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# Just So You Know: When Illustration Challenges Rape Culture.

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**Abstract.** This paper focuses on a case study on re-contextualising illustration for second-rights use. The illustration works it discusses is from a year-long collaboration between Rape Crisis Tyneside and Northumberland (RCTN), and 2nd year illustration students from Northumbria University. The paper will first outline the students' original illustrated merchandise work for RCTN, before discussing the re-contextualising of that work into an information pack on sexual consent. This second project was funded by a ERDF Creative Fuse grant, and it brought together an inter-disciplinary team of experts from design, illustration, social science, applied science, and law to advise the re-contextualisation of the illustrations. This paper discusses the pedagogy behind how the students' collaborated with RCTN. It then explains the decisions that were made by the steering group that led to the successful re-contextualisation of the students' illustrations in a second-use context. Finally, one of the illustration students will reflect upon her student experience of being involved in the RCTN collaboration from start to finish. The Creative Fuse project was completed in September 2019, and RCTN are now using the illustrated work within its outreach work across the North East of England. This includes a social media campaign via Twitter, to provoke further dialogue on sexual consent using the hashtag #JustSoYouKnow. This paper will conclude by discussing the positive impacts of using illustration to challenge rape culture, by facilitating young people to become more informed on sexual consent.

**Keywords:** Illustration, Rape Crisis, Sexual Consent, Re-contextualisation, Second-use, Information Pack.

## 1 Introduction

This paper will focus on an illustration case study that used illustration as the core element in informing young people on sexual consent, to challenge the growth of rape culture. Working in a collaboration with Rape Crisis Tyneside and Northumberland (RCTN), second year illustration students saw how their merchandise illustrations for RCTN could be later re-contextualised into a new illustrated sexual consent information pack. Through support from a Creative Fuse North East project grant from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the new pack was created over four months through an inter-disciplinary steering group. This steering group brought together experts from design, illustration, law, forensic science, social science, and an illustration student rep to help RCTN to help shape the information pack. This paper will disseminate how this project re-contextualised sets of illustrations from a merchandise context, to a new communicational situational that visually challenges rape culture.

## 2 Rape Crisis Tyneside and Northumberland

Rape Crisis Tyneside and Northumberland (RCTN) has been operating in the North East of England since 1978. It is part of a UK network of Rape Crisis centres and “the longest established Rape Crisis Support Service in the UK” [1]. As a feminist organisation, its objective over this time focused on responding to the extent of physical and sexual violence experienced by women over the age of 13. RCTN does this with individual support, counselling and other outreach activities.

RCTN’s service helps on average 500 North East women and girls. They help all women who contact them including “women who identify as Lesbian, Bi, Trans and/or Questioning; Black, Minority Ethnic and Refugee women; and disabled women” [2]. As well as providing much needed counselling, RCTN also offers a range of specialist support services to enable women “to address the wide-ranging impact of sexual violence on their lives, including impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing” [3].

In 2017-18, RCTN were contacted by 667 people who had experienced sexual violence, with 546 referrals into its specialist services for women and girls (RCTN, 2019). It is a charity with limited financial resources targeted at relieving “the emotional, psychological and/or physical distress of women and girls who have experienced sexual violence” [4]. RCTN also sees its outreach work “to educate the public in the nature of sexual violence and its impact” as very important [5].

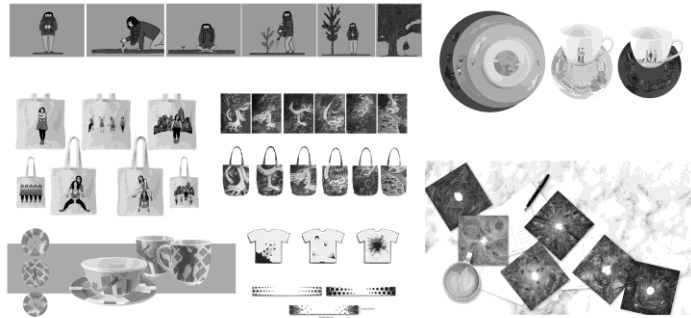
Buchwald *et al.* defined rape culture as “a complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. In a rape culture, women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself” [6]. The current societal issues of young people understanding the importance of consent was important to RCTN, and as part of its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary RCTN was something RCTN wanted to address.

In January 2018 Sue Griffiths, the Chair of RCTN’s Trustees, launched the RCTN initiative “to raise £40k during our 40<sup>th</sup> year of campaign” [7]. It was as part of that initiative that RCTN’s co-CEO Sue Pearce reached out to the Northumbria University illustration students on BA(Hons) Graphic Design degree to help RCTN to fund-raise. Traditionally, RCTN had found it challenging to engage with a mass audience, simply because the subject matter at the core of their service. So, in September 2017 RCTN created an illustration competition for our second year Northumbria illustration students, to challenge them to create new illustrated fund-raising merchandise. This competition was a collaboration between Northumbria’s illustration pathway team, RCTN and Crystlsd (a creative communications company). This illustration brief was integrated directly into a student Contextualisation and Interpretation module, and it created the body of illustration work that would later be re-contextualised into the information pack.

## 3 The Original Illustration Context

Through interpreting three important keywords HOPE, SOLIDARITY, and LIBERATION, the students created sets of six merchandise illustrations each. While the target audience for RCTN’s illustrated merchandise (illustrated cards, tote bags, ceramics, etc.) would be the general public, the target audience for the second project would be more

targeted. The original module competition brief advised the illustration students to avoid the obvious and the literal. RCTN wanted to see their unique creative responses to what is potentially a difficult subject matter, emotionally and visually. The merchandise illustrations would be aesthetically striking, decorative, and liberating, and avoided direct references to ‘rape.’ From this context, each student interpreted and illustrated their set of six merchandise illustrations (see Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** The original competition merchandise illustrations.

The *Hope Solidarity Liberation* project embraced a pragmatic pedagogical approach to emergent understanding through employing a Constructivist classroom model [8]. The student-centred dynamism that such a pedagogy provided the illustrators, meant that each student’s creative response to interpreting the keywords afforded them to shape their individual interpretations from their own experiences and perspectives. In this way, the role of the lecturer was as a facilitator of learning, responding through tutorial and crits to students’ assumptions, creative decisions and questions.

In this supportive way, the student illustrators’ own cognitive approach that Constructivism encourages individually (tutorial), and collaboratively (group crits) helped them to arrive at empathic interpretations of the keywords. Their understanding of their creative responsibilities emerged from their research and contextualisation of what their client RCTN needed. The illustration considerations that were raised as a result of this attention to context related to their target audience’s socio-cultural needs. This process mapped onto the double-diamond design process [9].

On this first project Sue Peirce, the co-CEO of RCTN, acted as the students’ client on what was essentially a live illustration brief. We felt that by engaging the illustration students beginning their second year in a live brief, they would benefit from quickly learning through doing the social and financial impact that illustration can positively have. Throughout the 12-week project the students actively engaged with their client through regular presentations (there was a mid-point review and a client presentation at the end).

#### 4 Re-contextualisation

The second #JustSoYouKnow project formed the last part of a larger ERDF Creative Fuse project. With a grant of £5000 the aim of this separate RCTN/Northumbria project

was to help RCTN to inform young adults on sexual consent and to help dispel rape myths. To do this the creative challenge was to repurpose eight of the students' merchandise illustrations into this new context. One illustration from each student was selected to form the creative core for this new illustrated project.

Working once more with the design agency Roots and Wings, an inter-disciplinary steering group was set up to advise on how best to create this new illustration-led information campaign. This steering group was chaired by the illustration project lead, and comprised of an illustration student rep, plus academics with research interests that could help RCTN drawn from across Northumbria University's Social Science, Applied Science, and School of Law faculties.

The creative intention of this new sexual consent project was to repurpose the visual language from the original merchandise illustrations into a new context. Roots and Wings selected the eight original illustrations (one from each illustrator) to illustrate a single consent issue. This would not require any further work from the students as creatives, but it would offer them additional published portfolio work from 'second use'.

Our original plan for the Creative Fuse funded #JustSoYouKnow project was for an informative book, plus social media campaign templates. This was soon altered for RCTN to a pack of information cards plus the social media templates. Jacqui Hall replaced Sue Pearce as RCTN's representative, and it was her input that informed the format change to cards. For RCTN cards would be better campaign material to help its outreach work with young adults to understand sexual consent and to dispel rape myths. The illustrations used in this information pack (see Fig. 2) and social media campaign would be targeted at young adults (15-21) and use age-appropriate language. Through the re-contextualisation of the illustrations (plus additional visuals), the pack's targeted visual communication to a young adult audience would engage in a more authentic way. Using the hashtag #JustSoYouKnow as the pack title, the cards could also be used as regular provocative social media posts, to create a wider online dialogue around sexual consent.



**Fig. 2.** The information pack re-contextualisation of the illustrations.

## 5 Inter-disciplinary Decisions

Roots and Wings needed to first really understand the context of sexual consent in order to develop an effective information pack. Drawing on the expertise from the inter-disciplinary steering group, they discussed and researched the different facets of sexual consent, and Jacqui from Rape Crisis provided further context for the needs of young adults. From this pool of expert knowledge, the design team shaped the visual communication of the information.

It was decided that the information cards would focus on six areas of sexual consent, plus two introductory cards introducing the pack. One card was focused on just on

young people who are students, and the second alternative card was for a broader target audience of young people. That way the pack could be tailored to different RCTN outreach work on and off campus.

Each of these eight cards would feature an illustration chosen from the merchandise project as the main visual 'hook' to first grab attention. The pack itself would use an illustrated card 'belly-band' and sticker to hold the cards together and branded to RCTN. From these prerequisites, the visual templates for the social media campaign would be also made. In regard to what information should be conveyed in the cards, Jacqui from RCTN and the experts in the steering group helped Roots and Wings to focus on these areas of sexual consent:

- Non-consensual Choking
- Non-consensual Anal Sex
- Sexting
- Stealthing (Non-consensual removal of condom during sex)
- Date rape drugs
- Revenge Porn

It was decided that the reverse of the illustrated cards should feature an authentic social media conversation around each sexual consent areas. It was crucial that the information cards informed young women and men in an authentic way without lecturing. To help them to make decisions around sexual consent, and understand the legal consequences of their actions, the steering group members from law and forensics helped the copywriter to compose the legal advice of each scenario in an age-appropriate way. This was written in a conversational tone and featured on the front of each card, with a re-contextualised illustration selected to support the theme and tone of each card.

## 6 Challenging Rape Culture

The loose-leaved format of the information cards meant that the young people, which were the focus of this outreach work, could read them in the order they desired. They could read them in the order they appeared in the pack, or individually, depending on which sexual consent issue they needed to understand. Sexual consent issues are legally complicated, so it was important that the cards were not seen as providing 'all the answers' to young people. Instead the cards would provoke further dialogue amongst young people.

This further dialogue was facilitated by the pack in two ways. Firstly, the information on the cards provided young people with facts around individual consent, ranging from peer responses to statements on the legality of personal actions. Secondly, through the social media hashtag of #JustSoYouKnow the illustrations from the cards were used as visual posts. At time of writing, this #JustSoYouKnow social media campaign has only begun to roll out.

On the card reverse side the social media post conversations showed both women and men challenging other men's boasting of their sexual acts. It was important that the issues on the cards around sexual consent also addressed male behaviour. RCTN found it important that this should be in a positive manner within the copy of the cards, through examples of males challenging the behaviour of other males.

The original Creative Fused funded print run of the information pack was 2000 packs. It was crucial that the cards would appeal to a younger demographic (both female and male), and that the language used in the featured conversations were authentic. Any individuals in these conversations were anonymised, and any photos that may cause offence blurred out. Such a realistic and honest tone of voice was important to challenge young adults' assumptions around sexual consent.

The compiled pack was originally intended to be distributed in Newcastle during September 2018 Fresher's Week. This deadline to organise a Fresher's Fair stand was too tight for RCTN due to the scheduled printing delivery, so they rearranged the distribution for later student-based events. Jacqui from RCTN was very happy with the packs, and they were how she imagined they should look. By January 2019, RCTN were inquiring about a second print as supporters were asking for more packs [10].

## 7 Illustration Implications

The collaboration with RCTN began with illustration at its core, and the professional development of the young illustrators through a social context. In this way, the illustration work produced had a direct implication within the real world for the students. In the initial project, illustration was the main driver in facilitating fund-raising for RCTN. In the Creative Fuse project, illustration then became the core component in how to provide young adults with authentic information on sexual consent.

The young illustrators who were involved in these projects were fresh second year students. Sarah (whose illustrated female character was featured on the pack's information card and sticker – see Fig. 2), described working for a client as “rather daunting at first” and “a big responsibility” [11]. The merchandise illustrations were a challenge to the students to contextualise RCTN's needs, and to interpret the three keywords into desirable commercial outcomes.

Some of this work was exhibited in October 2018 at Newcastle's *The Globe Gallery*, and many of the students (now third years) made sales, in doing so raising extra money for RCTN and gaining commercial validation to their creativity. It was at this exhibition's private view that the #JustSoYouKnow information pack was successfully soft-launched to the assembled invited guests (see Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3.** The launch of the #JustSoYouKnow information pack and exhibition of the RCTN merchandise illustrations.

Although the steering group drove the development of the information pack (with a student rep involved), the students still became involved in seeing their work re-contextualised. The printer could not collate the cards into packs so that collation was completed by volunteers from Northumbria University and RCTN. Some of the original illustrators volunteered their time, and Sarah found in helping compile the packs she developed “an increased appreciation for the work” she had created almost a year before [12].

The students all received copies of the information packs for their portfolios at the beginning of their third year. Overall, the professional development impact on the students of working with RCTN had increased their confidence. Sarah herself, now admits to approaching “current projects with more positivity” and is “more aware of what I am capable of achieving” [13]. But more importantly, her and her peers’ illustration work impacted positively on challenging attitudes to sexual assault.

## 7 Conclusion

As illustrators working with RCTN on its merchandise and outreach work, the students benefited greatly in learning how they could contextualise and interpret challenging subjects. Illustration student Sarah was a good example of how the students successfully engaged in both projects. Her re-contextualised female character now formed the identity for the new informational pack, and was selected to be on the sticker that sealed the pack. Sarah felt really satisfied that her original and re-contextualised illustrations were “contributing to a charity that was providing people with much needed information” [14] to “educate the public in the nature of sexual violence and its impact” [15]. In a small but visual way, the all students’ work helped Rape Crisis to challenge rape culture within Tyneside and Northumberland. In doing so, they also learnt that their illustrations could still effectively perform through second-rights use.

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