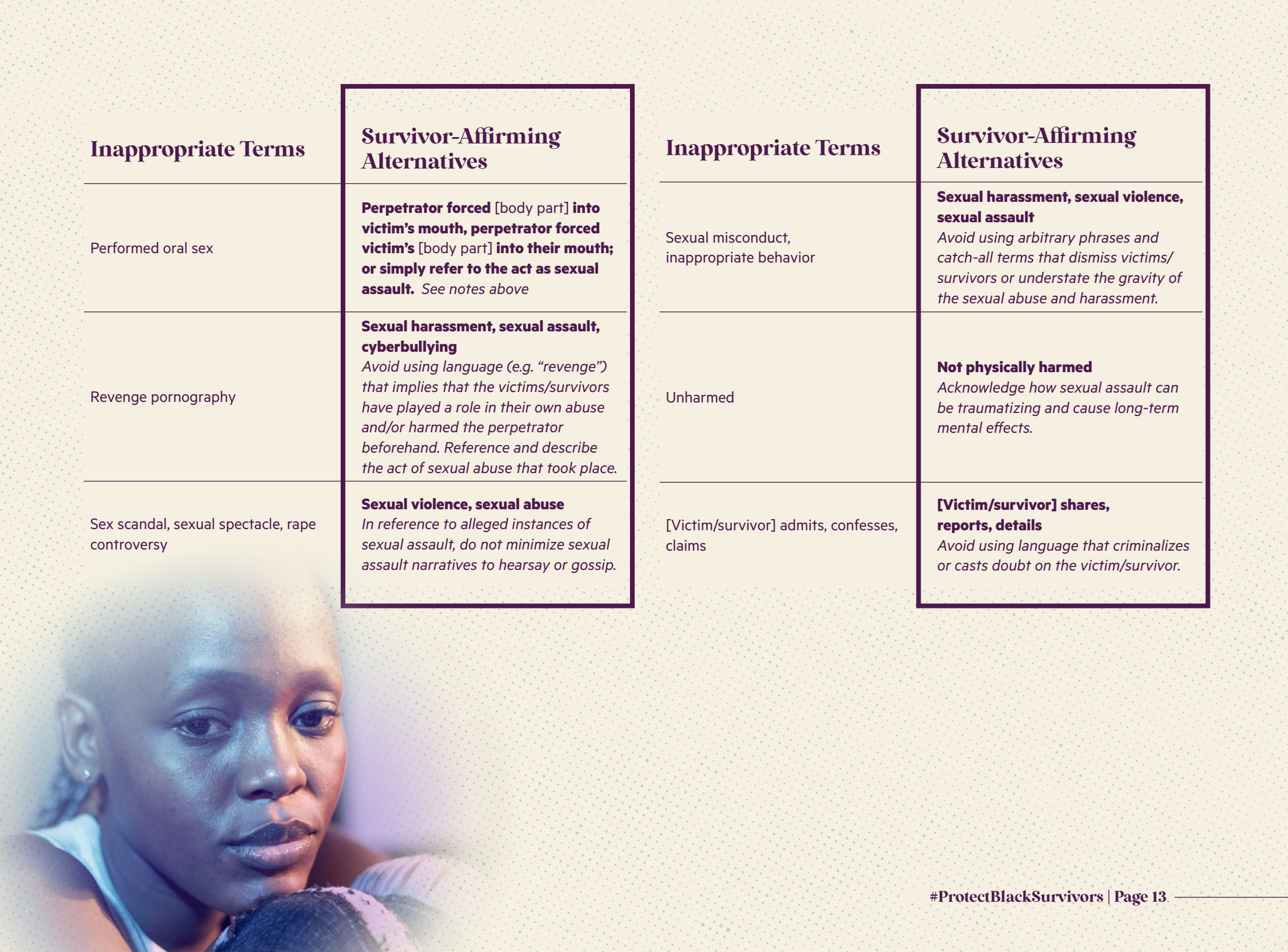
#ProtectBlackSurvivors | Photo: [unreadable]

Victim/Survivor Affirming Language

The following list gives examples of frequently used terminology that minimizes, alienates, or dismisses the trauma of sexual violence and the experiences of sexual violence; and **alternative affirming options to use**.

Inappropriate Terms	Survivor-Affirming Alternatives
Child prostitute, child sex worker	Commercially exploited child <i>Children cannot give consent to engage in sex, transactional or otherwise.</i>
Child pornography	Child sex abuse <i>See notes above. Children cannot give consent to engage in sex or pornography. Recorded instances of child sexual abuse should be described as such.</i>
Date/acquaintance rape	Sexual abuse by family member, sexual assault by intimate partner <i>Reference the actions of perpetrators or simply state the crime.</i>

Inappropriate Terms	Survivor-Affirming Alternatives
Domestic dispute, domestic conflict, domestic altercation	Domestic violence, domestic abuse <i>Do not minimize the power dynamics that create abusive relationships/ conflicts.</i>
Drunken, intoxicated, inebriated	Unable to give consent <i>Do not allude to activities or behaviors that call the victims/survivor's judgment into question.</i>
Engaged in, participated in	Coerced, forced into <i>Without consent, victims are not active participants.</i>



Inappropriate Terms	Survivor-Affirming Alternatives
Performed oral sex	Perpetrator forced [body part] into victim's mouth, perpetrator forced victim's [body part] into their mouth; or simply refer to the act as sexual assault. <i>See notes above</i>
Revenge pornography	Sexual harassment, sexual assault, cyberbullying <i>Avoid using language (e.g. "revenge") that implies that the victims/survivors have played a role in their own abuse and/or harmed the perpetrator beforehand. Reference and describe the act of sexual abuse that took place.</i>
Sex scandal, sexual spectacle, rape controversy	Sexual violence, sexual abuse <i>In reference to alleged instances of sexual assault, do not minimize sexual assault narratives to hearsay or gossip.</i>

Inappropriate Terms	Survivor-Affirming Alternatives
Sexual misconduct, inappropriate behavior	Sexual harassment, sexual violence, sexual assault <i>Avoid using arbitrary phrases and catch-all terms that dismiss victims/survivors or understate the gravity of the sexual abuse and harassment.</i>
Unharmful	Not physically harmed <i>Acknowledge how sexual assault can be traumatizing and cause long-term mental effects.</i>
[Victim/survivor] admits, confesses, claims	[Victim/survivor] shares, reports, details <i>Avoid using language that criminalizes or casts doubt on the victim/survivor.</i>

Guidelines for use

The following list gives examples of frequently used, prejudicial language that minimizes, alienates, or dismisses the trauma of sexual violence and the experiences of sexual violence, along with **alternative affirming options to use**. We have also included examples of real headlines and/or leads that demonstrate language that works and doesn't.

Language to Avoid	Survivor-Affirming Alternatives	Language to Avoid	Survivor-Affirming Alternatives
<p>Passive voice descriptions</p> <p>Example: "A 20-year-old woman was sexually assaulted early yesterday in the East Village..." (New York Times, July 2007)</p> <p>This lead removes the presence of a perpetrator.</p>	<p>Active voice descriptions</p> <p>Example: "A southwestern Missouri letter carrier with the U.S. Postal Service faces charges after police say he sexually assaulted a 78-year-old woman on his route." (Associated Press, April 2021)</p> <p>This lead properly identifies a perpetrator of the crime.</p>	<p>Victim-blaming language</p> <p>Example: "Two high school football players were convicted Sunday of raping a drunken 16-year-old girl at an all-night party." (USA Today, March 2013)</p> <p>This lead unnecessarily emphasizes the survivor's level of intoxication.</p>	<p>Perpetrator-accountable language</p> <p>Example: "A young girl was raped, sodomized, drugged, and urinated on while unconscious as groups of people watched her suffer and kept track of the events through different forms of social media." (The Western Courier, March 2013)</p> <p>This lead focuses on the acts of violence committed by perpetrators against her.</p>

Passive voice manipulates representations of sexual violence. It conceals violence, de-emphasizes the responsibility of the perpetrator, and exaggerates the victim/survivor's agency.¹

¹ Alexandra K. Frazer and Michelle D. Miller, "Double Standards in Sentence Structure: Passive Voice Narratives in Describing Domestic Violence," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, vol. 28, no. 1, October 9, 2008: pp. 62–71, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927x08325883>, 69.

Victim-blaming language has been shown to have negative psychological effects on victims and survivors, such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹ It also further discourages formal reporting of sexual violence and abuse.

¹ Michael O. Schroeder, "The Psychological Impact of Victim-Blaming and How to Stop It," *USA Today*, April 19, 2016, <https://health.usnews.com/wellness/articles/2016-04-19/the-psychological-impact-of-victim-blaming-and-how-to-stop-it>; Ashima Suvarna et al., "Identifying Victim Blaming Language in Discussions about Sexual Assaults on Twitter," *International Conference on Social Media and Society*, July 26, 2020, pp. 156–163, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3400806.3400825>.

Language to Avoid	Survivor-Affirming Alternatives	Language to Avoid	Survivor-Affirming Alternatives
<p>Euphemistic language</p> <p>Example: “Neptune City Police: Man Masturbated In Front of Kids, Fondled Women in Stop & Shop” (<i>App. Part of USA Today Network, September 2020</i>)</p> <p>This headline names the actions of the perpetrator without calling out how they are criminal.</p>	<p>Explicit, direct language</p> <p>Example: “Filing: Man drugged woman before sexual assault” (<i>Ottumwa Courier, February 2020</i>)</p> <p>This headline explains how the crime was committed by the perpetrator against the survivor.</p>	<p>Language that alludes to consent</p> <p>Example: “The arrest warrant says that he allegedly abused two of his students in 2020, with one of them claiming he engaged in oral sex, while the other says they had exchanged nude photos.” (<i>Complex, February 2021</i>)</p> <p>This lead describes sex acts and exchanges in a way that implies mutual engagement between the abuser and survivors. These acts should be framed as sexual violence.</p>	<p>Language that names sexual violence</p> <p>Example: “Sexual Assault Survivor Suing the Former Coach-Teacher Who Preyed on Her, and the School District That Allegedly Failed to Protect Union City, NJ Students from His Serial Abuse” (<i>PR Newswire, April 2021</i>)</p> <p>This headline uses terms that delineate the behavior of a sexual predator.</p>

Euphemistic language trivializes sexual assault by removing the violent nature of the abuse and invalidating the traumatic experience(s) of victims/survivors.¹ A 2013 study found that euphemistic language “impairs ethical decision-making” (including whether to report sexual abuse), “encourages a mindless processing of moral considerations” (including whether child sexual abuse is considered as such), as well as prompts readers, witnesses, and bystanders to “forget” the details of the sexual assault or abuse.²

Using language that implies consent perpetuates harmful rape myths and misrepresentations, including that victims experience pleasurable feelings during sexual abuse or are complicit (or play a role) in their own victimization, and that sexual assault is not inherently violent.¹ Implying consent also omits the agency and culpability of the perpetrator.

¹ Haley Pritchard, “Changing Conversations about Sexual Assault,” See the Girl, December 17, 2014, <https://www.seethegirl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Fellowship-Changing-Conversation-Sexual-Assault.pdf> pp: 4.

² Kristen Lucas and Jeremy P. Fyke, “Euphemisms and Ethics: A Language-Centered Analysis of Penn State’s Sexual Abuse Scandal,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 122, no. 4, June 17, 2013: pp. 551–569, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1777-0>, 558–559.

¹ Haley Pritchard, “Changing Conversations about Sexual Assault,” See the Girl, December 17, 2014, <https://www.seethegirl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Fellowship-Changing-Conversation-Sexual-Assault.pdf> pp: 4–6.



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key terms & phrases

words have power

*Words have power, and it's important that we understand the language surrounding sexual violence so that it can be **used to protect and uplift**, rather than weaponized against survivors. Establishing important terms and phrases, and their meanings as they pertain to this topic, is foundational to a commitment to survivors.*



Consent

An agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity. It requires a verbal and affirmative expression, is an ongoing process of discussing boundaries and expectations, and can be withdrawn at any time.¹ Instances in which consent cannot be given include, but are not limited to:

- Where individuals are underage, intoxicated, or incapacitated by drugs or alcohol.
- Where individuals are asleep or unconscious.
- Where someone agrees to an activity under the pressure of intimidation, threat, coercion, or physical force.
- Where power differentials exist, such as engaging in sexual activity with an employee or student.

¹ "What is consent?" Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, (n.d.), <https://www.rainn.org/articles/what-is-consent>.

Sexual Harassment

Any unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.¹ Some forms of sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:

- Discussing sexual relations, stories, and fantasies in inappropriate places, such as work or school.
- Exposing oneself or performing sexual acts on oneself.
- Making conditions of employment or advancement dependent on sexual favors, either explicitly or implicitly.
- Making jokes that refer to sexual acts or sexual orientation.

¹ "Sexual Harassment," Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, (n.d.), <https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-harassment>.

Sexual Assault

Any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs by force or without the explicit consent of the recipient of the unwanted sexual activity.¹ Some forms of sexual assault include, but are not limited to:

- **Attempted Rape:** The attempted penetration of the victim's body.²
- **Forcible Sodomy:** Forcing an individual to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body.³
- **Forcible Object Penetration:** Penetrating someone's vagina or anus, or causing that individual to penetrate themselves, against their will.
- **Groping:** Unwanted or coerced sexual touching.
- **Rape:** The penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or the oral penetration by a sex organ without the consent of the victim.⁴
- Any sexual contact with minors, or any coerced sexual contact.

1 "Types of Sexual Assault," Marshall University Women's and Gender Center, (n.d.), <https://www.marshall.edu/wcenter/sexual-assault/types-of-sexual-assault/>; "Sexual Assault," Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, (n.d.), <https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault>.

2 "Types of Sexual Assault," Marshall University Women's and Gender Center, (n.d.), <https://www.marshall.edu/wcenter/sexual-assault/types-of-sexual-assault/>.

3 Ibid.

4 "Uniform Crime Report, Crime in the United States: Rape," Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/rape.pdf>.

Child Sexual Abuse

Any interaction between a child and an adult (or an older adolescent) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer. This can include both touching and non-touching behaviors, such as voyeurism, exhibitionism, or exposing the child to pornography (see definitions below).¹

- **Exhibitionism:** The practice of exposing one's genitals on purpose to attract attention or to arouse the sexual interest of another person, without their interest or consent.²
- **Voyeurism:** The practice of observing unsuspecting and non-consenting individuals while they are undressing, naked, showering, or engaging in sexual activity, for sexual pleasure.³

1 "About Child Trauma: Sexual Abuse," The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, (n.d.), <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/sexual-abuse>.

2 Ibid.

3 "Voyeurism," Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence, April 3, 2020, <https://endsexualviolencect.org/voyeurism/>.

Sexual Violence

An all-encompassing, non-legal term that refers to crimes like sexual assault, child sexual abuse, rape, and incest.¹

¹ "Sexual Violence," Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, (n.d.), <https://www.rainn.org/types-sexual-violence>.

Victim

A term used when referring to an individual who has recently been affected by sexual violence, when discussing a particular crime, or when referring to aspects of the U.S. criminal justice system.¹

¹ Ibid.

Grooming

The process in which an abuser/predator gains the trust of the child (and their family members) with the intention to later violate that trust and harm the child sexually.¹ Grooming tactics include, but are not limited to:

- Developing a relationship with the parents/guardians to have access to the child.
- Suggesting ways to spend time alone with the child (e.g., sleepovers or day trips).
- Buying the child (and/or their family members) gifts, food, and other material items.
- Touching the child in front of family members, in a non-sexual way, to usher the child into believing that unwanted touching is acceptable.

¹ "Protecting Every Child: A Guide to End Child Sexual Abuse," Black Women's Blueprint Institute for Gender and Culture, 2017, https://d6474d13-2b53-4643-b862-e78077ee7880.filesusr.com/ugd/f0223e_68ba4688afc1418e92f3eb0ec8b43c84.pdf.

Perpetrator

A term used when referring to an individual who has carried out a harmful, criminal, or violent act. As it pertains to sexual violence, perpetrators may use emotional coercion, psychological pressure, or manipulation to force a victim into non-consensual sex.¹

¹ "Key Terms and Phrases," Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, (n.d.), <https://www.rainn.org/articles/key-terms-and-phrases>.

Survivor

A term used when referring to an individual who has gone through the recovery process, or when discussing the short- or long-term effects of sexual violence.¹

¹ "Key Terms and Phrases," Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, (n.d.), <https://www.rainn.org/articles/key-terms-and-phrases>.

Abuser

A term used when referring to an individual who uses coercive tactics and behaviors to exert control over another person with whom the abuser is in an intimate, dating, or family relationship. Such behaviors and tactics include but are not limited to:

- **Physical Abuse:** When an individual uses their body to cause injury or harm to establish and maintain power and control over the victim (e.g., punching, throwing, burning, poisoning, stabbing, or shooting another person).¹
- **Sexual Abuse:** When an individual uses non-consensual sexual acts to establish or maintain power and control over the victim (e.g. sexual assault).²
- **Economic/Financial Abuse:** When an individual uses finances to establish or maintain power and control over a victim (e.g., prohibiting/limiting the victim's access to bank accounts or credit cards, denying the victim's right to work).³
- **Emotional Abuse:** When an individual uses emotions to establish or maintain control over the victim (e.g., criticism and manipulation, humiliation, gaslighting, shaming).⁴
- **Verbal Abuse:** When an individual uses aggressive language or suppresses language to maintain power and control over the victim (e.g., starting an argument, yelling, or screaming).⁵

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Timothy J. Legg, "What Is Verbal Abuse? How to Recognize Abusive Behavior and What to Do Next," Healthline, March 29, 2019, <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/what-is-verbal-abuse#abusevs-argument>.

5 Ibid.

Retaliation

Any acts used to punish a victim/survivor for filing complaints or formal reports against the perpetrator for sexual harassment and violence.¹ Some forms of retaliation include, but are not limited to:

- **Ostracism:** Wrongfully excluding the victim/survivor from social acceptance or membership in (or association with) a group of which such victim/survivor was (or would have wanted to be) a part of, with the intent to inflict emotional distress or discourage reporting.
- **Reprisal:** Threatening to take an unfavorable action, withholding or threatening to withhold a favorable action, or making or preparing to make a protected communication. Examples include, but are not limited to, promotion interference, unwarranted disciplinary or other corrective action, and punitive departmental transfer or demotion.

1 "Experiencing Retaliation after Sexual Assault," Department of Defense Safe Helpline (n.d.), <https://safehelpline.org/experiencing-retaliation-after-sexual-assault>.

appendix

Additional Information on Covering Sexual Violence

- **Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls and Young Women:** This organization has put together [“A Media Toolkit for Local and National Journals to Better Media Coverage”](#) with more best practices, information, and resources on covering sexual violence.
- **The Dart Center:** A project of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, the [Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma](#) is committed to innovative reporting on violence, tragedy, and conflict—including sexual violence.
- **Know Your IX:** This organization has put together a [“Guide for Journalists”](#) for reporting on gender-based violence, specifically on college campuses.
- **Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)** The largest anti-sexual assault organization in the United States, RAINN has compiled a host of resources for journalists seeking a thoughtful, data-informed, gender-inclusive approach to reporting on sexual violence. Some resources include [“Tips for Interviewing Survivors”](#) and [Sexual Assault Statistics](#).

Additional Information on Sexual Violence Against Black Women

- [“Black Women & Sexual Violence”](#) National Organization for Women
- [“Sexual Violence in the Lives of African-American Women”](#) by Carolyn M. West and Kalimah Johnson for VAWnet.org: National Online Resource for Violence Against Women
- [“Gender-Based Violence Against Black Women: U.S. Historical Context,”](#) University of Illinois Chicago Women’s Leadership and Resource Center

Recommended Reading

- [“Black Women, the Forgotten Survivors of Sexual Assault,”](#) Jameta Nicole Barlow, Ph.D., MPH for the American Psychological Association
- [“Black Women and Rape: A Review of the Literature,”](#) Jennifer C. Nash, J.D., Ph.D. for the Brandeis University Feminist Sexual Ethics Project
- [“Victim, Race and Rape: A Review of Recent Research,”](#) Elizabeth Kennedy for the Brandeis University Feminist Sexual Ethics Project

- [“The Music Industry Has Failed Black Women Survivors,”](#) Alexia Norton-Jones for Refinery29
- [“Will Time Ever Be Up for Men in Hip-Hop?”](#) Sylvia Obell for BuzzFeed News
- [Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist](#) by Angela Davis
- [Believing: Our Thirty-Year Journey to End Gender Violence](#) by Anita Hill
- [Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America](#) by Melissa Harris-Perry
- [Violence in the Lives of Black Women: Battered, Black, and Blue](#) by Carolyn M. West
- [Borders of the Body: Black Women, Sexual Assault, and Citizenship](#) by Toni Irving
- [At the Dark End of the Street](#) by Danielle McGuire

LGBTQ+ Language

- This Gender Nation Glossary, created by Refinery29 in collaboration with GLAAD, is a comprehensive list of terms that pertain to LGBTQ+ identities and practices that can help in making sure you are using gender-inclusive language.
- This Style Guide, created by the Trans Journalists Association, provides reporters, editors, and writers with a strong foundation for covering trans communities with sensitivity, care, and nuance.

Training

- **Custom training from Poynter on reporting on sexual violence:** The Poynter Institute is a global leader in journalism that offers several online courses and training, some of which can be customized, on sexual assault coverage.
- **Narrative training from Color Of Change for reporting on sexual violence against Black women specifically.** Color Of Change adheres to an integrated approach to racial justice that involves both grassroots campaign organizing and narrative work. Color Of Change will host media trainings (on a case-by-case basis) to ensure accurate, nuanced, and race-forward reporting on sexual violence.

Activists, Academics, and Experts

Kimberlé Crenshaw, J.D., L.L.M.

- Distinguished Professor of Law and Promise Institute Chair in Human Rights at University of California Los Angeles, and Professor of Law at Columbia Law School.

- Co-founder of the African American Policy Forum, a think tank that connects academics, activists, and policymakers to promote efforts to dismantle structural inequality.
- Coined the term “intersectionality,” which is used as a framework for understanding the patterns of sexual violence in several publications, including “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics.”

Crystal Feimster, Ph.D.

- Associate Professor of African American Studies, history, and American Studies at Yale University, with a focus on racial and sexual violence.
- Authored **Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching**, which historicizes sexual violence against Black women by discussing the problems of rape and lynching in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Kalimah Johnson

- Founder and Interim Executive Director of the SASHA (“Sexual Assault Services for Holistic Healing and Awareness”) Center, which provides educational workshops to communities, corporations, and other organizations to raise awareness of sexual assault.
- Worked with the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence for over 15 years, as a social worker specializing in mental health and community organizing.

Ignacio G. Rivera

- Black-Boricua-Taíno, queer, trans survivor of childhood sexual abuse, adult rape, and domestic violence
- Founder of The Heal Project, which works to prevent and end child sexual abuse through “healing the wounds of sexual oppression and embracing sexual liberation.”
- Co-hosts Pure Love Talks, a YouTube segment where they model ways to discuss sexuality, gender, and healthy relationships as a means to prevent sexual harm.

Loretta J. Ross, Ph.D.

- Associate Professor of the Study of Women & Gender at Smith College
- Co-Founder of SisterSong, a Southern-based organization centered on improving institutional policies and systems that impact the reproductive lives of Black and other marginalized communities.

Salamishah Tillet, Ph.D.

- Henry Rutgers Professor of African American Studies and Creative Writing; Founding Director of the New Arts Justice Initiative, Associate Director of the Clement Price Institute on Ethnicity, Culture & Modern Experience
- Co-Founder of A Long Walk Home, Inc., a non-profit organization that uses art to end violence against women and girls.

Carolyn West, Ph.D.

- Associate Professor of Psychology at University of Washington Tacoma, with a focus on family violence and human sexuality.
- Chief Editor of the Sexualization, Media & Society (SMS) Academic Journal
- Authored many publications on how gender-based violence disproportionately and uniquely impacts Black women, including “Still on the Auction Block: the (S)exploitation of Black Adolescent Girls in Rap(e) Music and Hip-Hop Culture,” “Sexual Violence in the Lives of African-American Women,” and “Hidden in Plain Sight: Structural Inequalities and (In)visible Violence in the Lives of African American Women.”

Wagatwe Wanjuki

- Antirape feminist theorist and activist who coined the #SurvivorPrivilege hashtag and drafted several works on Title IX and campus sexual assault, such as #HashtagActivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice and “Why Don’t Sexual Assault Survivors Report to the Police?”
- Nationally recognized speaker on gender, race, sexual violence, and digital strategy

Survivor-Centered Organizations

- Black Women’s Blueprint
- SisterSong
- Survivors Know
- The Combahee River Collective
- Trans Women of Color Collective
- UltraViolet



Powered by Color Of Change

Thank you

#ProtectBlackSurvivors