

First chapter of Joanna Bourke, Rape: A History from the 1890s to the Present (London: Virago, 2009)

Chapter One: Sexed Bodies

We are never told her name. None of the American soldiers encircling her would have been interested in such niceties. The only relevant considerations were that she was Vietnamese and a virgin. “Guys are taking turns screwing her”, recalled one of the participants, adding, “It was like an animal pack. Nobody was turning their back or nothing. We just stood in line and we screwed her”. While this soldier was “taking her body by force”, his heavily armed comrades stood and watched. Then, suddenly, unexpectedly, the unnamed woman turned toward him, “Why are you doing this to me?”, she said in English: “Hey... why are you doing this to me?”¹

This is the question I asked myself time and again while writing this book: why do some people set out to sexually humiliate and torture others? The rapist, not the victim, is at the centre of this book. Would you have picked up this book if it was called Rapists rather than Rape? Most of my friends were honest enough to say “no”. Why not? It is because we are afraid.

But if we are to dissect the scourge of sexual violence in Britain, America, and Australia from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, we must train a steely gaze on the guilty parties: those who carry out these acts. The vast majority of abusers are male. Victims, most of whom are female, tell their stories in this text, but it would be wrong to explore the violence carried out predominantly by men by studying the women they wound. To do otherwise is to contribute to a long-standing tradition of blaming women for their own violation. It is also to encourage the illusion that sexual danger loiters in social spaces, like

some agentless germ that a woman can “catch”. The rapist is not a “social virus”. He is human.

Deep down, we all recognize this truth. Everyone of us is vulnerable, and we all possess the capacity to be vindictive. A significant number of people, however, purposefully set out to exploit the human propensity to suffering. The infliction of cruelty is a choice. Who are these people who opt to deliberately inflict pain in sexual encounters? They may not be immediately recognizable, but their actions are disconcertingly familiar. Rape is a form of social performance. It is highly ritualized. It varies between countries; it changes over time. There is nothing timeless or random about it. Indeed, meaning has not been stripped bare from deeds of brutality, but has been generously bestowed. For perpetrators of sexual violence, it is never enough to merely inflict suffering: those causing injury insist that even victims give meaning to their anguish.

Although rape or sexual abuse may not be the worse thing that can happen to someone, it remains a terrifying and agonizing experience for victims. Rape is not a metaphor for the ruin of a city or nation (“The Rape of Nanking” or “The Rape of Kuwait”). It is not an environmental disaster (“the rape of our planet”). It is the embodied violation of another person. In Jean Améry’s description of being tortured by the Nazis, while the physical agony might fade away, the realization that the other people present were impervious to one’s own suffering never wanes. This is what most destroys “trust in the world”. “Whoever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world”, Améry concluded.² Inevitably, therefore, some parts of this book are distressing. I found the relentless talk of violence profoundly upsetting. There is no comforting tale of recovery or redemption to be told in a book that faces up to perpetrators of suffering. One school of thought contends that humans “come to terms with” their experiences through narrative – that is, by telling stories, we make sense of our lives and rise above our confusion, pain, and trauma. The accounts of violence

narrated by rapists, however, never metamorphose into anything even remotely transcendent. Instead, their stories circle endlessly around acts of transgression.

I can't deny that listening to rapists, and trying to make sense of their extreme experiences, has been a task fraught with anxiety. Focusing on perpetrators of sexual violence is risky. In innumerable subtle ways, misleading dichotomies of male-active and female-passive emerge within texts of violence. Might the focus on male agents of suffering reduce women to mere spectacles of victimization, thus contributing to cultural fantasies of female passivity? There is also the danger of strengthening the other side of the dichotomy: the purported natural link between masculinity and aggression. Man appears primed to rape. He is not.

Yet, in our society, we are frequently exposed to the aggressors' vernacular. Their words try to harm women. No amount of distancing oneself from their comments can negate the fact that simply repeating their distortions threatens to construct a female body that (once again) becomes little more than property, the object of trespass. Rapists literally invade and attempt to conquer the sexual terrain of their victims, and – through transforming her “no” into his “yes” – strive to triumph over their social territory too. It is crucial to repudiate the rapist's insistence on his agency, his power, over that of others. I use the word “victim” in order to draw attention to the hurt of abuse; it is not a moral judgement, nor an identity. Many “victims” are survivors.

I think there is another difficulty, though, in focusing on violent individuals. In seeking to counter the mindless, yet profoundly satisfying (“them” not “us”) dehumanization of sexual violators, we humanize them. This is both positive and troubling: positive because it removes them from the category of inhuman monsters, and thus makes their actions amenable to change; troubling because we risk becoming over-familiar and inured to the terrible harm they cause. Their rape narratives endeavor to force an intimacy, insist that we adopt their

languages. It can seem that in the beginning were their words: the grunts, groans, and obscenities of rapists made flesh despite the distance of time (history) and place (geography). But we have little to fear in the patois of the rapist. Those of us who have been hurt by him know that he is incapable of silencing us.

Most crucially, however, this book operates within an historical paradigm. It sets itself in opposition to essentialist explanations such as that of evolutionary psychology, which posits a continuity of sexually violent behaviour that can be traced back to our most distant ancestors and can even be located within (male) genes. There is also a constant skirmishing in these pages with those who wish to convert rape into an ahistorical phenomenon, as in the mantra that “all men are either rapists, rape-fantasists, or beneficiaries of a rape-culture”.³ On the contrary, rape and sexual violence are deeply rooted in specific political, economic, and cultural environments.

Defining Rape

There is no single definition of “rape” or “sexual abuse”. In popular parlance, contradictory coinages and euphemisms are commonplace. Thus, we hear terms such as “consensual gang rape”, “involuntary brothel prostitution”, and “distorted loving”.⁴ Some descriptions of rape nonchalantly acknowledge that the woman willingly “agreed to” each and every “sexual intimacy”;⁵ other accounts coolly concede that the victim desperately pleaded for the men to stop, yet still refuse to admit that the act was in any way forced. Articles on rape often slip casually between discussions of consensual and coerced encounters.⁶

Scholarly commentators hardly inspire more confidence. Does the designation “rapist” require a stranger brandishing a knife or will a spouse who

gradually wears down a “no” meet the necessary conditions? The definition of sexual abuse as “a sexual activity witnessed and/or experienced that is emotionally unsettling or disturbing”⁷ may seem overly encompassing (defined this broadly, have any of us escaped abuse?), but requiring brutal physical force also clearly excludes a universe of cruelty (who can deny the suffering caused by emotional coercion?). Imprecision permeates much clinical and psychiatric literature. In many cases, rapists are discussed in the same breath as gays, Peeping Toms, and verbal harassers. In conducting research for this book, I sometimes found it impossible to distinguish analyses of violent rapists or paedophiles from studies focussing on consenting homosexuals (whose actions, these commentators believed, would inevitably degenerate into more serious forms of “deviance” if not treated or punished). Rape is an “essentially contested category”,⁸ infused through and through with political meaning.

What if we turn to the law? Legal definitions have an aura of meticulousness – until explored more carefully. Commentators often assume that legal statutes decree that rape involves the forced penetration of a vagina by a penis. But this is not the case. Rape sometimes must involve violence; other times, lack of consent alone suffices. Still other statutes refer to sexual acts committed “against a woman’s will”. In some jurisdictions, proof of penile penetration of a vagina might be required, while others insist on evidence of emission of semen. Still at other times, the law accepts non-penile penetration as evidence of rape: fists, tongues, bottles, and broom handles are some of the ways a person can be violated. And the vagina is not the only part of the body that can be forcibly entered. What about the anus or mouth? As I show later, at various times and in various jurisdictions, these parts have been included in the corporeal mapping of rape. Men have increasingly been allowed to make accusations of rape against other men or even against women. Women have raped other women. Since rape legislation has often been framed from a male perspective, the victim’s unique identity has often been effaced in the legislation, making rape the act of having sex with a woman who does not “belong” to the

perpetrator. Thus, married men have often been automatically spared prosecution under rape legislation if their actions were directed against their own “property”, that is, their wife. The hurdles in prosecuting close friends and intimates for sexual assault have, in all practical ways, had a similar effect. Sexually active women become “common property.” The ambivalent status of having sex with one’s own children is another case in point. In England and Wales, incest was not a crime under common law until 1908.⁹ Prior to that, incest could be heard in the Ecclesiastical Courts; it was treated as an offence against morals. Most cases of incest first occurred when the girl was under-aged, but the crime was defined as a crime against the family as opposed to child abuse. Prior to the mid-1970s, incest was discussed as though it wasn’t child abuse.¹⁰ In many jurisdictions, young boys were deemed incapable of rape altogether (in the UK, until the 1993 Sexual Offences Act, boys under the age of fourteen could not be charged with rape). As I will be showing, these are just a few of the shifts in defining rape that have taken place in British, American, and Australian legal jurisdictions during the past 150 years.

Where does this definitional ambiguity leave us? What is rape? Refusing, and in defiance of institutional directives, to bestow primacy on any single, static definition, I have proceeded on the simple principle that sexual abuse is any act called such by a participant or third party. The definition of sexual abuse has two central components. First, a person has to identify a particular act as sexual, however the term “sexual” is defined. Second, that person must also claim that the act is non-consensual, unwanted, or coerced, however they may wish to define those terms. The person performing the act of classification may designate themselves as the victim, the perpetrator, or a third party (the suffering of infants, very young children, and the severely mentally impaired can only be described by third parties).¹¹ For the purposes of my analysis, so long as someone says that an act is “rape” or “sexual abuse”, that claim is accepted.

This definition does not claim normative status. In other words, it does not prescribe what ought to be adopted as the correct definition for institutional or political purposes (although it forms the background against which normative statements may emerge). Nor does it set itself up as a truth statement: it remains neutral about the veracity of any specific claim. Rather, the definition is a heuristic device. It enables us to problematize and historicize every component of the complex interactions between sexed bodies.

In writing a history of rape, the advantages of my definition are many. Most importantly, it avoids universalizing and essentializing either sexuality or the body. According to this definition, if a person designates an act as “sexual”, it is. This approach accepts that the body is sexed through discursive practices. Put in other words: certain body parts or practices become sexual through classification and regulation. As legal philosopher Jeanne Schroeder astutely reminds us, there is no sexuality free from construction; no consent that is not constrained; no “authentic sexuality that can be distorted”.¹² The parts of the body labeled and experienced as “sexual” change over time. They also vary dramatically over geographical space, which is why I only claim to deal with the construction of the rapist in British, American, and Australian societies. The discursive creation of the rapist in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Russia awaits a history. As I show throughout this book, there is nothing natural or permanent about the body and its sexualisation. The body is constructed as sexed by a host of discourses, including legal, penal, medical, and psychological ones. Much of what follows examines how this takes place. Linguistic practices give meaning to bodies.

Nevertheless, this sexed being is not merely a blank slate onto which narratives of violence are inscribed. As I hope will become clearer as you read this book, human subjects choose their “coming into being” from a range of discursive practices circulating within their historical time and place. Their choices don’t simply “represent” their experience; they constitute it. Through linguistic practices, the rapist constructs himself as a human subject. Agency

remains important. After all, embodied narratives do not wholly determine the person. As the philosopher Ann J. Cahill expressed it (albeit in relation to rape victims, rather than perpetrators):

That the embodied subject is understood... as constructed by her or his social, historical, and political situation does not necessarily imply that such a subject is wholly and relentlessly determined by the situation. The fact that forces of power act on bodies and affect their literal shape and habits does not indicate that those forces act identically or with equal force on every single body.... [I]ndividual subjects... respond to the play of forces in radically different ways.... the body on which political and social forces act [are not] an inert surface.¹³

The sexed body “acts as an active and sometimes resistant factor”, both in processes of subjection (the rape victims Cahill discusses) and those of subjugation (the perpetrators I scrutinize).

So far, I have discussed my definition of rape as useful in the way it allows for a discursive sexing of the human subject, thus avoiding the perils of universalizing and essentializing sexuality or the body. However, more obviously, my definition also enables me to speak about divergent ways of viewing the act of rape and the identity of rapist. In particular, my definition can encompass a dramatic historical shift in the understanding of sexual violence: what was initially seen as an act involving sexual violation became eventually conceived as part of an identity (“the rapist”). The designation “rapist” is modern, first used as late as 1883. There are parallels here with philosopher Michel Foucault’s discussion of gays. In the course of the nineteenth century, the homosexual and (I argue) the rapist “became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology.... Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality”.¹⁴ Medical and psychiatric

literature first began propagating the idea that people engaged in sexually abusive practices were not simply expressing their “tastes” but were a discrete category of human in the late nineteenth century. In the chapters in Section Three, entitled “Identities”, I examine some of these processes.

If the construction of “the rapist” as a persona is recent, so too is the notion of “consent”. My definition merely states that a person can claim that a particular “sexual” act is rape if it is non-consensual, unwanted, or coerced, however they defined those terms. This definition deliberately avoids exclusive emphasis on liberal notions of consent. A definition of rape based on a male-who-acts and a female-who-reacts (through uttering a “no” or “yes”) is highly problematic. Female sexuality is not merely reactive, just as male sexuality is not always driven by the need to take the initiative. As I have mentioned already, to assume otherwise is to adopt the rapist’s view of the female body as nothing more than property upon which he trespasses.

It is important to note, too, that consent has a history. As historian Pamela Haag argues in her complex and highly insightful Consent: Sexual Rights and the Transformation of American Culture (1999), the liberal notion of consent is a recent construction. According to classical nineteenth century laissez-faire principles, sexual abuse was concerned not with (female) interior states that expressed sexual desire or rejection. Instead, the definition of abuse followed the model of economic contract. Under nineteenth-century seduction theory, women could take legal action for abuse if they were “betrayed” by their seducer. As a consequence, early feminists such as Emma Goldman and Charlotte Gilman attacked white slavery not on the grounds that it violated a woman’s “will” by ignoring her lack of consent but because it commodified sexuality. In other words, it is not enough to simply ask, “did she or didn’t she consent?”; the historical meanings of the concept “consent” itself need to be interrogated. As Haag admitted,

Recognizing that “no” may also distort women’s feelings, of course, is not to sanction that males have license to “reinterpret” the word as yes. It does underscore, however, that the critique of sexual power and justice needs to be dislodged from the metaphysic of consent, or the act of consent, where it seems to be focused and absorbed today.¹⁵

I agree with Haag. Absence of consent is a legitimate (and extremely common) way to define rape, but it is not the sole definition.

Indeed, at various times in the past, greater importance might have been given to “coercion” (however defined) in defining sexual abuse than the lack of consent. Coercion, like all the other components in my definition, is also given meaning within specific temporal and topographical spaces. It may include forcing a sexual encounter through the use of violence, manipulation, emotional blackmail, or deceit. The harm of rape can be triggered without the employment of brute force. Violence is often the means of violation, but the harm of rape may exist independently of the violent means. Subtle intimidation, for instance, is often more effective in producing the docile body of the victim. In the period I have chosen to focus upon, the understanding of coercion has moved from an earlier emphasis on physical aggression to a focus on psychologically sly techniques of forcing compliance. I am not arguing that there has necessarily been any reduction in physical violence; merely that in the course of the twentieth century, more attention has been paid to the harm of emotionally coercive strategies used to compel a person to engage in sexual intercourse.

Furthermore, in this book, I will be speaking a lot about sexed bodies and the ways in which violence is sexualized. Although my definition does not essentialize sexuality or sexual organs (“sex” is whatever a person says it is), it remains the case that my definition of rape requires that something be identified as “sex”.

This may seem obvious to many readers. However, many feminists of the 1970s and 1980s radically insisted that rape was about “power not sex”. Most famously, this has been the argument of the distinguished anti-rape campaigner Susan Brownmiller, but has become mainstream in much feminist writing.¹⁶ Ruth Seifert, for instance, boldly asserted that rape studies “unanimously came to the conclusion that rape is not a sexual but an aggressive act”.¹⁷ Rape prosecutor Alice Vachss accused people who “think rape is about sex” with confusing “the weapon with the motivation”.¹⁸ By focusing on rape as a crime of power, these feminists explicitly rejected the individualistic, psycho-pathological arguments that reinforced stereotypes of women. At a period when police routinely asked rape victims if they had experienced orgasm during the assault, the assertion that rape had nothing to do with sex but concerned systems of oppression was both psychologically astute and politically prudent.¹⁹

There are important pragmatic grounds for being sympathetic to these views, but I shall argue against it in the penultimate chapter. As I show throughout this book, rapists choose to attack their victims in a way that they, and often their victims, identify as sexual. As philosopher Catherine Mackinnon correctly observed, “if it’s violence not sex why didn’t he just hit her?”²⁰

Finally, my definition does not question the right of victims to name any act as “rape” or “sexual abuse”. Perpetrators and a male-biased legal system have retained that exclusive entitlement for too long. Every analysis of sexual abuse must involve interrogating the nature of sex: what is “bad” sex? What do the victims of “bad sex” say? Conversely (as I discuss in the last chapter), we cannot ignore the complementary question: what constitutes “good” sex? A commitment to the link between sex and enjoyment remains central to the feminist project.

Masculinity

“Men” are not rapists. Some men are. A few women are. People choose their “coming into being” from within a range of discursive practices circulating within their historical time and place. Their choices construct themselves as speaking subjects. This book is an exploration of some of the most common narratives of rape and sexual abuse, with an emphasis on how these stories have changed over time. Because of the huge discursive power wielded by professions like law, criminology, psychology, and psychiatry, much of my analysis focuses on their languages of violation. In the conclusion, I will be looking at alternative narratives available for (primarily male) human subjects – that is, narratives that place sexual aggression outside the threshold of the human.

It is not hard to locate aggressive narratives, though. Western society is deluged by a glossolalia of violence, particularly sexual violence. Nineteenth-century Penny Dreadfuls recounted stories of lust and violation in gruesome detail. Romances lovingly depict their heroines being “ravished” against their will. One in every eight Hollywood movies includes a rape scene.²¹ Indeed, no Western or Vietnam War film would be complete without at least one image of rape. Newspapers increasingly and routinely describe horrific sex attacks. From being located on the periphery of newspaper journalism, stories of rape and sexual assault edged their way to the centre of reportage from the 1980s.²² The penis is commonly coded as a weapon. Discourses of pleasure and shame vie for attention in stories of sexual abuse.

Furthermore, I suggest, whichever narrative is espoused, they fulfil important functions for the rapist. Through recitation, act of sexual violation is given meaning, including pleasure and pain, guilt and shame. Rape narratives may ultimately always fail, but they are an attempt to grasp something

oppressive, crushing, and profoundly significant for the perpetrator. The insistence on recitals of consent (“she was wearing a tight red dress”) and pleasure (“she was begging for ‘it’”), for instance, are attempts by sexual abusers to integrate their actions into a bearable narrative of the self. They are integral to the process of enabling the perpetrator to assimilate his (or her) acts into a non-violating/non-traumatising “self”. Narrative or putting one’s experience into words restores “the social dimension of the self lost in the midst of violence”.²³ These stories are fundamentally situated in space and time. For example, with the development of a “dating culture”, rapists began attempting to fit their actions into romantic frameworks. In the words of a twenty-year-old Coast Guard who raped a young hitchhiker, “You don’t want to get hurt, baby – you want to get laid. You want it as much as I do”. Afterwards, he offered to buy her dinner.²⁴ Typically, a rapist in the twentieth century would take the trouble to drive the victim to her home, dropping her off politely at her doorstep. As one police report of a rape described it,

when the suspect was finished, suspect dressed himself, being very nonchalant about what had happened, making small talk as he dressed. Suspect then drove from scene to bus stop, gave complainant a dollar for bus fare, and left complainant there.²⁵

Such actions are an attempt not only to elicit “approving” behaviour from the victim by translating forcible rape into romantic seduction, but are also an attempt to shore up his own identity as a man capable of giving as well as receiving sexual pleasure and companionship. The account of sexual violence not only frames cruelty, it enables it.

Prevalence

Rape and sexual abuse are common, even if we do not actually know how many women and men are raped every year. Sexual assault eludes statistical notation. It is not simply that the statistics are not collected in a consistent or reliable manner. They cannot exist. As well as the difficulties I mentioned earlier in defining sexual abuse, legal and societal definitions of sexual abuse can change abruptly. In Britain, for instance, the number of recorded rapes jumped dramatically in 1885 due to the criminalization of sex with girls between the ages of 13 and 16 years. Legislative change alone could not explain the increase, however. After all, there was also an increase in 1885 in the number of sexual abuse cases involving girls under the age of thirteen. In other words, definitional changes were a response to a broader moral panic about the “white slavery” of English girls¹ and, in turn, the legislative changes encouraged greater reportage of abuse.²⁶ Similarly, the rapid increase in reports of rape since the 1960s was strongly influenced by improvements in the efficiency of reporting and recording these crimes, which were, in turn, partly a response to feminist-led awareness of the harm of such abuse and their encouragement of women to speak out against violation.²⁷

But even if we agreed on a definition (let’s say a specific legal one), most acts of sexual violence are neither reported nor recorded. For instance, in a national, representative sample of American women in the early 1990s, only 12 per cent of rape victims said that they had reported the crime to the authorities.²⁸ In that sample, 60 per cent of the assaults occurred when the women were below the age of eighteen. But, even among girls and women who were abused since the age of twelve years, fewer than nearly one-third reported the assault to a law enforcement agency, according to the National Crime Victimization Surveys of 1994 and 1995.²⁹ In Britain, a Gallup Poll for 2000 found that one quarter of people who claimed that either they or someone else in their household had been sexually assaulted or raped failed to report the assault to the police.³⁰

¹ This is discussed in both Chapter Three (“No means Yes”) and Chapter Five (“Brutalising Environments”).

The reasons for this failure to complain to authorities are many and varied. Members of minority groups might (rightly) fear that they will not be believed – or sometimes worse, they might be believed and thus find their communities subjected to increased policing. Formally accusing a father, husband, or brother could trigger financial catastrophe. In addition, so-called “secondary victimization” is common. The stigma of sexual victimization remains fierce. Courts often require rape victims to literally air their dirty linen in public. The embarrassment of a court case and the attendant publicity often leads victims of rape to support the downgrading of the offence from rape or sexual assault to simple assault. Offenders might be more likely to plead guilty in such circumstances, confident of receiving a lesser penalty. All in all, victims are correct to doubt their ability to gain sympathy, let alone reparation, from a justice system so weighted towards protecting perpetrators. Indeed, the anger underpinning my decision to write this book was stimulated by statistics revealing that fewer than five per cent of reported cases of rape in the UK ended in the conviction of the perpetrator. Men are getting away with rape. These issues are explored in greater detail in the penultimate chapter.

Rashly ignoring inconsistencies and incompleteness in the statistics, however, what can be deduced from police files, court records, and surveys? In this book, I focus primarily on the rape and sexual abuse of adults (there is a sophisticated literature on child sexual abuse).³¹ In other chapters, I present the most reliable estimates for male-on-male rape and female-on-male rape. However, for the largest proportion of rapes – that is, male-on-female attacks – the broad trend seems to be high levels of rape in the early modern period, which dipped significantly in the period I start with (that is, from the mid-nineteenth century). Rape rates then rose steadily from around the 1910s, with the exception of the decades 1930s and 1950s (when they stabilized and even dropped). From the mid-1960s, rape did not simply rise: it soared.

What about the specifics? The British Crime Survey of 2001 found that found that the prevalence rate of rape was 0.3 per cent for women over sixteen years. That is equivalent to an estimated 47,000 adult female victims of rape each year. Since the age of sixteen, seven per cent of women (that is one in every 27 women) had suffered a serious sexual attack at least once in her lifetime.³² In the United States, the main statistics for rape rates come from the 1940s onwards. According to the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), in the 1950s, reports to the police of rape and attempted rape were about 25 per 100,000 Americans each year. This was almost four times the rate reported in the 1940s. By the 1980s, the rate had climbed further, to about 70 per 100,000. Victimization studies generally revealed levels of sexual abuse about three or four times higher than these estimates. But victimisation studies showed much less increase over time when compared with the UCR, suggesting that the increase in the UCR rate may be partly the result of increased reporting to the police.³³

Given the incompleteness and ambiguities of the official statistics, some sociologists and criminologists have attempted to estimate how many men might be willing to admit to coercive sexual behaviour. Surveys of male college students in America found that around 25 per cent admitted to one or more forcible attempts at sexual intercourse since entering college.³⁴ In a study of 359 male college students in Rhode Island, 12 per cent said they would commit sexual assault if the chances of their being reported and punished were removed.³⁵ Neil Malamuth's startling survey of 1981 discovered that one in every three men attending college reported, hypothetically, that they would rape a woman if they were guaranteed that they would not be caught. Twenty-six per cent admitted to actually having made a forceful attempt at sexual intercourse that caused observable distress (crying, screaming, fighting, or pleading) to the women.³⁶

Finally, the two most cited statistics of sexual abuse are those of Mary Koss and Diana Russell. Koss studied 3,187 women and 2,972 men at 32

American institutions of higher education. She found that over 27 per cent of college women experienced either rape or attempted rape since the age of 14. 15 per cent of these women had been raped, and 12 per cent experienced attempted rape. Nearly eight per cent of the college men admitted to perpetrating an act that met the legal definition of rape.³⁷ In 1984, Diana Russell surveyed 930 randomly selected women aged over the age of eighteen, in San Francisco. Again, 24 per cent of women claimed to have been raped. This figure soared to 44 per cent when attempted rape was included. Clearly, deciding between such divergent estimates is a political act.

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These statistics can seem frightening. As I point out in the last chapter, they are often used deliberately to make women take precautions against the risk of being the next person harmed. We should not be cowed, though. The person who sexually tortures others is a reasoning being who has made choices; those can change. By exposing those cultural tropes that he (and, occasionally, she) employs, we can hold them up to ridicule, and undercut them. We can provide alternatives. The narratives examined in this book were crucial in creating the sexual subject; but no person is relentlessly framed by these abusive scripts. They choose from a pool of circulating meaning. Rapists are not born; they become. By seeing the sexed body as always in the process of “becoming”, of being rendered meaningful, we can imagine a world in which different choices are made. We can forge a future without sexual violence.

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- ¹ Unnamed soldier interviewed in Mark Baker, Nam. The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There (London: Abacus, 1981), 149-50. The book has come under attack in recent years for being unable to name all interviewees and evidence that some of the men interviewed were lying about their war experience.
- ² Jean Améry, At the Mind's Limits (London: Granta, 1999), 28 and 40.
- ³ There are innumerable examples, but a typical one is Adriene Sere, "Man and the History of Rape", at <http://holysmoke.org/fem/fem0126.htm>.
- ⁴ L. Anderson, "Boyz N St John's", National Review, 26 August 1991, 22; Mara Keire, "The Vice Trust: A Reinterpretation of the White Slavery Scare in the United States, 1907-1917", Journal of Social History (2001), 5-41.
- ⁵ Jacob A. Goldberg and Rosamond W. Goldberg, Girls on City Streets. A Study of 1400 Cases of Rape (New York: American Social Hygiene Association, 1935), 265.
- ⁶ Michael W. Agopian, Duncan Chappell, and Gilbert Geis, "Interracial Rape in a North American City: An Analysis of 63 Cases", in Terence P. Thornberry and Edward Sagarin (eds.), Images of Crime: Offenders and Victims (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 92.
- ⁷ Cited in Judith Lewis Herman, "Considering Sex Offenders: A Model of Addiction", Signs, 13.4 (summer 1988), 705.
- ⁸ Eric Reitan, "Rape as an Essentially Contested Concept", Hypatia, 16.2 (spring 2001), 43-66.
- ⁹ In Scotland, there was a law against incest dating since 1567.
- ¹⁰ This only changed in 1975 with the publication of Suzanne M. Sgro's article "Sexual Molestation of Children: The Last Frontier in Child Abuse" in Children Today, 4 (May-June 1977). It was popularized by Ellen Weber, "Incest: Sexual Abuse Begins at Home", Ms, 5 (April 1977). The best discussion can be found in Ian Hacking, "The Making and Molding of Child Abuse", Critical Inquiry, 17.2 (winter 1991), 274-75.
- ¹¹ This book is concerned primarily (although not exclusively) with adults.
- ¹² Jeanne L. Schroeder, "Catharine's Wheel: Mackinnon's Pornography Analysis as a Return to Traditional Christian Sexual Theory", New York Law School Law Review, 38 (1993), 237 and 249.
- ¹³ Ann J. Cahill, Rethinking Rape (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 101-2.
- ¹⁴ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction, translated by Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 43.
- ¹⁵ Pamela Haag, Consent: Sexual Rights and the Transformation of American Culture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 181.
- ¹⁶ See Susan Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975).
- ¹⁷ Ruth Seifert, "The Second Front. The Logic of Sexual Violence in Wars", Women's Studies International Forum, 19.1/2 (1996), 36.
- ¹⁸ Alice Vachss, Sex Crimes (New York: Random House, 1993), 78.
- ¹⁹ Katharine Whitehorn, "Rape: Fact and Fantasy", The Bulletin (31 August 1974), 30.
- ²⁰ Catherine A. MacKinnon, "Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: Pleasure Under Patriarchy", Ethics, 99.2 (January 1989), 323.
- ²¹ D. Gelman and K. Springen, "The Mind of the Rapist", Newsweek, 116.4 (23 July 1990), 50.
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