



An Open Response to Shecky Magazine: On Everyday Victim Blaming & Rape Culture in Comedy by @thebobbieoliver

This post was first published [here](#). Thank you to Bobbie Oliver for allowing us to cross-post it.

A few nights ago about 3am, I was bored and started googling myself. When I was done, I Googled myself. On page 18 of the Google search (I'm persistent when I'm high), I ran across a link to *Shecky Magazine* from back in May of last year. Hmm. When was I in *Shecky Magazine*? Usually, when I am in a publication, comedy or otherwise, I get texts and emails from other comics and fans saying, "saw you in [so-and-so]." With this, I got nothing. I guess no one read it.

So I click on the link to discover an [article](#) by Brian McKim and Traci Skene attacking a piece I had written for the website *Every Day Victim Blaming* called "[The Subtle Oppression of Women by Comedy](#)"

Once I got over the shock of it taking two people to write a short article in which half the words were mine, I noticed they called my essay a "trainwreck." (I assume one of them came up with "train" and the other one "wreck.") I thought it interesting that not only was it a particularly vicious review of my piece (they called it "blather"), but the writers seemed very annoyed that the piece had caught on with so many people in and out of the comedy community and that it had received so many positive comments (their article received zero comments). If so many female and male comedians and civilians related to my piece, it must be bullshit!! Rather than acknowledging that a comic who has been in the biz a long time might be speaking from a perspective and experience the writers (also long-time comics) had yet to consider and could learn more about, the piece must be crushed and the perspective must be mocked!

So, since you didn't get it *Shecky*, allow me to elaborate on the points you raised....

Shecky writes:

"There's a website called "Every Day Victim Blaming." We know, we know... it sounds like a satire or a parody site... something the Onion might come up with. (The title certainly sounds like it was named by one of the Festrunk Brothers- "We're two WILD AND CRAZY GUYS! Please to read our site, 'EVERYDAY VICTIM BLAMING!' The FOXES DIG IT!")"

The most offensive part of that is what a bad joke that was. (Try harder, guys.) Then they go on to quote the website's actual mission statement.

EVERYDAY VICTIM BLAMING



A campaign to change the language, culture and attitude around violence against women and children

Ok, let's just start with what is going on in your world and your brain that you think an organization dedicated to helping women and children who are victims of violence and that seeks to change the way these people (we) are treated, is a joke? Seriously, the idea that a group of people would gather together writers from all walks of life to comment on society's treatment of victims is hilarious to you? Lol beaten and raped women and children, amirite?! Why would you possibly seek to change the world when you can just sit around and make fun of people who try? You couldn't have proved the point of the organization or of my essay more if you had just stopped there. But, you didn't. In response to me stopping a radio interviewer from making a victim-blaming rape joke in an interview with me, *Shecky* writes:

"We submit that any comedian that ceases being a comedian and instead becomes an activist or ideologue will get that look a lot. Especially if the comedian is booked onto a radio show as a comedian but shifts gears into feminist scold. She has every right, of course, to shift into ideologue mode, but she can't expect the segment to instantly turn into anything but a frozen turd. Oh, sure, it makes for a great story at the next meeting of the Lena Dunham Fan Club, but she can't expect here riposte automatically provide rock-solid proof that we are all living in a hellish, unsympathetic "rape culture." She was (we assume) brought onto the show as a comedian... she might consider responding to a joke with... *a joke!*"

Firstly, are you guys really making the point that a comic must be a dancing monkey 24/7 and can never be serious at all? So, Jon Stewart, Bill Maher, George Carlin, etc don't count as comics? You two have no personal opinions you ever express in interviews? You said you assume I was brought on the show to be a comedian aka funny. I actually was very funny and have been asked back several times. The host went on to write an article about me that ended up on the cover of *Pasadena Weekly*, so I feel pretty sure that he was happy with my work on the show. Actually, I was brought on there to discuss the feminist perspective (you assumed wrong), which I often am because anyone who follows my career knows that I am a feminist. Why do you think we were talking about rape to begin with? Because it's so funny?? I did not blind-side anyone. But, I'll send the host your concerns for his feelings for having been corrected on his joke.

Second, why did I correct him and why did I include this story in a piece about victim blaming? (I tried to get booked by the Lena Dunham Fan Club, but they were looking for a male comic) **BECAUSE HE WAS BLAMING THE VICTIM.** He was putting the onus on the victim to have prevented her own rape, just as society does every day in the news and on TV and movies and comment threads on the Internet and in courtrooms and comedians' acts and in articles in comedy magazines about how organizations that help victims of violence are a joke.

Words have power. I'm sure as good comedians (which I have heard you both are), you know this. What is considered acceptable speech in our society has changed over the years because of that power. Want to argue that? Watch bigots look both ways before saying "nigger" or "chink" or "faggot" when those kinds of people would have just said it on a radio show back in the day. Words have power. Words affect societal views and they affect your audience. And no,



I didn't expect my riposte to convince anyone we are living in a rape culture. But, let me say this loud and clear so that there is no misunderstanding: **WE ARE LIVING IN A RAPE CULTURE.**

I could tell you that 1 in 4 women have been raped (including women in your audience) and that my personal experience is that the number is higher among the female comics I know, but that wouldn't convince you. I could point out in a long essay about comedy's contribution to that rape culture in not only its obsession with rape jokes, but with the jokes' focus on the victim as the punchline. Oh wait. I did that. Or you could have actually read the website you mocked and the collection of essays by women from all walks of life discussing experiences and responding to current events in the news.

In response to me lamenting how, in a Women in Comedy Roundtable that I hosted, managers/agents/club owners responded to my complaint that I have been in unsafe conditions in comedy condos, *Shecky* writes:

“Those managers— regardless of their gender— are stone cold morons and a danger to themselves and to their clients. The conditions described— which were so quickly dismissed by these so-called managers— are a danger to *any comedian* regardless of gender. No comic should tolerate such conditions. And any comedian who considers bookability (or re-bookability) when tacitly accepting such conditions is putting some sort of vague notion of comedy success over safety and security. (We suspect that a few comedians without management have swallowed hard and accepted slovenly, dangerous conditions, but a manager who tells her client to do so is without conscience and a special kind of sleazebag that is lower than the club owner who provides such accommodations.) Early on, The Female Half, when confronted with similar tattered and dicey lodging at a midwest comedy gig, promptly walked out, found a nearby hotel and told the management of the venue that the conditions at the condo were sub-par and that they could “do the right thing” and reimburse her for the hotel. And, of course, she never returned. She was 23 years old at the time.”

Yes! You made my point for me. Those conditions are unsafe for everyone (however, women are more at risk than men in those situations). But, the point you missed is that the response from the industry on the panel was “women comics are too high maintenance!!” They also added that we are “complainers.” My point was that when I raised concerns about safety, I was told that women should not complain or they will be viewed unfavorably by the industry.

When you say that comics should refuse to work in those conditions, I have to wonder what road you were on. Because on the road I know, the squeaky wheel did not get rebooked. Comedy is about supply and demand and the supply is a lot higher than the demand. Asking to be moved to a hotel room instead of the condo on the venue's dime may have worked somewhere once, but is a great way to never work there again. If you pulled that off, kudos to you (and email me the name of club because I want to stay in that nice hotel). Those situations are ideal, but most of the time, comics are just busting their asses to get rebooked and pay their rent. No one is putting trying to be a star over safety. Comics are just trying to eat. That's the reality. Yes, club owners, agents, managers, etc should step up and fix the unsafe conditions, and in the meantime, the people who complain about unsafe conditions (often women) should



not be attacked for it. That was my point.

In response to me discussing comedian Christina Walkinshaw not being rebooked after asking Yuk Yuk's Comedy Club to handle hecklers who asked to see her "tits and bush" (there was a policy that comics aren't allowed to respond to hecklers), *Shecky* replied:

"Oliver muddies the waters here. This diversion does nothing to reinforce her thesis that "comedy" is guilty of any sort of "oppression of women," subtle or otherwise."

On what planet does a women not getting rebooked for wanting to be protected from or to be allowed to defend herself against heckles of an aggressive sexual nature muddy the waters of an essay about victim blaming? In this situation, Walkinshaw was the victim. The club punished her for standing up for herself instead of punishing the heckler. How much more clear can I be? (insert stick figure of heckler yelling "show us your tits" as Appendix A). Female comics face a different set of obstacles on the road than males comics do, in addition to the ones male comics face.

In the [article](#) *Shecky* wrote on the Walkingshaw incident itself, they say,

"But the "breast and vagina" part of the story is the "B plot," if not the "C plot."Walkinshaw was put in a bad position. We've all been there. Not in this particular, exact position, but we've been in situations where our artistic integrity is (at the very least) compromised and/or we're miserable and/or the "management" of the club (such as it is) is unsympathetic."

Oh, but it's not the "C plot". It's not a regular heckle. It has an underlying implication of possible violence and can prompt a feeling of lack of safety and of an attempt to shut the woman down who dares to speak on stage. And we haven't "all been there." Most men haven't "been there" in regard to this kind of attack. I could tell you stories of the women I know who have been physically assaulted on stage (often in a sexual manner) – and men have been attacked on stage, too, of course, but it is very rarely sexual, if ever. I have been attacked on stage by men three times in my career, each time being sexually groped. It's how I learned to throw a mean punch. But, that won't impress you or sway you or even evoke a twinge of empathy in another person's experience because it doesn't match your belief system that women have it no different than men. But, that doesn't make it less true or valid. So, you may not see how a lot of women feel unsafe in their own town, on their own streets and sometimes in their own houses, and, most certainly, on the road doing comedy alone in a strange city, state or country.

In my essay on victim blaming in comedy (and how making it a joke normalizes it in our society), I mention seeing a video in which Bill Burr said he wants to know what Rihanna said right before Chris Brown beat her up. I don't have the link, but I can't imagine two minutes on Google couldn't produce it for you. I also discuss the Daniel Tosh incident with the female "heckler" in which he said "Wouldn't it be funny if that girl got raped by like 5 guys right now? Like right now? What if a bunch of guys just raped her..."and the backlash and death and rape threats the women received when she dared to blog about the experience.



“We’re not familiar with the bit. But we trust that Burr handles it deftly, as he handles every other subject he touches on. The inclusion of Tosh and Burr in Oliver’s piece seems incongruous, until we realize that the main purpose seems not so much to provide any real evidence of any oppression as much as to demonize various people and, ultimately, portray female comics as victims. (Ironic, considering the ostensible mission of the website it appears on.)”

Forgive me if I grow frustrated at the inability to see what is right in front of you. First of all, to lead any argument with “we’re not familiar with the bit, but...” proves that you aren’t interested in an actual analysis of my essay, but in defending a position you hold firm, regardless of facts and individual situations and perspectives. Asking what Rihanna said right before Chris Brown beat her up implies that she ‘must have said something really bad to bring on that kind of ass-whooping.’ Victims are not responsible for their attackers’ inability to control their violent impulses. Period. That is victim blaming as a punchline to a joke. That is actually a textbook example of what I am talking about. Does that mean that Bill Burr is a bad comic? OF COURSE NOT. It means that is a victim blaming joke.

What does the Tosh incident have to do with the thesis of my essay, sorry, trainwreck? The woman (heckler) who blogged about her experience and discomfort, fear, etc of being in that situation was sent rape and death threats. According to people who were there, Tosh asked the crowd what they wanted to talk about. That woman was no more of a heckler than the guys who shouted to for Tosh to talk about rape. Why didn’t Tosh imply a threat to the male hecklers? Why didn’t he try to silence them the way he silenced her? Has anyone thought that, considering rape stats and the fact that woman expressed discomfort with the topic, the heckler may have, in fact, been a rape victim herself? And even she wasn’t, likely 1 in 4 of the other women in the audience were. What was the woman’s crime in blogging about her experience and her dislike of Tosh? Why did her voice (via the blog) have to be silenced instead of just tolerated or, gasp, respected? And for people who say, “well she didn’t actually think she would be raped right then,” you try sitting through that and walking to your car at the end of the night with the audience members who said ‘let’s talk about rape,’ especially if you have been a victim of violence in the past.

I close the article with a story about my friend who was raped by a staff member of a comedy club. I called her a brilliant female comic, because she is. I love how in the paragraph below, *Shecky* chooses to put “brilliant female comic” and “rapist” in quotes. Hmm. As if they are neither.

“That’s just great. Our “brilliant female comic” puts her career over the security of any future comics (female or otherwise) who might play the club at which she was allegedly raped. So... to review: Our Brilliant Female Comic gets to carry on with her career, while allowing a “rapist” to roam free. Awesome. Is this supposed to be the ultimate example of “comedy oppressing women?” (Ultimately, a meaningless concept.) Any clear-thinking person will read the above and see that this is the worst possible example she could have cited to cap off this awful screed. Sadly, though, it’s elicited a torrent of “attagirls” from both female and male comics.

This probably makes me madder than any of this attack piece crap and not the part about my



“awful screed” (points for owning a thesaurus, guys). You just proved that this was the perfect story to end my piece with because you are attacking the rape victim. You assume that she did not tell any other people in the industry and warn other female comics on the circuit, but let’s put that aside for now. It is an example of comedy oppressing women via our current rape culture within comedy as a microcosm and society as a macrocosm.

Our society does not typically take rape very seriously. We attack victims who report it and those who don’t report it. We leave rape kits on shelves in evidence rooms for months and years or forever. We worry more about the man’s sports career (Kobe Bryant, Jerry Sanduski) or the family he comes from (Dupont) or his business career (Adam Richmond-I could do another entire essay on the attacks received by the waitress who reported his sexual assault and the number of male comics who knew this happened and didn’t warn women on the road for months after the assault).

Society asks what the rape victim was wearing and how many sexual partners she had and why did she go back to his room, how much did she have to drink, what did she expect to happen?? Entire communities come together to protect rapists and blame victims (Stubenville) My friend was not willing to go through what the courts and media and the comedy industry would put her through on top of being raped. Do I wish she had reported it? Yes, I do. But, is that my decision to make for her or my place to attack her choice? Absolutely not. And it’s not yours either. Ever.

And why did I get so many “attagirls” by both male and female comics? Maybe because, like Patton Oswalt and Louis CK, they are able to take in new information about comedy and its treatment of rape jokes and women based on hearing about other people’s perspectives and experiences and learn and change and grow. Or maybe they just want to fuck me!

“It seems as though folks are building a case that seeks to pit female comics against comedy. All it does is make female comics look like pathetic, weak, ineffectual people. Which we know them not to be. Female comics (at least the ones we have had the pleasure to have known) are some of the strongest, most robust people on the planet.”

So my essay standing up to the status quo of the comedy industry seemed pathetic, weak, and ineffectual to you? So having an opinion that does not mesh with yours, being smacked down in your magazine is you empowering female comics? No thanks. If you are holding the status quo idea that everything I said in my essay is bullshit and that organizations that help women and children who are victims of violence is a joke, then YES, I am pitted against you. And you don’t get to hold on to your archaic ideas of a male dominated industry that lacks empathy toward the female experience (which is admittedly wide and varied) and call it “comedy.” You don’t get to hijack comedy from the rest of us.

The article wraps up by dragging Jerry Lewis into it (you were saying something about my essay being off point?). The assertion is that Jerry Lewis saying women aren’t funny is like your grandpa rambling at Thanksgiving dinner and should not be listened to or paid attention to. This assumes your grandpa is not a respected elder in your industry that many grew up loving and respecting. So are Eddie Brill, Christopher Hitchens and Adam Carolla my creepy uncles at Thanksgiving? At what age do we get to stop publishing their versions of women aren’t funny?



“The Female Half dismounted the stage earlier this month at Goodnights in Raleigh— after a killer set— and she encounters an adoring 24-year-old female fan. The fan says, “I love you! But when you first walked onstage, I turned to my boyfriend and said, ‘Oh, no... a chick comic...’” Perhaps the tipping point has already been reached.

When a comedy fan— a female comedy fan, born in 1989— utters such a sentiment to her companion while seated at a comedy club in 2013, perhaps we are past the tipping point. The “Women Aren’t Funny” meme has taken hold with all the tenacity of a badger. How long before a female patron— born during the Clinton administration— claps her arm around a competent, professional female comic and says, “Honey, standup comedy is no place for a woman.”?

Do women have it hard in comedy? Yes. Do men have it hard in comedy? Yes. It’s a tough business”

So, wait. Is your point that people aren’t affected by these ideas that women aren’t funny or that they are? If we have reached “the tipping point,” are we to throw in the towel or continue to speak up? Regarding these lists (that have been compiled of funny females) that you mention your hostility toward in your article, how is reminding people that there are a lot of funny women among comics they have laughed at all their lives some sort of an affront against female comedy? Are there other lists of funny comics out there that you are opposed to? Are you against lists of any kind? How do you buy groceries?

I looked through *Shecky* and ran across [this attack piece](#) West that I thought spoke volumes about the magazines starting perspective. Lindy West was the writer who dared to debate comedian Jim Norton about rape jokes on the show *Totally Biased*, which was a great debate. *Shecky* seems to have watched a different debate than I did or that Jim Norton has discussed afterward. *Shecky* describes Lindy as a blithering idiot who was incoherent and made no good points at all.

To the contrary, she made a lot of good points and so did Jim. But, Lindy was not “allowed” to make points because she is a woman questioning the status quo of a male dominated industry. Why is it if you call out an industry on hack airplane food jokes, you have integrity, but if you call out hack rape jokes you are a free-speech fascist? Just because you can say anything, doesn’t mean you should. Not once did Lindy suggest censoring comics. Not once. She suggested a dialogue about the power of words and the effect they have on your audience. A dialogue *Shecky Magazine* is not willing to have.

The idea that West put forth that comedy clubs are hostile environments for women by met by *Shecky* with:

“This is utter nonsense, but it’s right in West’s wheelhouse. It’s a notion that can’t be proven or disproven. It’s merely a vicious, outrageous claim that merely seeks to demonize comedy clubs, their patrons and the people who mount the stage. And, as a bonus, it helps in the effort to portray women as victims... She gives no credit to comedy club patrons.”

Since the debate, West has received numerous rape and death threats for speaking out and



even Jim Norton asked fans to leave her alone and stop threatening her. Would these comedy club patrons/fans she doesn't give credit to be the same ones that were sending her death threats or are we to assume Norton's Twitter followers don't go to comedy clubs?

When I guest tweeted on The Women's Room (no, that's not a parody organization either! Lol womeznz), I was told by a ton of women that they stopped going to comedy clubs because of the culture of hostility toward women. I was really surprised. **THEY STOPPED GIVING MONEY TO OUR INDUSTRY.** This culture is affecting the bottom line: butts in the seats. If we keep saying, "if you don't want to hear this stuff, don't go to comedy clubs," guess what? They will.

Now, if you will excuse me, I need to get to a dark basement full of angry men to go work out some new jokes. I can't wait to see what disaster *Shecky* compares this essay to. Oh the humanity of speaking up and expressing perspectives in comedy! I'm still gonna use you guys as a credit, though, so thanks!

Bobbie Oliver