



Newsnight coverage of the Max Clifford verdict

Dear Sue Douglas

I watched you on Newsnight last night talking about the Max Clifford case. We heard in the report that he has been found guilty of eight indecent assaults on women and girls as young as 15.

You failed to follow the National Union of Journalists guidance on how to cover violence against women and girls* in the media.

You framed the violence against women and girls as the consequences of what women and girls will and won't put up with. You implied that the behaviour and confidence of girls and women is a significant factor in violence against them.

The guidance says that you should:

Frame violence against women and girls (VAWG) as gender equality and human-rights abuses rather than as.... the consequence of women undertaking activities that would be unremarkable for men (walking alone, being out after dark, drinking in a bar, etc.).

You said:

*"Most women now, this is not that many years on, would think absolutely **I'm not going to do that, don't be ridiculous**. So it's not even the kiss and tell culture. It's **I'm not kissing and I'm still telling**".*

In response to Jeremy Paxman asking you whether a man taking his penis out and expecting to be masturbated is normal behaviour, you said:

*"No, clearly and **most 15 year old girls would get up and leave, why didn't they?**"*

I hope you understand that Max Clifford's violence and the violence perpetrated by other men against women and girls is their responsibility. It is their responsibility to stop, not the responsibility of women and girls to act differently.

The guidance urges journalists to:

Take care not to imply that a survivor of gender-based violence might be somehow, even partially, to blame for the violence she has experienced, nor assume or imply that any of her behaviour might have triggered the abuse or that "she asked for it".

You implied that the behaviour of women and girls is significant:

"I think one of the important things the sort of watershed moments here is that what it also



*signifies is a real sea change about **the way women behave** and so I really genuinely think most of the young women I know, my children, my daughter, **wouldn't put up with that kind of behaviour**".*

You implied the confidence of girls is an issue:

"20 – 30 years ago most women of that age probably **wouldn't have the confidence** to think "Hang on, he's just locked me in this office or this toilet, what do I do? And I **went along with it** dot dot dot"

I hope you understand that it is the responsibility of the perpetrator to behave differently, not the responsibility of women and girls to be more confident.

You said you find this difficult to believe now:

*"It did surprise me that some of those girls, and as I said earlier, I can't imagine them saying this today, our daughters' age group, would say "I didn't have the confidence to say no or I went along with it. I just, I **find that really difficult to believe, now**".*

I hope you understand that finding it hard to imagine something not does make it untrue. Many vulnerable women and girls do not have the confidence to say no to a man in positions of authority. It is the responsibility on those men who commit violence against women and girls to stop.

You don't think men are able to or willing to change:

"I don't think that some men will behave any differently in the future. I think that will carry on".

I hope you understand that by suggesting men won't behave differently in the future, you absolve them from responsibility. We must do everything we can to prevent violence against women and girls, including responsible media reporting on the subject.

Please read the guidelines before commenting in the media on cases involving violence against women and girls in the future. You can read them [here](#).

Yours sincerely,

End Victim Blaming

*The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

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