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THINKING ABOUT RAPE:
THE MEANING OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE FOR "NON-VICTIMIZED" WOMEN

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

When I was in high school in the early 1980s a fellow student, Cheryl Stillman[1], was raped by a group of boys who also attended the high school. Being just 16 years old and coming from a politically and socially conservative family, I had little or no exposure to feminism or feminist ideas. I, along with my small circle of friends (and most everyone else at the school for that matter) were extremely critical of Cheryl and had assumed she was either (a) lying about the incident or (b) she had provoked it in some way. It did not help matters that one of the accused was a well-liked, good-looking, clean-cut, boy who was also the son of one of the towns wealthiest businessman. There wasn't a remote possibility in the minds of most of the students that this young man would be involved in anything like a gang rape. The story we heard went something like this: Cheryl was at the home of this well-liked student along with several other boys hanging out in his basement. Suddenly Cheryl decided she wanted to have group sex. She also insisted on having the encounter video-taped and asked the boys to insert a bottle and various other objects into her vagina. Afterwards, she felt ashamed and embarrassed. Worried the boys would tell other people at school, she decided to claim she was raped.

I never knew Cheryl very well - well enough to say hello to her in the halls but nothing which could approximate a "friendship". There was no particular reason, she just wasn't part of my circle of friends. I also never felt any animosity towards her. My memories of this incident have become hazier with time but certain factors stand out in

my mind. Cheryl was much more physically mature than the other girls our age. This seemed to be one of many indicators of her "guilt". Her large breasts signified to the other students at the school that she was "over-sexed" in some way and certainly "promiscuous". I simply cannot remember any *real* incidents of "promiscuity" related to Cheryl; she simply "wore" her alleged promiscuity on her body.

As far as I could remember there were no students or teachers rushing to defend her. There was no one willing to stand up for Cheryl and tell her side of the story. There were no voices questioning the outlandish assumption that this young woman would willingly engage in sexual acts with a group of boys, request that objects be placed in her vagina, and demand that it be video-taped for her pleasure. One might speculate that the female students, even if they did believe a rape had occurred, would not be quick to voice such an opinion for fear of identifying or aligning themselves with the tainted victim. For most of us however, the issue was simply not of concern to us. We would never put *ourselves* in the situation that Cheryl had placed herself. We would never be alone in a basement with a group of high school boys.

I saw Cheryl only once in school after the rape. She looked worn down and haggard. I remember feeling some vague sense of pity for her but I did not go out of my way to speak with her. Perhaps I too had a fear of identifying myself with this "spoiled" young woman. Apparently so did everyone else. While I don't really know why she never appeared in school again, one can only imagine the social ostracism was too much for her to bear. While we heard the case had gone to trial I don't believe we ever knew the outcome. We simply didn't care enough to find out.

I didn't think about Cheryl for years. It was only after being exposed to feminist readings on sexual violence that I began to look back in horror at the way Cheryl was treated by her classmates and the community. My complicity in her treatment through my own silence and eagerness to believe the worst about her, preyed upon my conscience for many years (and perhaps still does). I began to self-consciously examine the underlying assumptions behind the belief and those of my friends, that Cheryl had somehow "provoked" the assault and to question the origins of such assumptions and how they were continuously reinforced.

The second wave of the feminist movement has brought heightened awareness of sexual violence against women. In the past 25 years there has been a proliferation of research and writing by feminist scholars on the ideological underpinnings and the causes of rape (Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1971; MacKinnon, 1987; Miedzian, 1993; Russell, 1975). There are voluminous accounts of the voices of the survivors in addition to in-depth analyses of the societal treatment of the victims (Bode, 1990; Easteal, 1994; Estrich, 1987; Lees, 1997; Madigan & Gamble, 1989; Smart, 1995; Quina, 1997). My focus in this study is to describe and explain the perceptions of rape as they are experienced by women who do not self-identify as a victim of sexual violence.

Almost 30 years of research into sexual violence has uncovered the misogynistic cultural beliefs and perceptions which contribute to the propensity of some men to commit rape as well as to proffer continued justifications for sexual violence. But do equivalent or comparable ideological justifications inform the beliefs of women, specifically women who do not identify themselves as ever being the victim of an

assault? Are women generally sympathetic toward the rape victim and/or subscribe to a more feminist ideology? Is the fear of rape a daily part of women's consciousness and does such fear contribute to a negative perception of the rape victim? These, and other issues were examined in four focus groups in which women were given the opportunity to express their opinions and voice their beliefs concerning a host of issues related to sexual violence.

The importance of studying women who have ***not*** been the victims of sexual assault is somewhat self-evident. Women who have experienced sexual violence or an attempt at sexual violence would, I believe, have a different perspective on the issue than the non-victim. For example, Macdonald (1995) cites one study in particular which examined women's reactions to the film ***The Accused***. There was a noted difference in the responses of women who had been the victims of sexual violence and those who had not. Women who had experienced rape or attempted rape placed more responsibility upon the bystanders who cheered on the rapists. Women who had never been the victims of sexual violence were more likely to sympathize with the pressures created by male bonding and thus attribute less guilt to the bystanders.

As far back as the mid 1970's the social sciences (the field of psychology in particular) has produced an abundance of research on rape myth acceptance ("RMA"). In much of this research the tacit ***assumption*** is made that the respondents have not been the victim of sexual violence. This is evidenced by (a) the apparent lack of any attempt at uncovering the respondents past experiences with sexual violence and (b) the paucity of studies which specifically examine women who ***have*** been victims (Muehlenhard &

MacNaughton, 1988; Mynatt & Algeier, 1990 and Reilly, et al., 1992 are among the few studies that specifically look at victims).

While this study is informed by and draws upon the valuable research on RMA, such research is limited in a number of ways. First, rape myth acceptance studies have typically used a number of variations of RMA scales (Martha Burt's (1980) being the most popular). Such scales consist of a series of statements designed to test the subjects adherence to rape myths (i.e. "Women who get raped while hitchhiking get what they deserve."). The subject circles a number, usually from 1 to 7, which corresponds with a gradation of agreement or disagreement. Without diminishing the value of such scales, it is my contention that qualitative sociological research in the form of focus groups will yield a much more complete picture of not only the respondents' beliefs about sexual violence, but how such beliefs are socially constructed.

Second, although gender and other variables such as race, age and education have been examined in connection with RMA, I have not yet found a study that places these variables in a broader context which would include the role fear plays in perceptions of rape victims as well as the role of the media and popular culture. According to Lonsway & Fitzgerald (1994), while numerous studies have shown a significant relationship between various beliefs and RMA, (i.e., greater RMA is associated with less blame for rapist and more for the victim; greater RMA is associated with less likelihood of labeling a situation "rape" even when it meets the legal definition, etc.) it appears that much of the research is demonstrating a relationship between RMA and acceptance of a particular rape myth. They therefore recommend future work to go beyond this and establish

linkages with more general belief systems, if the rape myth construct is to contribute significantly to our understanding.

Third, as I previously mentioned, the literature on RMA and gender also makes the assumption at the outset that the respondent has never been the victim of attempted or completed sexual assault. Thus, how do researchers know when victimization is effecting RMA? How do they know if the respondents would *identify* themselves as being the victim or attempted victim of sexual violence even if they had been? Does their denial of their own victimization effect RMA? Might this denial have to do with disassociating oneself from the rape victim? These are just some of the issues that will be addressed herein.

There are, however, several difficulties in attempting to divide women into distinct categories with regard to being a "victim" or "non-victim" of sexual violence. Daly (1978) argued that the 'possession of women's minds' (p.2) is far more significant than the physical act of rape. If, as it has been argued, rape is an act of terrorism keeping all women in a state of fear and thus operating as a mechanism of social control, it becomes difficult if not infeasible to clearly delineate a victim from a non-victim. Routine sexual harassment at work or in public places, being flashed or verbally abused, or receiving obscene phone calls, to name a few examples, are a common occurrence for many women and can be understood as a form of sexual violence. In her research, Liz Kelly (1987) found that most of the women interviewed had experienced some form of sexual violence. She uses the concept of a 'continuum' to illustrate the extent and range of sexual abuse in women's lives. This concept highlights the fact that sexual violence exists in most women's lives while the form it takes, how women define it, and the

impact it has will vary. Kelly uses a wide range of experiences, including sexual harassment, pressure to have sex and coercive sex in her analysis of sexual violence. Rich (1980), MacKinnon (1982) and Dworkin (1983) have argued that force and coercion are often present in what is considered "normal" heterosexual relations. According to MacKinnon (1982) one of the difficulties in proving rape in a court of law is that forced or coerced sex are all too common experiences for women, and are often considered "normal and natural", even by the women who experience them.

The matter becomes one of the individual women's subjectivity with relation to whether or not there is a perception of harm from the various experiences and the extent of such harm. This difficulty in categorizing women as victims or non-victims will perhaps be more illuminating than deleterious for the purposes of this research. During the focus groups, women were asked about a range of experiences. Whether or not the focus group members perceive various acts of sexual violence as "normal" or "trivial" and/or as having little or no effect on their lives may arguably reflect upon their adherence to the dominant ideology surrounding sexual violence. The category of victim and non-victim will therefore be largely one of the interviewee's perception. This is not to say that a woman is not a victim of sexual violence merely because she does not perceive herself as such. Mary Koss' pioneering work on the hidden rape victim, that is, a woman who has had an experience which meets the legal definition of rape but does not identify it as such, reveals just how common an occurrence this may be. (*See* Koss (1982); Koss (1985); Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987); Koss and Dinero, et. al. (1988); Koss (1992); Koss (1993); and Koss and Cleveland (1997). *See also*, Warshaw, Robin (1988), ***I Never Called it Rape*** for an in-depth look at this phenomenon.)

A secondary focus in this work is an inquiry into the larger cultural context in which such belief systems are formed. Recent social science research has focused on the impact of popular culture as it relates to sexual violence (Buchwald, 1993; Campell, 1993; Cuklanz, 1996; Macdonald, 1995; Powell, 1993; Tanner, 1994). There is evidence to suggest that sexually objectifying images of women in popular culture have the effect of desensitizing the male viewer toward the harm that sexual violence brings to women, as well as reinforcing negative stereotypes of the rape victim. (Miedzian 1993; Donnerstein, et. al. 1987; Faludi 1991; Dworkin 1979; Griffin 1981; MacKinnon 1991; Douglas1994). Although it has been suggested that negative images of women in popular culture induce women to learn to expect and accept abuse (Buchwald, 1993; Burk and Shaw, 1992; Miedzian, 1991) there is a noted lack of research with respect to such images having the equivalent or similar effect on women as they do on men (e.g. a desensitizing effect).

Popular culture continually bombards women with sexually objectifying images of themselves. Film, print, television, and now the computer offer us representations which confuse, equate, or otherwise link sex to violence. One out of every eight Hollywood film contains a rape scene[2] - albeit not often identified as such. It is not at all atypical to find sex scenes in which the woman is physically forced, often with overt violence, and is portrayed as deriving extreme pleasure from the experience. The film industry is not alone in what is becoming somewhat standard practice, that is, infusing us with the subtle, or not so subtle, message that women enjoy, seek, ask for, and deserve sexual abuse. According to Linz, et. al. (1992) the "research consistently indicates that exposure to violence against women that is either juxtaposed with mildly erotic scenes

(slasher films) or sexually nonexplicit (R-rated with rape scenes) results in callousness toward female victims of violence, especially rape." (p. 148).

Powell (1993), for example, has noted that among her students who saw the film ***Pretty Woman***, seventy percent did not remember that it contained a prolonged rape attempt. She concludes that throwing a woman down and tearing her clothes off is simply not that unusual in American films.

How do women make sense of these images? Has it become so commonplace as to be acceptable? Do these images disturb or are they passed off as "normal"? The voices of the women in the focus groups provide some interesting insights with respect to these issues.

Review of the Literature

Prior to the feminist analysis of rape in the late 1960's and early 1970's, rape was generally regarded by the public, the legal system and scholars alike, as an act stemming from the naturally uncontrollable sex drive of the male. Male sexual passion was overwhelming and therefore men were not deemed responsible if they could not control themselves in the presence of a woman said to be "leading them on". In fact, it was seen as the responsibility of the woman to hold male sexual desire in check and to act as the guardians of sexual morality (Pateman, 1988; Donat and D'Emilio, 1997). In other words, women, with the power to arouse sexual passions in men and the supposed power to tame and control male desire, were the gatekeepers of sexual morality. If a man should loose control of himself sexually, she somehow stirred his passions to begin with, or, in the alternative, did nothing to quell them.

Preceding the feminist redefinition of sexual violence, most scholarly research of sexual violence could be found in the disciplines of psychology and criminology, both beginning with the premise that the man who rapes is an aberration, a sexual deviant, or a sexual psychopath (Amir, 1971). Nevertheless, sexual violence was not always perceived as "rape" per such, but as a normal sexual occurrence where women truly desired the sexual act but for numerous reasons discussed below, could not admit to. Therefore, no crime occurred. Only in instances of sexual force being used on "chaste" or "pure" women was a crime said to have occurred. And then, the crime was deemed a property crime against the husband, father, or other male relative associated with the woman (Brownmiller, 1975, Pateman, 1988; Donat and D'Emilio, 1997)

One of the earliest sociological works focusing on rape was Amir's (1971) widely read (and later widely criticized) work, *Patterns in Forcible Rape*. Amir essentially held a theory of victim-precipitation in rape wherein the victim initiates the interaction between her and the rapist. It is by her own behavior that the potential for rape is triggered in the offender. While scholarly in nature, his efforts merely echoed centuries-old misogynist beliefs and ideology and quickly came under attack from the burgeoning feminist movement and scholars of the time. (Clark and Lewis, 1977; Smart, 1976; Weis and Borges,1973).

A review of the feminist literature on sexual violence is indeed a daunting task. As the radical feminist movement of the 1970's was primarily concerned with women's basic control and right to her own body, there is a plethora of feminist literature from this time period concerned with sexual violence.

It can be said that the basic claim of radical feminism is that all freedom, including sexual freedom, begins with an unconditional right to one's own body (Dworkin, 1978). It is from this premise that second wave feminists began their analysis of rape. Although there was feminist discussion of sexual violence in the form of consciousness raising groups and various magazine and journal articles prior to 1970, it is perhaps with the publication and large scale circulation of Susan Griffin's article "Rape: the All-American Crime" in 1971 and such volumes as *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, ed. Robin Morgan in 1970, and later *The Politics of Rape* by Diana E.H. Russell in 1974 and finally the best seller *Against Our Will* by Susan Brownmiller in 1975 that sparked wide scale concern and interest in sexual violence, not only as a political issue, but one in need of further scholarly research.

Never before had the topic of sexual violence been so openly discussed, much less conceived of as a distinctly political issue. Feminists began redefining rape as a tool of social control, a political act which exemplifies the collective control of men over women and was therefore likened to a terrorist act, a weapon used to exert power and domination over women (Millet, 1969; Brownmiller, 1975; Russell, 1974; Dworkin, 1979; Daly, 1978; MacKinnon, 1989). Feminists began to debunk the myths that certain women "ask" to be raped, that rape is the product of irrepressible urges on the part of men, that it is not physically possible to force intercourse on a woman unless she wants it, that "scorned" women often "cry rape" in an attempt at vengeance, etc. Feminists are also credited with bringing to the public's attention for the first time the fact that rapists are not mentally ill, deranged psychopaths, but your "average" man (Griffin, 1971; Brownmiller, 1974; Russell, 1974) and that the "typical" rapist is not a stranger jumping

from the bushes but someone the victim knows (Koss, 1985; Estrich, 1987; Warshaw, 1988). In fact, it was and is argued that rape is the normal outcome of a patriarchal woman-hating society (Griffin, 1971; Mackinnon, 1987; Buchwald, et. al., 1993) - "rape is not so much a deviant act as an overconforming act" (Russell, 1974 p. 260) In short, rape is not the product of unfulfilled, uncontrollable sexual desire, it is the product of a culture that views women solely as objects for the use of men, as possessions to be bought, taken, and conquered at will, and ultimately as inferior beings. (Brownmiller, 1975; Russell, 1974; Dworkin, 1979; MacKinnon, 1989). The act of rape was recognized as a "form of domination and control, a weapon used to enforce women's subordinate role to men"(Donat and D'Emilio, 1997).

Edwards (1987) has discerned several issues which have come to characterize feminist treatments of rape:

> "the close interconnection between sexuality, aggression and violence as the primary component of masculinity in many societies; a difference in degree only, not quality, between rape and 'normal' heterosexual intercourse; the contradiction between men as predators on and guardians or protectors of women; the paradox that femininity, socially constructed as the complement of masculinity, not only undermines women's capacity for sexual (and social) self-determination but actually increases their physical and psychological vulnerability to male attack; the perception of rape as more a political than a sexual act, ...and the failure of the legal and judicial systems to extend to women the support, protection and redress their injuries deserve." (p.19)

While it is impossible here to give an all inclusive account of the research put forth in the last 30 years, the theoretical framework of my research is indeed based on this broad range of feminist literature.

Rape Myth Research

Rape myths, as defined by Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) are "attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny

and justify male sexual aggression against women." (p.134). It is generally acknowledged in the literature that rape myths serve an important function in the perpetuation and justification of sexual violence. This being the case, there has been extensive research into rape myth acceptance (largely conducted in the field of psychology). RMA is measured in numerous ways, the most common being Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance Scale in which items are presented in standard 7 point Likert format (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

The variable most frequently examined in relation to RMA is gender. Almost all studies indicate that men are more accepting of rape myths than are women (Blumberg & Lester, 1991; Borden, et. al., 1988; Brady, et. al., 1991; Ellis, et. al., 1992; Fonow, et. al., 1992; Gilmartin-Zena, 1987;, Reilly, et.al., 1992) Barnett, et. al. (1992) found that women were more likely to attribute the rape to sex biases and inequities than did men, and men attributed the rape more to the victim's behavior, and the victim's character than did women. There has not been one study as of yet that has found women to be more accepting of rape myths than men. (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). As we shall see, this does not mean that women reject rape myths. It merely means that on average, men tend to accept rape myths more than women.

Much less is known about the relationship of race/ethnicity to RMA. Studies have reported that African-American students (Dull & Giacopassi, 1987) as well as Hispanic students (Fischer, 1987) were more accepting of rape myths than Whites. Williams and Holmes (1981) found that African-Americans were less likely than Whites to define the situation as rape, were more likely to blame the victim, and less willing to prosecute the rapist. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) argue that the research has not been

systematic nor has there been clear articulation of the relationship between race and RMA. This research has not examined variables linked to race and ethnicity such as religious traditions, sex role expectations, cultural history, etc.

The relationship between knowing a survivor of rape and RMA are conflicting and unclear. Two studies have found that knowing a rape victim predicts lover levels of RMA (Ellis, et. al., 1992; Gilmartin-Zena, 1987). Another study found no such relationship (Borden, et. al., 1988). Mynatt and Allgeier (1990) found that among women who had experienced attempted or completed sexual coercion, RMA was not associated with blaming themselves for their own rapes or blaming other victims. While these studies were based on student populations, two community studies also failed to report a significant connection between knowing a rape victim and rape myth acceptance (Burt, 1980; Wiener, et. al., 1989). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) point out the importance of further study in this area in order to examine how "such cognitive discrepancy is resolved by the respondent, a process that may have much to tell us concerning the perpetuation of rape myths in the face of contrary evidence." (p. 145.)

Several studies have shown that higher levels of RMA are associated with negative, stereotypical attitudes towards women (*e.g.* Fonow et. al, 1992; Muehlenhard & MacNaughton, 1988; Quackenbush, 1989; Weidner, 1983; Burt, 1980; Hall et al., 1986; Murphy et al., 1986). One study found that higher RMA among female students was associated with more negative attitudes towards feminism (Senn and Radtke (1990). Ryckman, Kaczor and Thornton (1992) present an interesting departure from research which has consistently found nontraditional women to assign less blame to rape victims. They have found that nontraditional women believe it is appropriate and beneficial for

women to resist their attackers. Therefore victims who actively resist their attackers are judged less harshly. In contrast, traditional women hold the belief that it is inappropriate and foolish for women to resist their rapists and thus judged the passive victim less negatively than those who resist. Acock and Ireland (1983), Burt (1980), and Williams and Holmes (1981) all observed that victim blaming is more likely in communities with traditional sexual attitudes. The victim is more likely to be "revictimized" by society when the community of which she is a part holds traditional attitudes toward male and female roles.

Chancer's (1987) research not only confirms the above, it also highlights the conflict between ethnic and sexual forms of oppression. In her discussion of the New Bedford Massachusetts gang rape she notes the women in the community were very active in defending the rapists, even organizing and attending demonstrations. Because of the media's emphasis on the fact that the rapists were Portuguese, the women felt that the real victims were the Portuguese community. Although the rape victim was also Portuguese she was not considered as such since, by walking into a bar alone, she had deviated from the approved values of her community. "Anti-Portuguese prejudice was commonly recognized and accepted by the community as a whole, but sexual oppression was not. For the women as well as the men in the community, ethnic loyalty was legitimate and built into the fabric of daily understanding. Feminist loyalties, based on a sense of sexual oppression, were not." (p. 255) Chancer also points out that defending the rape victim would have pit them against the men on whose love and economic and social support the women depended. These points raise important questions and should be further examined. We may ask, for instance, if some women are loathe to defend rape

victims because, in doing so, they are seen as "man-haters" and thus make themselves less appealing to men.

Very few studies have examined RMA in women who have been the victim of sexual assault but all have found no significant association (Muehlenhard & MacNaughton, 1988; Mynatt & Allgeier; Reilly et al., 1992) However, Muelenhard and MacNaughton (1988) found that women who accept victim precipitation myths are three times as likely as women in the low-belief group to have experienced verbally coerced sex. According to Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) the relationship between RMA and women's experiences of sexual aggression is an important one not only in order to understand treatment for survivors but to understand how women resolve the discrepancies between belief in rape myths and evidence from their own experiences.

Exposure to Sexual and/or Violent Media

Numerous studies have shown that RMA is significantly increased by exposure to sexual and/or violent media (Donnerstein, et. al. 1986; Linz et al. 1988; Malamuth and Check, 1985) Although most of this research has been conducted on men, some studies have found that after viewing pornography, both males and females think rape is a less serious crime (Gordon and Riger, 1989). Still others have reported that viewing sexually aggressive films (commercially available feature films) increased men's but not women's acceptance of cultural myths indicating that women deserve or secretly desire rape (Malamuth and Check, 1984; Weis and Earls, 1995). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) cite one study (Nabber and Fitzgerald (1991)) which has shown that depictions of violent sexuality have similar desensitizing effects on women when the aggression is put forth in

a *romanticized* fashion. More research in this area is needed in order to understand the ways in which women are socialized to accept and rationalize sexual aggression.

Rape myths function to explain why rape victims deserved their fate and to reaffirm a woman's false sense of security that they are somehow immune to rape. The belief that only certain types of women are raped serve to conceal and deny the personal vulnerability of *all* women by suggesting that only *other* women are raped. (Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1994). According to Gordon and Riger (1989) television news and newspaper coverage of rape typically implies that rape happens only to women who are not being careful enough, who are "asking for it" or who entice men through their appearance or behavior. Women therefore frequently engage in "social distancing". In other words to minimize their fear, women attempt to differentiate themselves from the victim - to convince themselves that they are unlike the victim in some salient way and are therefore "safe".

In addition, Soothill's (1991) content analysis of the media coverage of rape indicates that attention is given only to very particular types of rape: multiple rapes by one offender or gang rapes. The obvious concern here is that since media coverage is likely to be highly influential in shaping the public definition of rape, only these types of rape will come to be regarded as "real rapes" (even though the reality is that the overwhelming majority of rapes involve one man assaulting a woman he is already acquainted with). "Recognizing that definitions of rape are fluid, the potentially serious consequence of this increasingly misleading representation of rape provided by the media is that the public, as well as official definers (such as the police and the courts), may well revert to the somewhat narrow definitions so vividly portrayed in the media." (p. 392).

According to Norris, et. al. (1996) young women tend to perceive themselves as being at a very low risk for sexual victimization by an acquaintance. The women in this study reported a very low likelihood of using any physical resistance and only a small likelihood of using verbal assertiveness or indirect resistance if faced with a threatening situation. They found that fear of embarrassment and concern about rejection by the man were particular impediments to direct resistance. The authors note that while a woman may have abstract knowledge about the general risk of sexual assault by an acquaintance, certain biases incline her to appraise her own risk as low.

The present study will address many of these issues through the opinions and experiences of 41 focus group members from varying backgrounds. While focus groups 1, 3 and 4 come primarily from the suburbs of Long Island they are otherwise quite varied in race, ethnicity, religion, etc. Their comments and experiences will also be placed within the broader context of the media's treatment of sexual assault and women in general. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which each group engages in the process of the social construction of sexual violence. In the next chapter I will discuss in more detail the benefits of utilizing focus groups in social research and the characteristics of each focus group will be specified.

Chapter 2

Research Methods

The 1980s were particularly fruitful in terms of feminist research into sexual assault. At the forefront of this new wave of research was Mary Koss who uncovered the abundance of hidden rape victims - i.e., women who do not report their rapes and are thus imperceptible in official statistics. As could have been expected, the public, led by a surge of backlash media criticism against these findings, refused to acknowledge that the numbers of women being sexually assaulted by men was far greater and more widespread than previously thought (Schwartz, 1997).

But perhaps more important to the research question at hand is the fact that these recent inquiries into the unreported incidence of sexual violence have also revealed that rape may not only be hidden from official statistics but from the victims themselves. Women are just as much a product of society's belief systems surrounding rape as men are and thus will doubt a rape has taken place if they were not attacked by a stranger jumping out of the bushes (Estrich 1987) or if they willingly accepted an invitation to the attackers apartment or dorm (Sanday, 1996). It is this idea in particular that has critics such as Neil Gilbert, Katie Roiphe and Christine Hoff-Sommers so incensed. They argue that if the woman herself does not identify an act as rape but the feminist researcher does, this is clear evidence that feminists are attempting to expand the definition of rape in order to change the long-standing rules of how men and women relate to each other (Schwartz, 1997).

Clearly the present research is also susceptible to such criticisms. However, while the occurrence of sexual violence may be a matter of perception to the individual woman thus proving difficult to neatly sort into categories of "victim" and "nonvictim," such perceptions may be linked to several other variables which may be indicative of adherence to a particular world view. It thus becomes not merely a re-definition on the part of the researcher as to whether or not a subject has been victimized. Rather, the subject's perception is grounded in the framework of her own belief system as a whole. It remains to be seen whether self-perceived harm effects themselves alone or if it extends to other victims of sexual violence as well. In other words, will a rape victim who does not perceive herself as such, be more likely to deny the victimization of other women?

The present research will focus on several issues: (a) the fear of rape as something widely experienced by women and the possible effects such fear have on women's perceptions of rape victims; (b) how sexual violence is socially constructed through group interaction (a continuous process of defining and re-defining what rape is); (c) an analysis of how the news media construct sexual violence and how tolerant (or intolerant) focus group members are to such constructions; and (d) an examination of the influence of several elements of popular culture (such as music videos) on the focus group members' construction of sexual violence as well as an exploration of the present state of our corporate controlled media system with respect to possible future implications for the construction of gender-related issues.

The type of research questions I am dealing with are best fitted for qualitative methods. Qualitative research has most recently been defined by Creswell (1998) as

> ...an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p.15)

According to Maxwell (1996) there are several distinct research purposes for which qualitative studies are especially suited:

a. "Understanding the *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences." (p.17). For the purposes of this study, it is precisely the meanings that women assign to the events in their lives and the lives of others that are of paramount importance.

b. "Understanding the particular *context* within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions." (p.17) A crucial aspect of this research is to examine the connection between the thoughts and feelings of the individual and the larger sociocultural context in which they take place.

c. "Identifying *unanticipated* phenomena and influences, and generating new grounded theories about the latter." (p.19) As can be expected with this type of research, I did indeed uncover phenomena that I have previously overlooked in the formulation of the research proposal.

d. "Understanding the *process* by which events and actions take place." (p.19) While this research is interested in what women believe about sexual violence, it is by far more significant to uncover how such beliefs were formed and how they are sustained.

For purposes of this research I have conducted a *grounded theory* study, that is, my aim is to generate a substantive theory about the phenomena discussed above. Such

theories will be grounded in data obtained from four focus groups involving 41 women in total. I utilize a feminist theoretical framework drawing on various feminist traditions of thought.

Grounded Theory

The development of grounded theory as an approach to qualitative analysis was first utilized by Glaser and Strauss in the early 60s during a field observation of hospital staffs' handling of dying patients. It has its roots in two areas of work: American Pragmatism with its emphasis on the necessity for thinking about method in the context of problem solving and the Chicago school of sociology in which field observations and intensive interviews were widely practiced. Chicago sociology also stressed the requirement of grasping the actors' viewpoints in order to understanding interaction, process, and social change (Strauss, 1987).

Grounded theory is basically a method in which theory is generated from data, as opposed to theory generated from *a priori* assumptions. Thus, generating a theory entails a process of research. "Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research." (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.6) The research findings therefore, make up the theoretical formulation of the phenomenon being studied. Utilizing this method the concepts, as well as the relationships among them, are generated *and* tested. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Feminist Methods

There is little consensus on just what constitutes a "feminist method" in the social sciences. In fact, one might argue that there is no single, unified feminist methodology

precisely because there is no single, unified feminist theory (Renzetti, 1997). Feminist researchers have used all of the methods traditional researchers have used. But how they carry out these methods of gathering evidence is remarkably different. For example, they listen closely to how female respondents perceive their own lives and they observe the behavior of women and men that other social scientists have traditionally considered unimportant (Harding, 1987). The inclusion of and emphasis on gender as a central category of research is one of the most revolutionary features of feminist methodology. Feminist researchers established the fact that gender does indeed matter and that our every day lives are gendered and permeated with widespread gender inequality. (Renzetti, 1997)

Feminist research has raised a number of issues that challenge the traditional assumptions about the social world: What are the goals of research? What is the appropriate relationship between subject and researcher? What counts as evidence and what constitutes knowledge? (Miller, 1997; Harding, 1987). Traditional epistemologies have typically excluded the possibility that women could be agents of knowledge. Feminists argue that history is written from the point of view of men and that the subject of social science is always assumed to be a man. Thus, feminist researchers proffer alternative theories of knowledge where women are knowers (Harding, 1987). How does something get defined as a problem in the first place?. Feminist researchers have brought to light that the questions that are asked, as well as those that are not asked, are equally important in determining the adequacy of the research as are any results of such research. "Defining what is in need of scientific explanation only from the perspective of bourgeois, white men's experiences leads to partial and even perverse understandings of

social life. One distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences." (Harding, 1987 p.7)

Feminist scholarship, more often than not, has political goals. The questions an oppressed group wants answered are generally going to be about how to change its conditions. "Consequently feminist research projects originate primarily not in any old "women's experiences," but in women's experiences in political struggles" (Harding, 1987 p.8). Thus, it follows that an important theme in feminist thought has been to question not only if research can be value-free, but whether value-free social science is desirable at all. Feminist researchers have pointed out that while traditional positivist research claims to be value-free and objective, it is actually loaded with the values and biases of those conducting it (Reinharz, 1992). This is not to say that feminist researchers do not bring to their analyses their own cultural beliefs and behaviors. While some have argued that researchers should be members of the groups they study (Collins, 1990) others have suggested that research be self-reflexive pointing out our flaws and our own understanding of the social world. We should preserve in our research the "presence, concerns, and the experience of the [researcher] as knower and discoverer" (Smith, 1987, p.92). In this way our own subjectivity will be made visible to the reader. This "in fact increases the objectivity of the research and decreases the "objectivism" which hides this kind of evidence from the public." (Harding, 1987, p.9).

Typically with this type of research it would be almost standard practice to use individual open-ended interviews. This method has its obvious advantages. In-depth interviewing creates a relationship between the researcher and subject that is more intimate than that which occurs in quantitative methods of gathering data and will thus

enable the subject to open themselves up to discuss what may be a sensitive topic. Gordon & Riger (1989) found that reporting of rape was twice as high in interview-based data collection as compared with telephone-based collection. Not only does interview research include opportunities for clarification and discussion but the open-ended interview allows the researcher to explore people's views of reality. According to Reinharz (1992) interviewing offers us access to people's thoughts, ideas and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. "This asset is particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women." (p.19) That being said, it will be argued below that focus group research, long overlooked by the social sciences, is not alone a method far better suited to the research topic at hand, it is distinctly feminist in numerous respects.

Focus Groups

During World War II, increased attention was placed on focused interviewing in groups, primarily as a means of increasing military morale. Many of the procedures that have come to be accepted as common practice in focus group interviews were set forth in the classic work by Robert Merton, Marjorie Fiske and Patricia Kendall, ***The Focused Interview***(1956). (Krueger, 1994). Merton first developed a group approach ("the focused group-interview") to eliciting information from audiences about their responses to radio programs (Merton & Kendall, 1946). Focus groups have most typically been used for marketing purposes. It is only in the past 10 years or so that the focus group has been seen as "gaining some popularity" among social scientists (Wilkinson, 1998; Morgan, 1996).

Krueger (1994, p. 6) defines a focus group as a "planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment." Focus groups are typically made up of 6 to 10 people. The general rule is that is must be small enough for everyone to have an opportunity to share their ideas yet large enough to provide a diversity of opinions. As we will see, the focus group presents a more natural environment than that of an individual interview because participants are influencing and influenced by others – just as they are in their everyday life. Krueger (1994) argues that the focus group works because it "taps into human tendencies," that is, our attitudes and perceptions are developed in part by interaction with other people. Evidence from focus group interviews suggest that people do indeed influence each other with their comments and opinions and thus the researcher may discover more about how that shift occurred. Individual interviews, on the other hand, are not capable of capturing the dynamics of group interaction.

Although focus group research has become more popular within sociology in many areas including: aging (Knodel 1995, Duncan & Morgan 1994), criminology (Sasson, 1995), medical sociology (Morgan & Spanish 1985, McKinlay 1993), political sociology (Gamson 1992), social movements (Cable 1992), and the sociology of work (Bobo, et. al. 1995), most all of this work has occurred in the past ten years making it a relative "newcomer" to sociology. (Morgan, 1996). According to Morgan (1996) this "newcomer" status has:

> "...encouraged comparisons between focus groups and the various traditional methods in each of these areas, but researchers have offered two very different reasons for comparing methods. One reason... has been to determine whether the two methods produce equivalent data. According to this view, focus groups are most useful when they reproduce the results of the standard methods in a particular field. A different reason for comparing focus groups to existing

> methods has been to locate the unique contributions that each can make to a field of studies. According to this view, focus groups are most useful when they produce new results that would not be possible with the standard methods in a particular field." (p.132)

Such comparisons have often led to the conclusion that the major strength of the focus group is not only in exploring what people have to say, but in generating insights into the foundation of complex behavior and motivations. (Morgan & Kreger, 1993). It is important to note that the discussions that take place in a focus group should not be treated as the sum of separate individual interviews. Interestingly, even among researchers using the focus group method, their data is often presented as if it were one-to-one interview data, without reporting or analyzing the interactions between group participants. (*See*, Wilkinson, 1998). Obviously the dynamic is quite different from the individual interview in that the participants will question *each other* as well as explain themselves to each other, providing examples from their personal experience. Thus, these interactions produce narrative that would be difficult if not impossible to elicit in individual interviews. Examining such interactions will often yield valuable data on the nature of consensus (among many other things) and is thus one of the key strengths of focus groups. Thus Montell (1999) argues:

> "The researcher can analyze not only what each participant reveals about herself, she can observe how people negotiate issues with each other, noting which ideas the group accepts and which statements spark disagreement. Instead of simply aggregating individual data, the researcher can directly observe the extent and nature of agreement and disagreement among participants." (p. 65)

The creation and acceptance of the myths surrounding sexual violence are a social and cultural production and must therefore be analyzed in a way which is sensitive to such social categories and capable of revealing "taken-for-granted" assumptions and

beliefs. A group discussion provides valuable insight into social relations and more adequately reflects the social nature of knowledge than a mere collection of individual interviews. The process of negotiation among participants and the way they respond to and interact with each other also enables the researcher to see the ways in which language can structure common sense understandings. "Because knowledge and meaning are collective rather than individual productions, focus groups can be an effective method for getting at this socially produced knowledge." (Montell, 1999 p. 51) More importantly for the purposes of this research is the focus on what women's discussions reveal about the larger cultural discourse surrounding sexual violence as well as the way ideas and assumptions are connected (rather than placing *sole* emphasis on the individual's actual beliefs.) In fact, Wilkinson (1998) not only points out that feminist psychologists have long highlighted the influence of social context and the "construction of meanings and knowledges through interaction" she also argues that "research methods which isolate individuals from their social context should clearly be viewed as inappropriate." (p.111).

Focus Groups as Feminist Method

According to Montell (1999) the prominence of focus groups as a method used in marketing research may have alienated some feminist researchers and prevented them from seeing the connections between the focus group method and the particular concerns of feminist methodology. Concerns such as the influence of social context, power, and the imposition of meaning on respondents may be averted by use of the focus group method. While feminist researchers have long taken aim on the dominance of quantitative research methods, when qualitative methods *are* used, the individual interview is still the most widely employed method. Feminist social scientists have

articulated some unease about the ethical issues involved in one-to-one interviewing, "particularly in relation to the potentially exploitative nature of the interaction in which the researcher controls the proceedings, regulates the conversation, reveals minimal personal information, and imposes her own framework of meaning upon participants..." (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 114). With the focus group the researcher's power and influence is diminished not only by virtue of sheer number (although this clearly shifts the balance of power) but because the research participants have more control over the entire interaction than does the researcher. "In a group, if even one person expresses an idea it can prompt a response from the others, and the information that is produced is more likely to be framed by the categories and understandings of the interviewees rather than those of the interviewer." (Montell 1999, p. 49)

Yet another benefit of this method is the way in which participants contradict and disagree with each other, often pointing out discrepancies in each others accounts (where coming from the researcher it would seem authoritarian to do so). "But regardless of how open-ended the questions are, an interview is an interaction between two people who have different and unequal roles in the exchange." (Montell 1999, p. 50). Critics, however, have argued that the social nature of the focus group could possibly result in distortion and bias since participants may simply conform to majority opinion or express only what they believe to be "socially desirable" ideas. When viewed from another perspective however, this possibility occurs not only within the confines of the focus group but in the larger social realm as well and in effect, provides us with *more*, not *less*, accurate data on the social construction of meaning. In addition, while I did find several instances where it appeared shyer and less active members were merely conforming to

majority opinions, I have often found the opposite; that is, where one member "breaks the cycle" of conformity and voices a radically different opinion, prompting others to rethink their original statements. Again, these are precisely the kind of interactions that take place in everyday life and arguably make the data more authentic than data elicited by other methods. "Insofar as individual opinions are formed and shaped through talking and arguing with families, friends, and colleagues about events and issues in everyday life, focus groups tap into ordinary social processes and everyday social interchange." (Wilkinson1998, p.120)

One of the more interesting aspects of the focus group as a tool of feminist research, is the similarity between focus group discussions and the "consciousness raising" sessions common in the 1970s. The give and take of personal histories and questioning among equal participants makes this method more "consciousness-raising" than an individual interview. The interactions are consciousness-raising in that they encourage women to recognize the patterns in their shared experience. (*See* Schlesinger, et. al. & Montell 1999). According to Wilkinson (1998) "there may often be a conflict between researchers' often stated desire to relinquish power in relation to the group, and the hope that the group will achieve feminist goals of consciousness raising." (p. 116). I experienced this conflict first hand in one focus group where a participant discusses "the impossibility" of being raped if the woman does not desire intercourse due to the tightening of the vaginal muscles - a very old rape myth that I had thought was long discredited by the general public. Of course with my particular research had I intervened in any way, discrediting this participants beliefs, the entire purpose of my research would be undermined. I could not possibly challenge any particular rape myth and then attempt

to continue eliciting further myths regarding sexual violence. While this dilemma made (and still makes) me extremely uncomfortable, (especially since no other member of the group discredited this archaic idea), I take some comfort in the fact that the discussions participants have with each other can be far more consciousness-raising than anything the interviewer could say (as was evidenced in my other focus groups where the participants do, in fact, challenge one another).

Data Collection

In suggesting a sociology oriented "from the standpoint of women," Dorothy Smith (1987) argues that the validity of one's data analysis should not be dependent upon how accurately the subjects represent the larger population, but on how well the data depict actual examples of larger social processes. With this in mind, my central focus in analyzing the data was on how women in our culture think about or rethink, sustain or dismiss, the harmful myths that surround sexual violence.

Typically in a grounded theory study the participants interviewed are theoretically chosen. In other words, the investigator examines individuals who can contribute to the evolving theory (Creswell 1998). While the intended focus is on women who have never been the victim of sexual violence, clearly I expected to come across women who have been victims (especially since, as I noted earlier, the concept of "victim" will depend on the perception of the subject). Thus I did not derive a sample of women who are known survivors of sexual abuse and then compare them with women who self-report never having been victimized. It better suits my research goals to leave the line dividing victim from non victim open and fluid rather than artificially constructing such a line at the outset of the research.

The Respondents

I felt it important for purposes of this research to attempt to encompass women in various age categories, races/ethnicities as well as women from urban and suburban neighborhoods.

Age may prove to have some significance with regard to RMA and a woman's fear of being raped, as well as a woman's world view. Do older women with more life experience have radically different views from young women just beginning to enter into adult social interactions? Does the fear of rape lessen with age as the prevailing stereotypes are that only young women are raped or does fear of rape increase with age along with fear of crime in general? My original plan was too encompass women in various age groups. Although to a certain extent I accomplished this goal, the age variation did not go as far as I would have liked it to. This was due primarily to the fact that my access to respondents was limited to a student population. This does not however, preclude us from making some general observations with respect to age since my population ranged in age from 16 to 42 with the following breakdown by focus group: Focus group #1 ages 18 to 42; focus group #2 ages 16 to 18; focus group #3 ages 19 to 39; focus group #4 ages 21 to 40.

Race/ethnicity. As previously mentioned above, there is some evidence to suggest that African Americans and Hispanic Americans are more accepting of rape myths. However, these studies did not take into account the cultural history, religious traditions or sex role expectations associated with the race or ethnicity of the respondent. In other words, perhaps race is not the factor effecting RMA at all. Also, little attempt has been made to understand whether or not African-American or Hispanic women have

interpretations of sexual violence (their own and others) that differ from those of white women. Chancer (1987) and others have pointed out that the conflict between ethnic or racial oppression and gender oppression are deemed more urgent and more keenly felt in many communities. While this may speak to a woman's world view it does not directly address a woman's fear of rape (by a man of any race or ethnicity) and her subsequent restructuring of daily activities around that fear. My 41 focus group participants consisted of 11 whites, 15 Latinas, 14 African-Americans and one respondents reporting her race as "mixed."

Education. Social psychological research has shown education to have a liberalizing impact on numerous social attitudes including the reduction of prejudice (Ward, 1995). Burt's (1980) RMA research did indeed find that education had a direct effect on the rejection of rape myths. The better educated respondents were found to be less accepting of rape supportive beliefs. Again, these results were based on RMA scales and failed to delve deeper into the thoughts and beliefs of respondents concerning rape. While my student population does not afford much diversity in the levels of education (I could not compare, for example, women with completed college degrees and those with only high school diplomas) there is some variation in that 16 participants were still seniors in high school while the remainder of the population were at different points in their college careers.

Another significant distinction is whether the respondent lives in an *urban vs. a suburban* neighborhood. How does the fear of rape differ for the evening college student taking the subway home to the Bronx at 10:00 p.m. versus the suburbanite who drives wherever she must go in the comfort and safety of her car? How do their world views

differ? Research has consistently shown that a woman is much more likely to be raped by someone she knows rather than by a stranger jumping out of the bushes. The long-held belief of a *real* rapist being a stranger is often part of a larger system of rape supportive beliefs. There were some very interesting differences, as well as similarities, that were played out among urban and suburban women. My population included 22 respondents from various suburban areas and 17 from urban neighborhoods (mainly the Bronx). Two respondents left this question blank.

In order to contextualize the respondent's perceptions of sexual violence within their world view, I asked several questions (some found on the background questionnaire) concerning a wide array of feminist issues, their attitudes towards violence in general and crime in general (*See* Appendix A). Interestingly, as is often the case with focus groups, valuable discussions arouse reflecting the participants' world view which were not prompted or solicited by me. These discussions will be dealt with in some detail in the following chapters.

A Quick Overview of the Four Focus Groups

Focus group #1 consisted of 4 Latinas and 5 White women from a suburban community college. They ranged in age from 18 to 42. Six women were single and 3 were married. Two participants reported family incomes less than $20,000 per year, four made $41-60,000 per year and the rest reported incomes from $61,000 to over $100,000 per year. Two participants in this group had children; only two out of seven said they practiced their religion on a regular basis. Only two women reported having any interest in national or local politics but 6 identified themselves as Democrats (the other three said they had no party affiliations).

Focus group #2 consisted of 10 Latina and 6 African-Americans ages 16 to 18 from a Bronx, NY high school. Eleven respondents said they do not practice religion. Six reported family incomes below $20,000 per year; five from $20-40,000; and three from $41-60,000. Seven respondents reported an interest in national and local politics while 9 did not; eleven identified themselves as Democrats, 5 said they had no party affiliations. One participant had a child.

Focus group #3 consisted of 4 White women and 3 African-Americans from a suburban community college. All the women in this group were 19 or 20 years of age with the exception of one who was 39. Only one woman was married and had children and had already completed a graduate degree (she was returning to school for a second degree in a different field). The rest were at various levels in their college careers and were all single. One participant reported family income between $20-40,000, one between $41-60,000, two between $61-80,000 and three over $100,000. Four respondents said they had an interest in politics; three did not. Four reported having no political affiliation, two Democrats and one independent.

Focus group #4 consisted of 1 Latina, 1 "mixed", 2 White, and 5 African-American women ranging in age from 21 to 40 from a suburban community college. Five were single, 3 were married and 1 was separated; 4 women had children. Three women reported practicing their religion on a regular basis, 5 did not. One participant reported a family income below $20,000; 5 between $20-40,000; 1 between $41-60,000; 1 between $81-100,000 and 1 over $100,000. Four reported having an interest in national and local politics, 5 did not; 5 reported no party affiliation, 2 were democrats and 2 were republican.

It may be noted that focus group # 2, at 16 people, was much larger than the other groups. This was unavoidable however, as they were a high school class and could not be divided up during the time period in the manner in which the college groups afforded. While conducting this focus group did indeed present the typical problems associated with a much larger group (i.e., people speaking over one another, more difficulty in guiding the conversation, etc.) it also made for more lively and animated discussions and such diversity of opinions led to issues that I had not previously considered.

For purposes of identification, focus groups 1, 3 and 4 are labeled "suburban" groups throughout the text as this was their principal commonality (the members of these groups were racially and ethnically mixed but, with a few exceptions, all lived in the suburban areas of Long Island). The names of all the participants have been changed to protect their identities.

The Focus Group as a Unit of Analysis

As the research progressed it became evident that each group was more than a mere collection of individuals. It was the group, rather than the individual, that became the proper unit of analysis. This was made readily apparent by the way in which group members continuously negotiated and re-negotiated meanings in response to the ideas of other members – a process that would not have been entered into on an individual basis. It was this process that appeared to be most relevant. Although each member brought their own experience, knowledge, and opinions to the group (based in part on their individual backgrounds), such input could not be separated from what the other members contributed to the group. Each member worked together with the others to mold and shape the character of that particular group.

Chapter 3

The Social Construction of Sexual Violence

Several interrelated sociological theories proved to be most useful in my analysis of the focus group participants' interpretations of sexual violence, including social construction theory, symbolic interactionism, labeling theory, and Garfinkel's theory of ethnomethodology. My primary emphasis here is on the social nature and fluidity of such interpretations. As we will see shortly, the definitions surrounding what constitutes a rape, who is a "worthy" or "unworthy" victim and who is really a "victim" of sexual violence at all, are not fixed and unchanging but are constantly being negotiated and then renegotiated by the members of the group and are thus a product of social interaction. As I discussed earlier, it is this ability to see the process of the negotiation of meaning at work that makes the focus group so valuable to social researchers.

According to Berger and Luckman (1966), "social order is not part of the 'nature of things,' and it cannot be derived from the 'laws of nature.' Social order exists *only* as a product of human activity." (p. 52). Social construction theory suggests that what we see and experience as "real" is the result of human interaction. Berger and Luckman argue that reality is constructed in three stages: externalization, objectification, and internalization. In the first stage, we create cultural products through our interactions with others. Once these products have been created, they then become "external" to those who have produced them. The construction of gender identity is one compelling example. The construction of our gender identity begins at birth with our assignment into the category of male or female. Through dress and adornment, we let others know of the

sex of the child, and they in turn treat the child according to the gendered expectations they have for that particular sex. Children then behave and respond differently because of the disparate treatment they receive. A situation defined as real thus becomes real in its consequences. Girls and boys are *taught* to act differently from each other and therefore end up acting different. (Lorber, 1994).

The second stage in the construction of reality, objectivation, occurs when the products created in the first stage seem to take on a reality of their own, becoming independent of those who created them. "People lose awareness that they themselves are the authors of their social and cultural environment and of their interpretations of reality. They feel as if the products have an objective existence, and they become another part of reality to be taken for granted." (Ore, 2000, p. 6) Thus many parents come to feel that the behavioral differences or likes and dislikes of boys and girls are something which is beyond human intervention and such behaviors are simply "the way things are." And finally, in the last stage, internalization, we learn the "objective facts" about the cultural products that have been created. This is accomplished through socialization. Here we make these "facts" part of our subjective consciousness. "Because of the process of internalization, members of the same culture share an understanding of reality and rarely question the origins of their beliefs or the processes by which the beliefs arose." Ore, 2000, p. 6). Many, if not most, individuals growing up in our cultural environment will be taught at a very young age that such differences are normal and natural and thus, not worth questioning. People will therefore rarely stop to examine a belief system which claims that differences in gender behavior are strictly a biological matter. As I will show with the focus groups, when the shared understandings of sexual violence are called into

question by one member, other members may steadfastly adhere to their beliefs attempting to convince the group how that particular individual has "wrongly" interpreted the issue. Often, however, shared understandings will be renegotiated until a conclusion acceptable to most members is reached.

Another theory pertinent to my discussion and closely aligned with theories of social construction, Symbolic Interactionism,was developed in the 1920s and 1930s by Charles Cooley, W.I. Thomas, and George Herbert Mead. Symbols – words or gestures that signify ideas, people, or objects – are critical in this process because they form the basis of human interaction. Language is the most important system of symbols. Symbolic interactionists argue that through language and other types of communication, people constantly change and reconstruct their images of themselves and others. (LaFree, 1989). Again, we will see this process at work in our focus groups with respect to the definitions of rape and what it means to be a "victim" of sexual violence.

Labeling theory, borne of symbolic interactionism, asserts that decisions (such as what constitutes an acceptable "victim") are based less on actual behavior than on definitions constructed through social interaction. These definitions are what Alfred Schutz (1967) termed *typifications*. According to Schutz, people process new information by comparing it to previously processed information and attempt to detect similarities between the two. This, in effect, frees us from the burden of continuous decision making and makes it unnecessary for us to develop new definitions for every situation we come upon. It constructs our social world into a predictable, understandable, and manageable place. Thus when one is already properly fitted with a long term culturally acceptable definition of what rape and a rape victim are, with each new case

one comes into contact with an individual will most likely shape their understandings according to their previous definitions. It should be pointed out that the social construction of these definitions is highly complex and may be related to such factors as an individual's "worldview" or their belief in a "just world" as will be discussed later.

The stigma of "unworthy" victims

According to Goffman (1963) "[s]ociety establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of these categories." (p.2). We anticipate how a particular category of people will act and what their particular attributes are. We rely on such anticipations, "transforming them into normative expectations, into righteously presented demands." (p.2). Once we discover a person possesses an attribute that makes him or her different from others in that category, they are reduced to being a "tainted" person. Goffman discusses three different types of stigma: physical deformities, blemishes of individual character, and stigma that can be transmitted through family lineage. The stigma derived from blemishes of individual character is clearly pertinent to the victim of sexual violence. While much has been written on the stigmatization of rape victims (*see, for example,* Bode, 1990; Buchwald, 1993; Easteal, 1994; Estrich, 1987) my concern here is twofold: (a) how such stigmas aid in the formation of a dichotomy between an "acceptable" and "unacceptable" victim, constructing the "unacceptable" victim, as the "Other" who is not at all "like us"; and (b) how women often attempt to differentiate themselves from stigmatized women since those who associate with or sympathize with the "Other" are also in danger of being labeled a member of that category. This in turn, may lead to an individual's reluctance to identify herself as a victim of sexual violence in any form.

The definitions or "typifications" of rape are perhaps made more complex due to the fact that they are intricately bound up with, and cannot be separated from, our beliefs about gender and gender roles. Edwin Schur (1984) in his work, *Labeling Women Deviant*, argues that "being treated as deviant has been a standard feature of life as a female" (p.3). Since women are subject to both objectification and devaluation, they are stigmatized. By virtue of the devalued status of women in patriarchal society, her femaleness in and of itself carries a certain degree of stigma. Women are "often perceived and responded to primarily in terms of their category membership – as females, first and foremost" (p.7). Since this category is devalued, Schur argues, it can be said that women serve as "all-purpose deviants" in our society. Our vulnerability to stigmatization lies in their general social subordination and poor power position. Furthermore, and most pertinent to the research at hand, there are distinctively female "deviances" which are supposed offenses emerging when women have violated specific gender norms. Thus the further a woman strays from prescribed gender behavior the more difficulty in convincing the public a rape has occurred. This ability to define women's behavior as deviant is a most effective tool of social control. Schur also argues that the counterpart phenomenon to this is the "fact that major offenses *against* women, which we *profess* to consider deviant, in practice have been responded to with much ambivalence" (p.7). This is clearly indicated by the fact that women who are victims of rape, sexual harassment or spousal abuse are often treated as though *they* were the deviants. Again, this reflects the general devaluation of women.

An ethnomethodological approach

Some of the more obvious expressions of rape myth acceptance among focus group members emerged in response to questions about serving as a juror on a rape case. Before delving into such examples, a brief discussion of Garfinkel's (1967) treatment of juror behavior seems relevant here. One of the more significant indicators of the disinclination of women to align themselves with the rape victim can be found in the behavior of jurors. Prosecutors of rape cases who attempt to pick more female members during jury selection (with the belief that women are naturally more sympathetic to the victim) find, much to their dismay, that it has made no difference in the outcome of the trial.[3] Jurors, male and female, bring with them all of the traditional cultural conceptions of rape.[4]

Garfinkel (1967) argues that common sense understanding consists in the enforceable character of actions in compliance with the expectancies of every day life as a morality. This morality is made up of background assumptions and expectations that serve to legitimize a constructed reality. In the case of rape, all the misogynistic background assumptions are put to use in order to legitimize society's treatment of the woman who is raped. Patriarchy's fear that its sexual aggression may be mistaken for sexual violence has served as an excuse to ignore rape, particularly by nonstrangers. According to Bumiller (1987) each effort at law reform is challenged by those who fear that broader definitions of sexual assault will distort accepted understandings of "normal" sexual relationships. For Garfinkel, for someone to question a widely accepted understanding is frightening as well as threatening.

Garfinkel argues that jurors make their decisions without abandoning the routine characteristics of the social order. Although they are instructed to do so, jurors do not, in fact, disregard their shared understandings and prejudices in coming to a verdict. Jurors feel they must modify the rules used in everyday life but the adjustments they make are negligible. They decide the harm, the extent of that harm, an allocation of blame and a remedy. "The question of deciding the harm is that of deciding what socially defined types of persons are legitimately entitled to have what kinds of trouble." (1967, p. 105)

Numerous studies of attitudes toward rape victims (*see, for example,* Weidner, 1983; Ward, 1995), as well as the low conviction rates in acquaintance rape cases and those in which women are engaged in nontraditional gender behavior at the time of the assault, lend credence to the idea that in our society certain victims are not legitimately entitled to claim harm. There are a host of methods employed to delegitimize the accuser's claim of harm in the rape trial. To name just one, the blame is often allocated to the victim for "putting herself in that situation." If she has willingly entered the defendant's home for example, she may be automatically assumed to have consented to anything else that follows.[5] Any evidence to the contrary is quickly dismissed or reinterpreted to fit one's understanding of rape. Although jurors claim to be "objective" every time a counter-explanation arises, it must be quickly explained away. If we dispose of counter-examples, according to Garfinkel, the category may be retained as "objective".

Jurors decide between what is "truth" and what is a "lie". They come to an agreement as to what happened, deciding the facts by using agreed upon common sense understandings. According to Garfinkel when making judgments a juror will enter a decision making process in which he or she forms a conclusion based on what is

consistent with their previous understandings of the issue. Regardless of the actual events, this will be treated as the thing that actually occurred. "If the interpretation makes good sense, then that's what happened." (1967, p. 106)

A jury, being a social group much like the focus groups, engages in the same form work; that is, negotiating and renegotiating meanings as well as relying upon shared cultural understandings in order to reach a conclusion.

Who says it's rape?

Gary LaFree, (1989) in his study of the social construction of rape processing by police, prosecutors and juries gives us a detailed analysis of the concrete legal effects of the stigmatization of women who dare to violate gender norms. In fact, LaFree found that a victim's nontraditional behavior was more important in predicting a jury's verdict than any of the evidence presented. But first, before a case ever reaches a jury it must pass a rigorous review by numerous processing agents, most of whom rely on socially constructed notions of rape and various rape myths in their decisions – which explains why rape has the lowest possible number of cases actually making it to trial and then the lowest conviction rate of any violent crime. Some like to point to the high rate of "unfounding" of rape cases as evidence that women frequently falsely accuse men of rape (a very common and long-standing rape myth). In fact when the question "of all the men accused of rape what percentage of men do you believe are guilty?" was posed to focus groups some responses seemed to reflect the obstinate rape myth that men are frequently falsely accused. While the Bronx group, generally the least tolerant of rape myths, overwhelmingly responded "most of them", the other groups' responses tended to hover

around the 50 to 75 percent mark (with at least one member in each group responding as high as 90 percent).

A case being labeled "unfounded" does not mean false – it merely denotes the fact that prosecutors have declined to bring the case forward (often, as will be discussed below, because they know the victim's non-traditional behavior will preclude sympathy from a jury). Nationally, the rate of actual cases determined to be false is very low (from 1 to 3 percent according to FBI statistics). In addition, it should also be taken into account that the "false accusation" rape myth is given disproportionate media hype. Although cases of men convicted of rape and later exonerated through DNA evidence are statistically rare, prominent national exposure is given to such cases (but not to those where DNA evidence convicts a rapist) leaving the public with the impression that men wrongly go to prison for rape "all the time."

The police, the first "official" processing agents may indeed hold the most power in determining what cases are to be "unfounded". According to LaFree, deputy prosecutors and judges generally agreed that "detectives were usually in the best position to know the evidential strength of cases at the early stage of processing" (p.71). In fact, it was very unusual in the cases LaFree studied, for a prosecutor to file felony charges when the detective opposed prosecution. In many police reports studied by LaFree, there was no specific, *legally justifiable* reason for unfounding. The reports simply assume that no crime occurred, refer to the complaint as "questionable" and then go on to support this assumption with negative assessments of the victim's moral character. Cases deemed "unfounded" due to problems with the complainant's character or conduct usually involved women who were drinking or using drugs at the time, were runaway

juveniles believed to be prone to fabrication or hitchhikers. The rape typifications held by prosecutors affected not only their disinclination to believe a rape occurred but also their unwillingness to present a case to a jury. "It is important to observe that the decision making of legal agents throughout the criminal-selection process is constantly informed by their hunches about how the case will be treated at subsequent stages in the system" (p. 107).

With respect to jury behavior, LaFree found that "Jurors were less likely to believe in a defendant's guilt when the victim had reportedly engaged in sex outside marriage, drank or used drugs, or had been acquainted with the defendant – however briefly – prior to the assault" (p. 217). In addition, jurors often used testimony about a victim's behavior to reach conclusions about her carelessness which in turn was linked to shared responsibility for the assault. And mirroring Garfinkel's notion that people will often rely on a perception of whether a victim and assailant are the *kind of people* who could have been involved, many of the jurors made comments about the characteristics of defendants that either confirmed or disconfirmed their ideas about rapists (i.e. noting that he didn't "look" or "act like" a rapist). In line with the analysis of decisions made by the police, when the victim engaged in nonconforming behavior, an acquittal was more likely. Ultimately, LaFree points out, "if women who violate traditional gender roles and are raped are unable to obtain justice through the legal system, then the law is serving as an institutional arrangement that reinforces women's gender-role conformity"

Finally, LaFree notes that the rape victim is in fact the first in a long line of processing agents. The victim is often just as susceptible as other legal agents to socially constructed ideas of rape and, as previously discussed, may be reluctant to identify

herself as the victim of a sexual assault. Following the dominant cultural stereotypes, LaFree found that women who had been subjected to high levels of violence were more likely to see themselves as rape victims while those who were acquainted with the offender prior to the incident were less likely to consider themselves a victim.

It should be briefly pointed out here that the stigmatization and devaluation of women, along with the social creation of rape typifications is *not* fixed and unchanging. Organized groups are often quite successful at countering stigmatization. The women's movement has obviously effected profound changes in the public's awareness of gender related issues in general and sexual violence specifically. These changes, however, are gradual and have been dependent upon access to means of public dissemination of new ideas. As I discuss more thoroughly in Chapter 11, the means of access to public and/or private media are becoming more and more limited due to the heightened concentration of all media forms into the hands of fewer and fewer multinational corporations, often with a strong stake in maintaining the political and social status quo. Thus, gains already made by feminists in changing public consciousness can easily fall prey to a regression of public sympathies as long as they are dealing with a media system that is prone to silencing or distorting any idea it deems to "radical."

The Focus Groups

What constitutes a "crime"?

As a general introductory question, each focus group was asked if they felt the levels of crime in our society were a problem and if crime were a personal concern. A brief discussion usually took place in which the members engaged in dialogue about gang violence, drugs, school shootings, and the like. In short, their discussion was limited to

the types of crime that are prominent fixtures in the popular media. In this instance, with respect to this generalized question, rape was not constructed as a crime. This is not to say that the participants do not believe rape is a crime – indeed they believe it is a quite a serious one (and ultimately brought it up when I asked what they feared most). It may, I believe, reflect the cultural ambivalence and the media's reluctance towards identifying the high incidence of rape (as opposed to the rarity of school shootings) as a social problem which needs to be addressed. Likewise, many other crimes not normally given media attention were left out of the initial discussion.

An interesting occurrence that bears mentioning here took place in suburban focus group # 1. One of my follow-up questions to the "crime problem" query was whether or not any of the members have been the victim of a crime. Most responses involved property crimes and incidents of that nature. I then asked if anyone had been the victim of a crime, *other than a property crime*. All members responded "no". After a brief period of silence one young woman responded "I was flashed once but I don't know if you consider that a crime." Her response is quite telling. Her personal experience of the incident obviously made her feel that what happened to her might be a "crime" but knowledge of our cultural understandings led her to doubt that I, or anyone else in the group, might consider it as such. Moreover, once flashing was mentioned by this individual, another had a similar account (although the incident she describes seems more like an attempted assault) which she may never have mentioned if no one else brought it up. Thus by discussing flashing in the same vein with the crime problem, members perhaps renegotiated their socially constructed definitions. Being "flashed" is a common experience among women, (McNeill, 1987 found that 63 percent of women had been

flashed at). While a common experience, women often have very different reactions to such incidents. Some might experience fear, intimidation, anger, etc., others may find it non-threatening or humorous. What is of interest here however, is how the meaning of such experiences is negotiated among the members. After questioning whether or not it was a crime, the young woman went on to describe what happened to her:

> [Risa] I was in H.S. and I was walking home and some guy pulled over, he was driving his car naked and it was really disgusting [all laughed]. He was just creepy. I remember the car. It was a powder blue Gremlin. He was in the car and he was asking my friend directions. She wasn't paying attention. I turned around to look at him and he was naked. It was really weird. It was right by our H.S. I said to my friend, "common, let's get out of here.
>
> [I ask] Anyone else?
>
> [Winnie] Well, when I was a little kid in school, I think maybe third grade of fourth grade, I have that memory of in the hallway stairway, some kids, boys, cornered me against the wall. Older kids. And I was very afraid. I don't know what they would've done. I was a child. A teacher came. I don't remember what happened. I was so afraid. Thank God nothing happened.

And in suburban focus group #3 one member bringing up a flashing incident prompts several different participants to discuss their experiences:

> [Vanda] Many years ago, when I was a teenager, there were a couple of instances where uh, a man had exposed himself and uh, it was interesting because I had lived 5 houses down from a main street. And my friend and I were at the point where we're just walking to hang out certain places cause she lived kinda far from us, her mother was coming to pick her up. So, we went to walk, we were coming back from somewhere and we were gonna wait for her mother to come and get her. We were gonna walk down my block and my friend happened to see this guy and she said "what is he doing" and I couldn't see. And she said "let's not go down there." And across the street to the side we were on. And she's looking over my shoulder and she's like "he's running this way". We started running that way and he got on the corner and we both turned around and he had his pants open. So I shudder to think if we walked to my house he might have grabbed us, you know. And it actually happened a few other times with some other, it must have been another man, down at a park, the other end of my block by the train station. It happened a couple of times down there. Strange. But it could've have, something could've happened.
>
> [I ask] Anyone else?

[Christy] Yes, when I was young. When I was in California I was on this bus and I was looking through the window and there was this guy exposing himself.

[ ] When I walked to work there was this guy, and I called the police and reported him, he used to just sit in his car and whack off right on the main street! And in the morning time I look in car windows and check and make sure my hair looks ok. And I'm looking like "what the hell?" And there are little kids. It's early in the morning like 7:00. I take my son to the babysitter and there are kids walking to school, so these little girls could be... I got his license number and called the cops.

[Cindy]. I was in junior high. My friend and I used to walk to school and there was a man. I think he was just doing it all the time. He used to drive around when we were walking to school and he would come up and ask us an address or how to get, yeah. And then he would be like this [gesturing] in the car. I got his license plate and gave it to my friends parents. The detectives came to the house to report everything. And I think they found him. This happened more than once. One other time my mother, when Caldoor's was open, there was a naked guy right in the alley.

[laughter]

[Cindy] I was with my mother. My mother's like "close your eyes!"

[laughter]

[Fran] And you're like "mom I've seen that already"

[laughter]

[Noel] I don't think it's funny. I think its horrible.

[all agreeing] Well yes. Yeah.

[Vanda] We could laugh about it now but it really is...

[Noel] That situation is just so scary. So scary.

[Vanda] Like I said, I shudder to think if we walked to my house and didn't see the guy hiding behind a tree or something. But it's funny because I had seen a car parked up the street near the main road that didn't look familiar. Because I knew the people that lived on the main, you know, the corner house. And I didn't get the license plate. For some reason I didn't get it.

[Christy] This seems to be so common. I'm like Wow!

[Noel] I'm really surprised right now. It happened to me in Spain, in different countries. But don't people, you might know, don't people basically do that because of the shock value? They want to see your reaction. I'm not saying it's right...

Other interesting issues are brought up in this exchange. McNeill's (1987) study cited previously notes that common responses to flashing include fear, shock, disgust, giggling, anger and humiliation – some of these responses are evidenced here. One participant feels that the laughter of some of the other members is making light of the

gravity of the issue and decides to call them on it. By invoking her more serious interpretation of the experience she enables the other members to view it in this light and their social interaction has perhaps re-framed the issue. Most participants agreed that it was a somewhat fearful experience, especially since some were unsure where the flashing could lead. It would appear that they sometimes worried that flashing may only be a prelude to physical assault.

Constructing the Victim

According to some theorists there appears to be a cultural ambivalence regarding drawing a line between sexual violence and acceptable coercive sexuality (*See* MacKinnon, 1987 and 1991; Schur,1984). This notion is particularly relevant when we examine the social construction of either/or categories such as victim and non-victim, acceptable victim and unacceptable victim. As with many other socially created categories there is a definite tendency toward constructing a dichotomy between a victim of sexual violence and a "non-victim" rather than seeing sexual violence as a continuum (*See* Kelly, 1987). "Dichotomization encourages the sense that there are two and only two categories, that everyone fits easily in one or the other, and that the categories stand in opposition to each other." (Rosenblum & Travis, 1999, p. 14.) This belief that women can be sorted into two mutually exclusive, "either/or" categories has the effect of narrowing women's overall experiences of sexual abuse and leading many to conclude that an act is sexual assault only if it meets the predetermined, socially defined criteria, quite often very different from the legal criteria. Thus women who have met the legally defined criteria of sexual assault, but not the social, culturally acceptable criteria will

therefore be less likely to identify themselves (and be identified by others) as the victims of a sexual assault. (*See*, Warshaw, 1988)

This dichotomization also applies with respect to "acceptable" and "unacceptable" victims. Similar to LaFree's (1989) findings that a rape case is less likely to make its way through the legal system when the victim was thought to violate appropriate sex-role behavior, Acock and Ireland (1983) found that such victims were held more responsible for their fate and were blamed and derogated more than a rape victim who had not violated gender related norms. (*See also* Estrich, 1987; Sheffield, 1987; Smart, 1995; Weis & Borges, 1973; Williams, 1981 for discussions on socially "acceptable" victims). And again, the relationship between the victim and offender is often of utmost importance in the attribution of blame. The closer the acquaintance the less likely the victim is believed to have been sexually assaulted - with married women being the least likely to be believed (Russell, 1982). Sensing their behavior is ripe for blame many women will define an event that may have been an assault as something much more harmless. (Warshaw, 1988).

In suburban focus Group #1 I asked the question "was anyone here ever the victim of a sexual assault?" All responded "no." Several minutes later I asked "Was there any time that you felt somebody pushed you to go further sexually than you really wanted to?" Again, all responded "no". I then asked the follow-up question, "So you've all always felt completely in control of the situation?" Finally one participant, in a very hesitant manner describes an incident she experienced and the other members then begin to grapple with that type of situation and come to a definition that is acceptable to the group. The excerpts below are of interest for several reasons: (1) we see here an example

of how the definitions of sexual assault and who is really a "victim" are socially constructed and renegotiated through interaction; (2) we witness the general acceptability among the group members of a notion of male sexuality that is "naturally" and "acceptably" aggressive and a concomitant notion of female sexuality that bears responsibility for controlling the situation at all times; and (3) a member whom I had considered the feminist voice in this group finally gives up her line of argument when no other members back her up. In fact by the end of the group (as I will note later) she begins to fall in line with the others and adds what I would consider a rape-myth laden comment to signal her support of the general overall agreements reached by the members.

> [Kit]. Well I've had situations, a couple, where I was maybe a little bit drunk and I went a little bit further than maybe I wanted to but I couldn't turn around and say somebody made me. It was more like my irresponsibility. You know. Like, I mean, like "oh my God I can't believe I did that" but I would never turn around and say, cause I didn't stop, like you know..

Here Kit is reluctant to attribute any responsibility to the man she was with. Although she expresses regret over the incident she does not experience the event as coercive. In response to Kit's experiences all members of the group agree that if a woman drinks to the point of unconsciousness they would consider the act rape.

> [I ask] In that situation do you think it depends on how much you were drinking?
>
> [Winnie] It definitely has an effect on both the man and the woman. It changes their personality, their understanding of the situation
>
> [Risa] I mean if she's unconscious or passed out drunk, then it's like, rape.
>
> [all agree that if someone's unconscious its rape]
>
> [Winnie] you see, in a man's mind if a woman's drinking and she's coming on to him and she's flirting and they're getting touchy touchy and they're getting close, he's, in his mind, she wants it. So she may drink more to the point where she can't control what she's doing but in his mind he already knows or he already thinks she wants it so he'll go along. The woman should be responsible enough not to drink that much to lose control of what she's doing.
>
> [all together] Yeah.

[I ask] And is there anyone else, even in your teen years that kind of pushed you...?

[Lisa] (speaking as if that was a ridiculous question) Boys always try.

[all laughed]

[I ask] But you expect that?

[all laughing] yeah

[I ask] So it did happen to you? (all nod in agreement)

[Risa] It was a friend and we had flirted. We had talked about it and that was it and so I though that was it, and then when he decided he wanted to kiss me, I felt like "oh my God" we had already flirted to a certain point where it was either we continued this whatever or we stayed friends. And he crossed the line and I just felt like I couldn't back up.

[Winnie] Well I have a situation where I was actually in bed with a guy. In bed naked and it was a really cute handsome guy from work and I was so flattered that he noticed me that I went along with it. But then I realized, in bed already, nothing had happened yet, just kissing, that I was only doing it because I was flattered. And I thought "what am I doing I don't really want this" and I told him "no I can't do this." And he was a gentleman and he said o.k. When I thought about it afterwards, he could have done it right there and what am I gonna say the next day? I was in bed naked with the guy. I went along with it. But he was a good guy.

Here, two different situations are discussed which evince the culturally acceptable idea that once a certain point is reached, a woman loses all rights of refusal. Here Winnie attributes such kindness to the man who merely respected her wishes rather than utilize force or persuasion. But more importantly, she notes the impossibility of her claiming an assault if he were not so "kind." She appears to be quite aware that it is not culturally acceptable for a woman to simply change her mind about having sex once it has gone beyond a certain point and then report a rape.

[I ask] Let's think about that situation. Supposing a woman was in that position and she did say she was raped?

[Lisa] it's hard to prove

[all in agreement: yes, yeah]

[Jackie] (very frustrated at this point, says with exasperation) if it's not consenting it's rape. Anything that's not consenting is rape. Even if, o.k. she went a little too far or she gave the wrong signals. But it stops where it stops. If she says no then... I don't know. (She breaks off from this line of thought when she realizes no one is agreeing with her or backing her up.)

Jackie is questioning one of the "common sense understandings" of rape and her disruption of the rest of the groups shared understanding is generally disregarded.

> [Kit] I think it's rape too but you have to see the whole.. you have to see how she went about telling him. If she made it really clear and he kept on, then its rape.
>
> [I ask] So you think it depends on the way she says no or...?
>
> [Kit] I think it does because sometimes people say "no" like (putting on a whining voice) "oh, I don't know" or "I'm tired" or "I don't think I want to do this." Like that's not strong enough.
>
> [I ask] So nobody here has ever felt coerced. You feel it was always your free decision?
>
> [all agree]
>
> [Kris] I mean I don't know what kind of situation you're trying to... you mean any kind of pressure or..?
>
> [I respond] Yes, anything.
>
> [Kris] Well, I mean I guess I've had a few. Like when I was in H.S. my last year I had to intern at a stock broking firm and the place was packed with guys, young, nice cars and everything. So there were a few there that tried to pressure me. You know, it was kind of uncomfortable that every time you're trying to do your job or walk around the office to do something you're being commented on and things like that. And then you have people coming up to you saying this guy says this and this guy says that, it's just you know. And even the guy I was actually working for asked me to do things, you know. I mean I finally ended it . And I didn't really want to say anything because I was kind of like, you know, I'm doing this, I'm getting really good grades because of this but, so I was pressured.

It is unclear what this participant's relationship with her supervisor was but in saying "I finally ended it" and acknowledging that she was "pressured" this led me to accept at least the possibility that some sexual relationship took place. Through her evasiveness it was obvious that she was not open to any further discussion of the matter when I attempted to gently prod for more information.

When suburban focus group #3 was asked the question "has anyone ever tried to push you further sexually than you wanted to go?" they too interpreted such male sexuality as normal and expected:

[Noel] You mean like boys edging you on? Yeah. A couple of times. I always took it as "it's ok. He's a boy. He's gotta try."

[Christy] There was a guy who really tried to push me. I said "I don't even know you." And he was talking just about my body parts. Like I'm just some kind of toy or whatever, I don't know. And now I'm very careful about the first conversation I have. I look really good and I try to see what they're talking about and if they're just focused on my body.

[Fran] Well I try not to put myself in that situation, because I don't dress, showing my shape or anything like that. Or I don't carry myself like that. So it doesn't happen to me. But when I was growing up it did. But guys would say "I see you just don't want to so forget it." You know, I'd be fighting with them saying "no, no, no." And they'd be "oh just forget it, you're just too hard."

[laughter]

[Cindy] Someone's always gonna try and see what they can get. I mean it's just normal. Its a guy thing. Guys hormones are usually raging out of control and they're gonna try and see what they can get and talk you into whatever they can.

[laughter]

[Fran] I think some guys even have problems with that, with their biological, you know, like how they feel. They don't even want it.

[Marissa] They might be coerced by what their friends are saying you know, "I was with this one" so they feel like "oh, I better keep up".

And again, in suburban focus group #4 I ask "has anyone ever pressured you to go further sexually than you wanted to?":

[all nod heads and say yes]

[Sandra says yes as if I had asked a ridiculous question]

[I ask] Sandra, the way you said yes ...

[Sandra] Well, to push you to maybe go further, I think that's very common. Not physically to hurt you to push you. But to mentally coerce you to possibly go further and have sex with them, yes.

[all voice agreement]

[Billie] They don't even know they're doing it. It's like in their nature almost. It's not like they're trying to hurt you or anything.

[Sandra]. It wasn't to hurt you, it was that they wanted to have sex and you didn't, I mean...

[laughter]

[Sandra] ... or you wanted to wait and they didn't want to wait and that was it.

[Nina] They always like try to do it and you say "no no no" and then they'll stop for a little while, and then they'll try it again. And then it's like "NO!" and you have to take their hand and go [gesturing throwing their hand off]. And then they do it over it and over again.

[I ask] Is it something that you expect?

[Nina] I don't take it offensively.

[Kay] Yeah.

[Brenda] Like, they wanna know how far you want to go, they want to be sure...

Generally, the participants above did not experience the pressure put on them to have sex in a negative way, but as a normal and natural part of the male-female relationship. Below another participant describes an experience that she does *not* consider harmless:

> [Jean] My first boyfriend was when I was 16 so I wasn't that into those things. But guys, I didn't have many boyfriends, they would think that if you gave them an inch that you're gonna have sex with them. You know, they just think that way. You know, no means yes. There was one guy who told me that. Do you want to have sex? I was like no! I didn't have the feeling. He was out drinking. I know him. And he wanted to have sex and I was like "no, no, no." And he was like "can you just kiss me then?" And I was like "no." Cause one thing leads to another and he said "no, it's not gonna be like that" So I was like fine. I kissed him. And he was all over me. And I was like "No! No!" And he was forcing himself on me. I didn't want to scream because I didn't want to make a big scene. But we was fighting. He almost broke my arm and everything. We was fighting. I know him. Well the thing that makes me mad... I was saying stuff to him like, well, he has a daughter. I was saying "how would you like if someone did this to your daughter?" And he was like "are you a virgin?" And I said "that's none of your business and that's not the point." He said "oh, but I can't stop now." "First of all I told you no from the start" and stuff like that. His pants was open and stuff like that. And I was like "NO!" And the next day I was like "don't you understand what no is?" And he said "your no to me means yes." Really. That was it.
>
> [I ask] Is that kind of experience, a no means yes, is that pretty common?
>
> [Jean] What I was saying he was not hearing. He was just doing what he wanted to do. And his friends just said "oh, he was drunk". So I was like "what does that mean?" "Every time you're drunk you're gonna try to push yourself on somebody?"
>
> [Nina] When you're drunk you don't know what you're doing
>
> [Jean] He knew what he was doing!! He knows what he was doing! Please! He was up at 6:00 that morning all fine and everything. He was not drunk. He didn't have that much. I was there.

Jean, I would argue, counters the notion of the normalcy of a coercive sexuality with a description of what I would consider, and what would also meet the legal

definition, of an attempted rape (although she does not call it such). She tries to impart to the group her right to have her "no" respected without any qualifiers.

Focus Group #2, the High School students from the Bronx, provide perhaps the most illuminating example of the process of negotiation involved in socially constructing and reconstructing the meaning of rape and sexual violence and will be quoted at great length. This conversation encompasses not only their negotiation over what rape is but also who is and is not a victim. These are the voices of young women who have almost all had some experience with sexual assault, be it themselves personally or someone they were close to. Their experiences perhaps provide one explanation for what I believe to be their relatively feminist interpretations of sexual violence (as opposed to the other three groups) and their lower levels of rape myth acceptance. According to Kleinke and Meyer (1990) the fact that the participants in their study evaluated a rape victim from written case material more unfavorably than the videotaped rape victim indicates the positive value of even a small bit of familiarity with a victim. This is not to say that rape myths are not expressed in this group. They are. However, when rape myths are brought up they are often met with fierce opposition by other members the likes of which I had not really encountered in the other three groups. The excerpt below begins with a young woman expressing the belief that rape is not that bad unless you are seriously physically harmed:

> [Shanelle] I think the scariest part of rape is if you're injured in the process, like was cut or something. Because I think some, some, I'm not saying it's not um, [inaubible] but the way they're [the other students] are making it it's like "oh, I could never forget it, oh it's so bad" . Because I mean like, I personally came close once. But the way some people make it it's like their life is over. Unless you got hurt in the process...
>
> [Jane] But it's not good to suppress. Cause I know somebody who got raped when they were only 3 and um, and she suppressed it a lot. And that's

what's breaking her down, breaking her soul down. It just effects everything. But it's different if it's something with a boyfriend and they call it rape but it's really not rape it's just that they let it happen. You know what I mean?

Shanelle offers the common rape "typification", that women tend to exaggerate how much rape affects them, (See, Burt, 1980; Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1995) and another member questions her understanding but then proceeds to offer another long standing rape myth (that rape by an acquaintance is not as serious or is not really rape at all), presenting it as being more realistic than the first. The conversation continued:

[Anne] Well some people will say it has to do with the way girls dress. Like they're like "oh, you're dressing that way then you're looking to get raped" or something like that. And in some ways, yeah, because you shouldn't be dressing like that if you want to be respected or whatever, but then again it's not to say that "ok I'm dressing this way so go ahead and rape me." You know, it's like, I'm not giving you permission. Don't touch me I wanna dress this way because I want to, it's my style. But then other people have their opinions like that. And that's just sort of disrespect towards women cause like women have to dress this way, they just have to. But they want to be respected and whatever.[6]

[Shanelle] I don't think that like when someone dresses a certain way that they're asking to be a victim of rape because you're walking out with hardly any clothes on. Of course a lot of people don't believe so, but a woman should be able to dress in a certain way. And people tend to judge at first by the way they're dressed. Instead of a guy. He can go out with shorts and no shirt on, you know what I'm saying? But a woman wants to go out with a little t-shirt and shorts on and she's judged as if she should put her clothes on and cover up. Why can't he put his shirt on and cover up?

[Jane] I think the real problem with guys is that they treat women like a piece a meat. Like sometimes, when they were growing up they didn't have any respect for their mothers so they're not gonna have any respect for you. But basically you could walk down the street naked and nobody has the right to touch you. But rape is rape and they [men] don't see anything wrong with it.

[Tanisha] I think what you wear doesn't have so much to do with whether you're going to get raped or not. You can have big baggy clothes on and if you're in a situation like walking alone at night on the street you're likely to get raped by some psycho that is just after women. What you wear doesn't really...

[Jane] I think that with some people it's not sexual, like why some people rape. Because, yeah, it's like psychologically, some people want control. So they rape to get control over you. It's not really about ... It gives them a better, it [the way a woman dresses] gives them more of a reason or excuse to say that that's why they did it but...

> [AnneMarie] Any guy that's after women, you know, in general, and you're out alone by yourself at night, you're fucked.

The above discussion primarily centers on debunking the rape myth that women provoke attacks by dressing in a provocative manner. These young women seem to resent the fact that their choice in clothing should have anything at all to do with sexual assault. Their conversation ended with what I would consider quite a feminist perspective and one that many in the group came to agree with. Several minutes later into this discussion one member brings up her own experience with sexual assault.

> [Lucia] There are different types of rapes. I can tell you that. It's part of my life. There's physical rapes and mental rapes. And like I've been through the mental rape and that it something that I hate talking about but it's just there. And like people think that rape is just like, you know having sex with you. That is not rape. That is just one part of rape. And like you know, rape can be in a lot of different ways. I mean it's horrible what it does to you, you know. And like people have got to understand that there are different types of rapes and just because I wasn't raped physically, does not mean that I was not raped. And you know, it took a lot for me to report it.
>
> [I ask] What would you say was the difference between a physical rape and a mental rape?
>
> [Lucia] The physical rape is where intercourse actually happens. The mental rape is where someone is just watching you. Watching all the time. Like when I would sleep, I was living with my aunt and uncle, and I was going to sleep and like I felt somebody watching me all the time and then like I went to the bathroom and that same person would come into the bathroom and you know, I mean I didn't want to accuse him or anything but I was just mentally, I just couldn't live there anymore. I feel like I suffered equally to a person that was raped, um, which had physical, maybe even worse.

Although she refers to her experience as a "mental rape", I would argue that what happened to Lucia must have met some legal definition of sexual assault since she briefly discusses an incident at her trial later on in the conversation and points out that the offender did serve jail time. For reasons I can only speculate, she decides to call it a "mental rape." Perhaps, for example, she was not actually penetrated with the offender's

penis and has accepted a particular definition of rape as something that only happens when penile penetration is involved (See Brownmiller, 1975). In any event, she has defined her own experience as a form of rape. The conversation continued:

> [Camille] Like my mom, when I was growing up, when I was younger, my mom was like [inaudible] like something like that happened to me, actually at a friends house, not necessarily that you don't trust the parents, but like they'd have a family friend that comes over and you don't know them, you don't know what they're gonna do.
>
> [Christine] That's happened to someone in my family. They was at their cousins house. They always went there for the summertime and she would have like different kids from the family come there for the summertime. And one day, she was eight, and she had um, one guy who was about 16 or 17. And he never physically raped her but she told me that like he would touch her, tell her things, threaten her, tell her if she didn't do this he would do this to her. And it's like, she never told anyone until like one day, um, my Aunt, she like heard him say something and she said "what did he just say to you?" And like, he didn't think no one heard him say it. And so she said that's not right. And he was immediately sent back home and he like, and like action was taken against him because she's a minor and he's like 17 or 18.
>
> [I ask] It seems like a lot of you know somebody who was the victim of a sexual assault. How many of you, a show of hands? Ok. Almost the whole group [everyone but 2]. Did any of these cases that you know of result in any jail time?
>
> [Jane] At first her mother didn't know and then when she was older she was like mommy "daddy did something to me" and blah and blah. And she was only a little kid so that she didn't understand that when you're a little kid. You're only 3 you're just trying to grow up and live your life. You don't know what's going on. But I don't think he was sent to jail. I don't know what happened.

The fact that nearly every member in this group knew someone who was sexually assaulted as well as being the group least likely to adhere to common rape myths, poses an interesting possibility of a connection between rape myth avoidance and being personally acquainted with someone who has been affected by sexual assault. The young woman below will lead the conversation in new directions by bringing up the issue of rape in marriage.

> [Tanisha] When you're married, like a lot of people say oh, ok, once you get married you wouldn't , like you have to have sex with your husband. If you

> don't like, and he like forces you, you wouldn't call it rape. But I think that it would be because it's like having sex against your own will, you know, because like in another case that would be called rape and I don't think marriage should change that. In my family, my mom, when she was with my father, they were going out they were never really married. But they were living together, whatever. And you know, when you just had a baby you can't have no intercourse because your just still, you know recuperating and stuff like that, and he would force her. And she went through all that a lot. And I think it was so horrible like for somebody to, you know to go through something like that. Even if your married or even if you're going out, it's still called rape because [inaudible] And they fight with that person you know, you don't want to have sex and the other person does and you're forced to have sex and that's not right. He died. And I was so happy.
>
> [bursts of laughter from everyone]
>
> [Tanisha] I know he was my father, but I'm happy in a way that he died because he was so, he was so abusive to my mom. And like everything that he like, he would have killed her. And like he couldn't go by my grandparents house because they wanted to kill him. You know every time he would come they would have a knife ready at the door for when he would come in an jump at 'em you know. And you know, like I'm happy that he is dead because I know right now if he was alive, like he would always tell my mom when I was born that he was gonna take me away from her and that's why I was always scared like he was gonna come and take me away and maybe do something to me. He would end up killing my mom or something like that. So I'm glad because he was such an evil person but then again it's like that emptiness of not knowing him and stuff like that. [tears] I'm sorry for getting so emotional.

The fact that this participant brought up the rape of her mother by her father is significant. In no other group was rape in marriage even considered unless I mentioned it first. Even then, most members were not comfortable with the notion that a married woman can be raped by her husband. This young woman brings up the issue and the group is generally receptive to the idea that a husband can force intercourse on his wife and that it is in fact a rape. However, their receptiveness falters somewhat when the law is brought into the picture:

> [I add] That's ok. I appreciate you sharing that with us. You made some very good points. What do other people think about assaults in marriage? Is there a difference when you're married or if it's a stranger?

[Jane] Of course there's a difference. I mean just because you're married to them doesn't mean you lose all your independence or your choice if you want to do something.

[I ask] Let's say that all of you were on a jury serving on a rape case and the victim is married to the offender. What that affect your decision?

[some discussion amongst themselves for a second or two]

[Diane] Actually, I would actually think about what type of proof do you have that he raped you? I mean, I'm sorry but there's a lot of evil women that would actually be, you know "since you did this to me I'm gonna say you raped me. And I have all the proof because like we've had sex a lot of times and I have like whoa, a whole lot of, you know..."

[bursts of laughter]

[Diane] Think about it. The whole situation. I can't really say it, like off the bat, yeah, I mean it doesn't change anything, because it does change a lot. I mean if I would to be on a jury right now I would actually think about it twice because... I don't know, I don't know.

[I ask] Anyone else?

[Rosa] If you would put the word "rape" into a sentence and a particular situation, it is wrong and I'm not gonna think twice about it. If it was rape it is wrong. Whether you're married, single, whatever.

[Christine] I feel that you're both right. That there are women out there that do use that as an excuse but then once you say no and the person pushes himself on you that's rape. It's rape. If we don't want to, that's rape. But there are women out there that do do that...

[Anne] I'm sorry to cut you off, but I've seen situations when, I know guys and I know they didn't, I mean, not to say that I knew that they didn't do anything, but I knew the girl that they were with. And, I know that it was, I mean, not that, cause I'm not, I wasn't their [inaudible] but she was very consexual [consensual], you understand? And for you to say, "ok so we had sex and um, and I um, it was rape." And how do you call it rape? Well, um, and then to say that I didn't want to do it but I still did it. I mean I don't know, it's just, there are situations. I mean there's a lot of people that actually, I don't know.

I found it most interesting that the participants voiced their unqualified support in the belief that a married woman can be raped by her husband when the discussion centered around another member's lived experiences but then changed to include some common rape myths when the discussion was more abstract and not based on any woman in particular. I would argue that it is far easier to distance oneself from an abstract unknown individual and thus to define her as the "other" than it is to do so with a woman who is known to us or seems somehow more real.

I continue the conversation by asking the participants to imagine they are on a jury and to tell me what kind of proof they would look for that a rape has occurred. This sparks an intense debate involving the notions of a "worthy" and "unworthy" victim.

> [Jane] First of all when you're on a jury you're supposed to be unbiased. That's why your picked. When you're on a jury you can't say, "oh she was this and that" because people act as if they look sad and things like that. You have to, the problem is proof or evidence so that would be hard to do. It's their world against yours or whatever.
>
> [Diane] If they don't cry then forget it.
>
> [people talking at once. A lot of disagreement]
>
> [Lucia] Well, when this happened to me, I did not cry. I did not cry in that court room. I was sitting there and the guy started asking me "why you not crying? Why doesn't it bother you? Why aren't you emotional?" Because I know what happened! I don't have to prove (pointing to others around the room) to you to you to you what happened to me.
>
> [I ask] Anyone else?
>
> [Anne] If she's the type, you know, she has a background. The type of woman she is. Even though it doesn't always happen that way. I would tend to go with the female cause I'm a female. But I might doubt it if she were the type of woman that looks for trouble.
>
> [numerous voices disagreeing]
>
> [Lucia] There is no type!
>
> [Alyson] I wouldn't think twice about someone who, she was a virgin when she uh, was raped than someone who's been with a lot of partners and had a history like that. I'm not saying that I would go against her because of ***that. I'm*** just saying I would think twice about it.
>
> [Shanella] It's not even that she wasn't a virgin, it's just that, if she, this person had like 50 husbands or she gets married everyday. Something like that ...
>
> [Diane] I would probably doubt it if it was a woman out for the money of the man. Like in most cases they say this afterwards, that it was rape. And then [inaudible] they really just want the money of the actor or...

The discussion above involves numerous long-standing rape myths: that an unemotional woman on the witness stand is lying, women from certain backgrounds or with more sexual partners are not as trustworthy, and women use the claim of rape when they are out to steal a man's money. As the process of negotiation continues however, these rape

myths do not go unchallenged. When a participant brings up the question of prostitution the challenge to numerous rape myths is brought to a new level.

[Jane] Well what if a prostitute got raped? Would it not be rape because she's a prostitute?

[everyone shouting no, no, that's not it]

[Diane] I think a prostitute can't be raped.

[a lot of screaming and shouting]

[Diane] but look how she's living her life!

[I ask] O.k. that brought up a lot of issues. Let's just have a show of hands. How many of you think that a prostitute can be raped?

[Most raise their hands].

[screaming and shouting]

[Diane] I'm not saying she can't be raped. But she's living that life. She should think about what's gonna happen to her. Like maybe [inaudible] if I see someone that don't look healthy they might, don't look good enough for me to have sex with, that's different. But if she decides that, she should think about it, and look at the person..

[Lucia] What if she didn't get raped while she was working?

[Diane] Well then that's something different.

[screaming and shouting]

[Jane] You mentioned that you should look at the person to see if they're alright. A rapist could look more sane than anyone in here!

[voices of agreement,; laughter]

[Shanelle] It ain't no joke. But I've run into crazies. Just because you're a prostitute on hours or off hours... I mean my best friend, she was a prostitute. She was a prostitute when she got kicked out of her home. And it was one time, no twice, she almost got murdered and the guy wasn't some [inaudible] He tried to choke her. I mean you don't think all men are gonna try and kill you. You negligent to, the atmosphere that you put yourself in because if you get killed you shouldn't be there in the first place. But then again, you could be a dancer, a lot of dancers they say "I'm not gonna have sex, I'm just here to dance to make the money and go home to pay for whatever." And a lot of 'em wind up get raped, you know. And a lot of 'em, to be honest, the come from good homes, righteous families and they end up in those places doing those things. But you can't put a label on anybody who gonna get raped. You could be an old lady and get raped.

[Rosa] That's the same thing, do you think a porn star can get raped? Of course! I mean anybody can get raped. You just can't say oh she can't get raped because that's all she does. I mean its like, that's like putting a label on people, like "oh, look at her"...

[ ] But it's like because you were assaulted and you're a masochist it means it's not a violation, you know what I'm saying?

[Rosa] Even if you like it, even if you're doing it for a living. I mean it doesn't matter it's still a violation.

In the above conversation the participants grapple with the very commonly held view that a prostitute, by nature of her work, cannot be raped. Again, this idea stems from a long history of thought which holds that a woman with numerous sex partners is "fair game" and can never really legitimately claim rape. Interestingly, according to Chessler (1994) prostitutes are the group of women most frequently raped, sometimes as much as 30 times in one year. The conversation continues below with the notion that the more sexual experience or partners a woman has, the less damage is done. This idea is generally discredited by the rest of the group. Another participant expresses the belief that prostitution prevents rape. Again this idea does not meet with agreement from the rest of the group.

> [Diane] I think, it's the same thing like I was saying. Go back to the crime issue, I mean the amount of jail time someone would do. For a prostitute, I think that if she gets raped and like she was gonna go to have sex with him and then something happened and she was just like "no" and he raped her. He raped her no matter whether or not she [] before she got in the car or after she got in the car. He raped her. I don't think that, I don't know, I just think that the jail time for him shouldn't be the same for someone else...
>
> [Jane] But he's still a rapist. You're getting let a rapist out on the street so that some other woman...
>
> [Diane] But it's a different situation.
>
> [Jane] He's still a rapist. That's the way I see it. Anyone who is a potential rapist should suffer jail time. Even if they didn't do it. If you touch a little girl but don't rape her you should still go to jail the same as the rapist...
>
> [AnneMarie] But like in the other situation where a prostitute said "yeah" and then she said "no" then I don't think he should get time. Because that man went to that prostitute because he didn't want to rape anybody...
>
> [explosion of incredulous laughter]
>
> [AnneMaria] ....no no no. But he didn't want to attack no girl walking down the street. That's why he went to that prostitute. Even though it was wrong, she changed her mind last minute. It doesn't justify it but I don't think he should go to jail...
>
> [shouting. Everyone talking at once]

> [Shanelle] Well I say well then, if that guy didn't want to rape anybody, and he went to that prostitute and she said no, well then roll on down to the next prostitute...
>
> [shouting, taking at once]
>
> [Jane] But it's like I said before. It's about control. Most rapists, a lot of rapists rape prostitutes. It's about control, cause they can't control their lives so they have to control other people.

In the above conversation there is some attempt to stigmatize prostitutes as "unworthy" victims but the idea is generally shot down by other members of the group. In bringing up this particular issue it seems to have facilitated further support for the ideas of what I believe to be the more feminist voices in the group.

Competing Social Constructions

In each focus group there appears to be a dichotomy created between the culturally produced, socially acceptable constructions about sexual violence which arise from socialization and other influences such as the media, and the social constructions which arise from the members' actual experiences (or those with whom they are acquainted). The participants quite often flip-flop between both understandings, trying to settle on an acceptable definition. The media, in all its forms, serve up conflicting ideas on what constitutes a rape and who is a rape victim. And, as I discuss in Chapter 6, with the concentration of media into fewer and fewer hands and the tendency to view anything challenging the patriarchal status quo as "too radical", there is less likelihood for alternative, feminist definitions to take hold with the public. (*See*, for example, Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Nichols, 2000; McChesney, 1999; Phillips, 2001)

In the conversation below members speak of the experiences of people close to them who have been raped. In the initial discussion they seem to disavow those rape myths asserting that women who are acquainted with the offender are somehow to blame for the attack. Later in the dialogue however, they seems to return to the culturally

acceptable rape typifications that we are all too familiar with. After one member mentioned the rape of her sister earlier in the conversation, the discussion below began with the question "Do any of you, aside from Dina, know the victim of a rape?":

[Marissa] I have a cousin who was abused at a very very young age. She was like 15. I mean she adored the man but he took advantage of her. He passed her around to his friends. We were devastated.

[I ask] And was it ever reported?

[Marissa] You know women are very emotional. And what happens is when you have feelings involved with the person. O.K. She didn't really take it to court. She didn't really do anything about it. She just told her family that he took advantage of her and some of her friends. But because of her feelings for him, she didn't do anything.

[ ] Is she still with him? (another woman asking her)

[Marissa] No.

[Cindy] You could kinda understand her having feelings for him but, you know, I would be a little bit perturbed by the fact that he's letting all his friends take advantage of me...

[ ] Yeah. {all agreeing}

[Gloria] As wrong as it may seem that she was that young and he was taking advantage of her, you know...

[Marissa] He didn't feel the way she did.

[Vanda] How hold was he?

[Marissa] I think he was about 19 or 20. He didn't feel the way she felt. But she didn't know that. She was led to believe that he cared for her.

[Vanda] Well sure, he's scum.

[I ask] What about your sister Dina, did she ever report it?

[Dina] No. Because it was like a date. I mean you go out with somebody on a date and they rape you, back then, and you tell somebody they're not gonna believe you. They're gonna say "you brought this on yourself". You know, what was she doing going out with him? And that was the situation within our family, you know. They were saying she deserved it.

[Noel] Your family said that?

[Dina] My uncles and stuff. Which I disagreed with them you know. They said "she deserved it. She knew how he was. She should've never went out with him." But then, you know, they don't realize how much emotional scars she has, you know. She's been going to a psychiatrist and stuff like that but you know, the point is that just having those thoughts in your head is violating you, what they're doing to you.

[Noel] But also what your family is saying to her. They're making it seem like you know "it's your fault". So she feels guilty.

[Marissa] Do you think that's why she never reported it?

[Dina] It's the shame of it.

[Noel] Do you think she also felt it was her fault?
[Dina] Some part of it she felt that it was her fault.

Several minutes later I ask the question "Of all the men who are accused of rape, what percentage would you think are guilty?" Answers ranged from 50 to 75 percent. I then followed up with "What do you think happens in the other cases?"

[Fran] I think it's cases where women lie. Where women, maybe they like the guy and the guy doesn't like them, doesn't reciprocate. And in order to get back at the guy, or the guy, say the guy does something wrong, say the man and the woman do have sex. And afterwards the guy is like "oh well, this is all that it is. I don't want a relationship." You know and then the woman gets mad and says "he raped me." Situations like that.
Do you think that that's a fairly common situation?
[all agree]
[I ask] Does anyone disagree?
[Cindy] Well it could be. Plus the more you hear stories like that the more women may be influenced by it and say "maybe I could do the same thing." It could be in the back in their head and then when a situation like that happens to them they say, well you know, maybe I'll do that.
[Marissa] Especially if its somebody that's famous.
[Fran] And for instance what happened at the Puerto Rican Day parade last year. Some women weren't even there or weren't even at the site and they just decided to come forward for attention or for..
[Vera] Money maybe?
[Fran] Yeah. And there's some there that it did happen to but...
[Noel] I don't understand that. Are you saying that the people that it didn't happen to came forward and said it did happen...?
[Gloria] She's saying that it might have been people that just said you know what here, have me too. I wasn't even there, but I'm gonna say I was there.
[Fran] You know like "I was on the other side of Central Park but I'm gonna say that I was there too.."
[Vera] Yeah, like she wasn't even part of it but she's gonna say "maybe I can get some money out of this."

Here, only several minutes after the previous conversation, the participants are inclined to believe the long-standing myth that women are vindictive and prone to lying. Again, it may be that different rules apply when one is speaking of those they know rather than women who are strangers with absolutely no relationship to the speaker.

Later, the members were asked about rape in marriage. Here again we see the tendency towards moving back and forth between the culturally acceptable definitions of rape and what I would consider a more feminist interpretation.

> [I ask] What about in marriage?
> [Fran] No. You're husband and wife.
> [Gloria] But if the marriage is shaky. Something like that happened to my brother. His wife accused him of rape.
> [Noel] But rape can happen in marriage.
> [Gloria] But if you have children with someone...
> [Noel] But it happens.
> [Gloria] Well maybe. But just leave him!
> [Fran] Well, if the woman has a headache too many times and he's getting ticked off you know "this is not how a marriage is supposed to be" he might force himself on somebody. I can see it happening. You know, the stress of bringing up kids, the stress of working, all different kinds of factors. Like you said, people grow apart. But again, you know if biological needs aren't being met you can understand... not that you can understand a rape but if someone gets frustrated enough and they're not being satisfied the way they feel a marriage should...
> [Vanda] If I'm a juror and I see a woman claiming that her husband... I'm more likely to believe her then a person, like a stranger raping..
> [I ask] Why is that?
> [Vanda] Because it's not something that happens all the time. Women don't accuse their husband's of rape.
> [voices of agreement]
> [Vanda] Because maybe they have children, you know. Yeah. I would definitely believe the woman.
> [Christy] Yeah. Because what wife would say her husband raped her unless he really did it.
> [Fran] Especially if there are kids involved because even, whatever happens, if you're guilty or not, that man is still part of the kids lives for the rest of their lives and she's gonna have to still interact with them. So it's probably a big scary step for her.

The above passage is also interesting in that we see one participant, Fran, who first speaks of a man's "biological needs" (a theme found in all four focus groups) and moments later ends up agreeing with a different interpretation put forth by other members. The participants are trying very hard to come to some sort of consensus on the issue.

Those Evil Women

As a teenager a quite socially conservative male relative took great pains to remind others in my family of the presence of all the "evil women" in the world. Such discussions typically arose whenever a rape case made it to the news or the subject somehow entered a conversation. I cannot recall a single case in which he believed in the veracity of a woman's claims. Rather, in each circumstance the "evil woman" myth was molded to fit every particular case. For example: the woman lied because she wanted revenge for being rejected, the woman lied because she was out for his money, the woman lied because she was out to destroy his career, she was promiscuous and was asking for it, women cry rape all the time, etc. While this relative is obviously a product of an earlier generation of thinking, I found that some of the women in the focus groups were speaking much the same way – keeping alive the same rape myths that critics were arguing against thirty years ago.

Once a victim is identified as "unworthy" she is constructed as the "Other" who is not at all "like us". Those who associate with or sympathize with the "Other" are also in danger of being labeled a member of that category. Thus it is that women will often make sure to differentiate themselves from those women deemed "unacceptable" (and here I am not only referring to rape victims but "unacceptable" women in general). Our culture is rife with examples of such "evil women" who lie, cheat, manipulate and are, above all, vindictive. Images of such women grace our television programs, our films, our music and our literature. Such stereotypes are also widespread in history and political theory (See Pateman, 1988). The images of the "evil woman" are so imbedded in our cultural landscape that the idea of the widespread existence of such women

becomes normal and natural. Also, as fighting this omnipresent stereotype may seem futile, women will often agree with it but claim *they* are nothing like it.

After a number of members in the suburban focus group #1 said they believed many men are unjustly accused of rape, they proceeded to give several examples which involved denigrating the stigmatized "Other":

> [Kit] I know of a situation where it's happened. When I was in college, I'm in college now, but I mean right after H.S. A girl that I was friends with she liked this guy and she liked him and they went out for a little while and then he, like you do when you're 18, turned around and liked someone else and she was angry. And she... I know she lied. He wasn't like convicted or anything. She kind of dropped it. She was angry and she wanted to get back at him.
>
> [I ask] Do you think that's something that is common?
>
> [Lisa] I would say so, yeah. Sometimes women can be very two faced and take things back and not be very clear about what they're feeling. You know, I know there's that thing that women say "if she say's no, she means yes." I mean some women do. You know, I'm not like that but there are women out there that do do that.

Above, Lisa identifies and agrees with what the rape myth literature would call a centuries old rape myth (a woman's no means yes) but is careful to disassociate herself from the likes of such women.

> [Linda] They tease.
>
> [Lisa] they like to play and I sympathize with the men for not knowing where to draw the line. I mean if you force yourself obviously ..... but if you don't and the woman afterwards says you know I didn't want that well, it's too late now to say that. It's very ambiguous. Women are very ambiguous.
>
> [I ask] Does everyone agree with this?
>
> [most responding yes]
>
> [Winnie] Verbally you have this game, this flirtatious game and so verbally it can be very ambiguous. But when it gets to the point of a physical thing where you're pushing and saying attitude changes and your getting angry, then the man should stop. But before then it could be like a word game. The man maybe doesn't realize, especially if she's a flirt. But there's a line where, at some point, you should know.

Winnie acknowledges the ambiguity of some sexual situations (attributing such ambiguity largely to women's flirtatiousness) but also notes that there is a point where a

man should realize the woman means no. Below Lisa expresses sympathy for men since, she feels, women make it difficult for them to know where to draw the line. She also brings up another long-standing rape myth found in the literature - that men cannot really control their sex drive.

> [Lisa] And I know girls that will take guys right up to the point of having sex and I know lots of girls like that. And they're not thinking about the guys. I mean they are only human. I'm not saying you should be mad at the woman, but it's difficult for them to know.
>
> [Kit] I think like if you really don't want to, then nobody has a right to. But you have to let the guy know. I mean if you really don't want to, when it comes down to it you go "NO", you know. Like then if they keep going, then it's definitely a rape but you have to like.., if you really don't want to then you have to get that across.

Again, Kit places all responsibility for the encounter squarely on the shoulders of women. It is up to them to be firm enough in their responses (exactly what would be considered firm enough is unclear). In addition research (Norris, et. all, 1996) has suggested that women are often too intimidated to speak up aggressively (often a product of female socialization) for fear of male rejection among other things. Below, Lisa puts forth a newer rape myth known as the "rough sex defense" made popular by the Robert Chambers murder case.

> [Lisa] You know this might sound terrible, but a lot of girls like it rough.
>
> [nervous laughter from others]
>
> [Lisa] A lot of girls do enjoy rough sex. So how's a guy supposed to know if this is just a game or something she doesn't want?
>
> [I ask] What do those who are being quiet think?
>
> [Winnie] Do women lie about being raped? Yeah. What about if somebody gets pregnant and they don't want to tell their parents you know, they're not supposed to be having sex and they say that somebody raped them so that, you know, it's not so bad.
>
> ... [Winnie]. I work with a young girl that's very flirtatious with a lot of the men that we work with. She's 24 and a lot of the guys that I work with are older, you know, they're, um, early 30s, 40s, 50s. There's this one guy in particular where whenever she's being flirtatious with him, and you know we work in retail, she starts talking about the color of her underwear, and she's

> wearing a matching set. We don't want to hear that. And she claims to have been raped multiple times and we question that because she's very flirtatious. A guy will come up to her, for example, this happened about a week ago, another guy was talking to her and I guess he got too close to her and she felt that he had violated her space and she slapped him! Because she felt that he was.. but she's very flirtatious with everybody so it's hard to tell. Well, you know, does she really want this type of attention or doesn't she? And she gives that conflicting.. in those situations. I think that happens a lot. With a lot of girls. It's attention for some girls. You know, they try to cross the line, they get to a certain point and they want to turn around and say forget it, you know you're not the one whose attention I want and they give mixed messages.

These comments are interesting for several reasons. I would argue that popular culture encourages young women (and often pre-teens) to be very sexually provocative and yet many of the old rape myths remain in place so that a flirtatious young woman is least likely to be believed when making a rape accusation. This paradox leaves women in a very awkward position. In addition, while the comments of the participants above represent what I believe are some of the most common rape myths, they are also sure to disassociate themselves from the legions of, what we might call, "those evil women" and relegate such women to the category of "Other."

Framing an Issue

There are numerous factors which mediate the social construction of an issue. Such factors may include the effects of desensitization brought on by long-term exposure to negative and objectifying media images of women, an individual's overall ideology or world view, or the effects of a belief in a just world, to name just a few. According to Lambert and Raichle (2000), "A plethora of research suggest that there are important individual differences in how people assign blame in cases of rape. In other words, even when presented with the identical facts, perceivers often draw very different inferences about victims, depending on the participants' a priori position with respect to relevant personality variables." (p. 853).

World View

In Kristin Luker's (1984) study of attitudes toward abortion, she points out that such attitudes are only the "tip of the iceberg". ". Beliefs about gender roles, parenthood and even human nature are all brought forth when abortion is the topic. Luker defines a world view as "those parts of life we take for granted, never imagine questioning, and cannot envision decent, moral people not sharing." (p.158).

Where does sexual violence fit in to one's world view? Again, some research suggests that men who hold highly traditional, sexist notions of gender roles are not only more likely than those holding what are considered to be more progressive views to commit the act of rape, but that they are also much more likely to believe in rape myths. (Acock, 1983; Barnett, 1992) But what of the women and their world views? Is the propensity of certain women to blame the rape victim part of a larger world view in which women occupy a traditional role? There is some evidence (discussed below) that this is indeed the case.

A review of the literature indicates that people who endorse politically conservative views tend to be more punitive towards rape victims, as opposed to people who are more liberal politically and do not hold such punitive attitudes. (*See*, Anderson et al., 1997). In their study of the role of political ideology in blaming rape victims, Labert and Raichle (2000) proffer a "legitimization hypothesis" in which conservatism might be associated with a tendency to react to rape in ways that justify the behavior of the attacker toward the woman. In other words, "politically conservative individuals are more likely to legitimize existing hierarchical relations between dominant and nondominant groups." (p. 855) Consistent with their hypothesis, they found that

participants who defined themselves as very conservative tended to blame the female victim more, and the male perpetrator less. In addition, judgments of blame were more consistently predicted by individual differences in ideology than by a participant's gender. Their results suggest that "ideology had an effect above and beyond any vested interest than might have arisen from judging same-sex versus opposite-sex targets." (p. 858.) They conclude that:

> "Unlike men, women would seem to gain little by investing in a belief system that is associated with preserving existing patterns of dominance, of which the difference between men and women is one example. Although future work is needed to further investigate this phenomenon, our results suggest that people's investment in general ideological principles can guide their reactions toward other persons, independent of and in addition to any vested interest arising out of their shared group membership with the person being judged." (p. 861)

These results are also consistent with Luker's findings that gender per se does not dictate a woman's attitude towards abortion, even though opposition to it goes against the interests of women as a social group.

In terms of the focus group participants, ascertaining their world view was difficult under the limited circumstances I was working with. Although I asked questions relating to their adherence to traditional gender roles and political party affiliations on the brief background questionnaire, this is obviously insufficient in terms of making any definitive determinations with respect to overall ideology. To do so would have required numerous direct questions within the actual focus group which would have substantially increased the length of the sessions and which was not possible due to the imposed time constraints. However, a brief look at the responses to the background questionnaire highlight some interesting points. First, 59 percent of the respondents indicated they had *no interest* in politics. This is not surprising given the apolitical nature of our culture.

Forty-one percent of all the respondents indicated they had no political party affiliations. Of those who did identify with a political party, most were Democrats (51%). Only 2 of the 41 focus group members identified themselves as Republican – both being members of focus group 3 (others did not respond). In terms of the few questions pointing to liberal or conservative beliefs, most groups tended to answer on the liberal end of the spectrum, with a few exceptions. For example, almost all the respondents did not believe it was the sole responsibility of a woman to take care of home and family while the husband was the breadwinner. They also tended to agree that working mothers can establish the same close relationship with their children as mothers who do not work outside the home. With respect to abortion, groups 1, 2 and 4 were solidly in favor – only in group 3 did the majority express opposition to abortion. Perhaps the most interesting pieces of information to come out of these questions were (a) the fact that, with the exception of only 4 respondents out of 41, all agreed that the movement for women's rights has helped them personally and (b) although the majority of respondents tended to give more liberal than conservative answers, the glaring exception across all four focus groups had to do with the death penalty. The overwhelming majority agreed that the death penalty is justified for certain crimes and most disagreed that the death penalty should be abolished.[7] While without further research I cannot be sure as to the reasons for this disparity in their thinking, I would speculate that this support for the death penalty is a product of the violent crime driven, fear inducing news we are all exposed to on a daily basis (the news outlets producing more crime fare because it is far cheaper to make and easier and more profitable to sell) as well as the "law and order" and

"tough on crime" mentality that is continuously pushed on the public through film, television, and political commentary.

Belief in a "Just World"

As I discussed in Chapter 4, while there may be many ways for women to become victims of either strangers or people they know, rape is the crime that women fear most (Koss, 1993). Uniting all women is the fear of rape (Gordon & Riger, 1988 and 1989; Koss, 1993; 1997). Among young urban women, rape is feared even more than murder (Warr, 1985). In response to this fear more than one half of all women give up evening activities, and isolate themselves in many other ways that men do not. Women in the US live their lives in fear of sexual assault, "and this fear constitutes a special burden not shared by men." (Koss, 1993, p.1062).

As we shall see, it is thought that this fear is closely connected with a theoretical construct called "belief in a just world" (Lerner, 1970). This is the general belief that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. When one's belief in a just world is threatened by say, witnessing a person suffering unjustly, his or her own belief in a just world is threatened. According to Lerner (1970) the observer will *cognitively* restore justice by reasoning that because of the victim's behavior or character, the victim must have deserved what happened to her. Several studies have found that those with a strong belief in the just world hypothesis perceive the rape victim as getting what she deserved (Rubin & Peplau, 1975; Miller, et. al., 1976) Innocent victims are often blamed for their fate, thus restoring the belief in a just and fair world. If it becomes impossible for a victim to be held responsible for the rape, people may derogate the victim, attributing undesirable characteristics to them and thereby once again restoring a belief

that bad things happen to bad people. (Kristiansen and Giulietti, 1990). In short, certain victims will pose a threat to an individual's sense of justice and they may utilize responses such as helping, blaming, and derogation in order to restore justice, in reality or through rationalization. (Hafer, 2000). In the brief review below, we will see that the evidence pertaining to a belief in a just world ("BJW") and it's relationship to rape myth acceptance is mixed.

According to Foley and Pigott (2000), there are two ways in which people can restore their belief in a just world: by attributing blame to the victim or by alleviating the suffering of the victim. Kleinke and Meyer (1990) argue that since it is not possible to reverse a crime of rape, rape victims are subject to derogation. However, in Foley and Pigott's (2000) study of civil trials they argue that it is possible that when the jurors are given the opportunity to compensate the plaintiff, they will be less likely to derogate her. Their research is an attempt to apply the just-world theory by giving jurors an opportunity to compensate the victim/plaintiff instead of derogating her by placing blame on her for the rape. They found that women, who are more likely to identify with the female plaintiff, awarded her much more in monetary damages when they had a high BJW than when they had a low BJW. Kleinke and Meyer's (1990) study of the evaluations of rape victims being interviewed on videotape found that men with high belief in a just world evaluated a rape victim more negatively than did men with low belief in a just world. These results did not hold true for women. Women with high belief in a just world were less negative toward the rape victim than women with low belief in a just world. They suggest that these findings may be due to the fact that

> "... women are more likely than men to identify with a rape victim and therefore less apt to blame her character. Women who identify with a rape victim

> and who belief in a just world face a particular conflict in reconciling the rape with their belief that "people get what they deserve". These women are especially reluctant to derogate a rape victim for a negative experience that could also happen to them." (p. 350)

Sinclair and Bourne (1998) proposed a "cycle-of-blame" framework to highlight the possibility that the same rape myths that lower conviction rates are in turn strengthened by not-guilty verdicts. Their subjects read a summary of a rape trial and were told that the jury's verdict was guilty or not guilty. They found that the male subjects displayed greater acceptance of rape myths and less empathy after a not-guilty versus a guilty verdict. Women were shown to have consistently high empathy across conditions and greater myth acceptance after a guilty verdict. In order to explain the apparent contradiction of women being more accepting of rape myths after a guilty verdict they argue:

> "...in the guilty scenario it is acknowledged that a bad event, namely rape occurred. Further the defendant is found at fault and the victim is held blameless. Exoneration of blame ... adversely affects women's faith in a just world because if this crime happened to a person who was not "bad" then it could happen to anyone, including the participant. A guilty scenario implies that the victim is not a bad person though a bad event has happened to her. Thus, according to the just-world principle in the guilty scenario, female participants need to find the bad person to restore their faith in a just world... Simply put the participant needs to blame the victim and does so by accepting victim-blaming myths." (p. 586)

Kristiansen and Giuliett (1990), in their study of attitudes toward battered women, found that females with a positive attitude toward women blamed, but did not derogate the wife/victim more as their just-world beliefs became stronger. They interpret this finding in view of research which suggests that "women may blame a victim of violence toward women in an effort to again perceived control over the possibility of their own potential victimization." (p. 177) Janoff-Bulman (1982), for example, noted that females felt less

vulnerable to rape the more they blamed a rape victim's behavior, whereas the extent to which they derogated the victim was not related to their feelings of vulnerability. Kristiansen and Giuliett conclude that it is more likely that women's perceptions of violence against women are not, in fact, motivated by any need to believe that the world is just, but by their need for control:

> "Further, the finding that attitudes toward women and just-world beliefs affected the extent to which females, but not males, blamed the victim, suggests that participants' perceptions of violence to women were not motivated by the need to believe that the world is just... Unlike victim blame, however, the extent to which females with favorable attitudes toward women derogated the wife/victim was not a function of their just-world beliefs. The latter finding therefore suggests that, while pro-women females with internal locus of control expectancies may blame a victim in order to preserve their perceptions of control, they may not derogate her owning to their favorable attitudes toward women more generally." (p. 186-187)

Thus, there seems to be more evidence that a conservative world view, rather than BJW, effects the acceptance of rape myths. (*See, for example*, Acock and Ireland, 1983) in which it was found that a rape victim who was described as having violated gender appropriate behavior was both blamed and derogated more than a rape victim who had not violated sex-role norms). And again, in Lambert & Raichle's (2000) study there was much greater support obtained for the legitimization hypothesis compared to either the just world or personal responsibility hypotheses. "This is exactly what one would predict if people's reaction toward the rape scenario were being driven by the motivation to preserve traditional power structures in society." (p. 860).

In terms of the current research, attempts to analyze the focus group participant's BJW were highly limited. Only seven questions relating to the topic were asked on the background questionnaire (as opposed to using the more lengthy 20-item Just World

Scale devised by Rubin and Peplau, 1975). Again, this was due to time restraints. After completing a focus group which lasted two hours the participants only had a limited time in which to complete the brief background questionnaire before the class time ended. Thus, I do not expect to give any definitive analysis of the focus group participants' belief in a just world. Although insufficient, a brief glance at the responses to the few BJW questions indicates a strong just world belief across all four groups (again, using these few questions as my only indicator). For example, almost all members agreed that everything that happens to people happens for a reason, that their success depends on their own efforts as opposed to other factors, and most were opposed to the idea that success may depend on receiving help from powerful people. Interestingly, although across all four groups members tended to give answers indicating BJW, there was ambivalence when it came to the statement: "In general do you believe that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get?" The members of groups 1, 2, and 3 were divided on this question. Group 4 was the exception with all the members answering "yes" to this question. Overall their answers indicate not only the possible belief in a just world but they seem to reflect the ethic of individualism typical of American culture (i.e., their steadfast belief that success depends on hard work and determination alone, rather than on other social and economic factors).

Media Overload

One of the more difficult issues surrounding attempts to measure the desensitization effects of popular media is the possibility that it may be "immeasurable." This is not to say that the effects do not exist. Rather, the effects, although insidious, do not lend themselves to quantifiable measurements. The problem is further exacerbated

by the fact that most of us refuse to believe that media content and images shape us in any way. This relates to the stubborn American notion to see ourselves as "individuals" who are not influenced by such factors (*See*, Morris and Williamson, 1982; Schwartz and Volgy, 1992; Sasson, 1995). Any suggestion to the contrary is often interpreted as an affront to our intelligence. Our refusal to acknowledge that we are influenced by popular media is made all the more suspect when we realize that billions of dollars are spent each year on advertising. Why do corporations large and small spend so much on advertising? Because they know it works. (*See*, Kilbourne, 1999; Griffin, 1981)

Ask participants how media images effect them and we will likely hear a general denial of their effects (with the exception of a wide-ranging agreement of the belief that it *does* effect children). Attempts to measure effects of media in laboratory settings are somewhat limited since it is difficult to take into account numerous other interrelated factors (such as one's world view) at the same time. Likewise, attempts to measure BJW and world view do not consider the power media has to shape our beliefs. I would argue that the many factors influencing our attitudes and perceptions of rape cannot and should not be viewed in isolation of each other. The fact that such variables are difficult (if not impossible) to measure should not preclude us from acknowledging the important role they play. The wrong-headed line of reasoning goes something like this: since you can not measure it in any scientifically quantifiable way, you cannot prove it exists – therefore it does not exist. Unfortunately (though fortunate for the massive media conglomerates) there is currently a tendency to shy away from examining the effects of media on the public mentality. This should in no way surprise us since it will always be the same media conglomerates that have the power to frame the issue in the first place.

Any serious public debate considering the negative impact of popular media on our culture will most likely not reach the general public. Likewise, any attempt to publicly question the incessant and increasing sexual objectification of women in media will be met with disbelief or ridicule by media pundits as long as this is the way the media frames the issue at the outset (and as long as such images remain financially profitable). (See Chapter 6).

Chapter 4

Fear

Women are taught very early on in life, through both subtle and almost imperceptible means as well as barefaced and blatant ones, to fear being raped. We learn not only from our families, friends and others who are close to us, but as we shall see, from other teachers such as the news media, television and film. Often this fear is something we don't readily think about. It sits somewhere at the back of our mind until some activity we are about to engage in brings it to the forefront of our consciousness. Going out to local bars and clubs in college, my friend Patty and I used to avoid parking her car in certain areas that we had designated "rape territories". "Rape territories" typically consisted of deserted, poorly lit streets, parking areas under the bridges for the el trains, and the like. Not realizing it at the time, what we considered a "rape territory" conformed perfectly to the images presented in news accounts about rape and films containing rapes. Most of us can also recall at least a few instances of being truly frightened of being raped. Two such instances stand out in my own mind. Traveling alone in Europe after college graduation, I had decided to see a Mozart concert in a castle in Salzburg. When I left the youth hostel and made the long walk up to the castle it was a warm summers evening and it was still light out. I remember enjoying the concert immensely but my memory of it is overshadowed by the experience of walking back to the youth hostel that night around 11:00 p.m. Upon leaving the castle a man approached me and asked for a cigarette. I obliged and continued walking. There were many other people leaving the castle and so the walk down the long hill was crowded enough. At the bottom of the hill however, the crowd thinned out with everyone going in separate

directions. The man who had approached me for a cigarette was still behind me and I began to get nervous. I was still a long way from the hostel and I suddenly realized how deserted the streets leading to my destination were at that hour. My heart began to pound and I was suddenly filled with sheer terror. I began walking faster and faster until I broke into a run. By the time I reached the youth hostel I was covered in perspiration and shaking with fear. I never did know if the man was following me but I never went to a nighttime event unaccompanied for the rest of my trip.

With the emergence of sexual violence as a topic of discussion among early second wave feminist writers came the understanding that rape is a form of political terrorism which keeps women "in their place" through fear (Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1971; Russell, 1975; Sheffield, 1987). This goal is accomplished in several ways. Some feminists (Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1971; Radford, 1987; Russell, 1975) have argued that this fear of rape furthers women's dependence on men for protection and that it keeps women confined to the private sphere where they are told they are safe. It has also been argued that women have devised their own elaborate strategies to keep themselves safe from rape (Gordon & Riger, 1989; Radford, 1987; Stanko, 1987). In either case, feminists have clearly established that women do, in fact, alter the course of their daily routines around this (unspoken) fear of sexual violence.

This fear of rape is, in effect, an instrument of social control in that it encourages women to restrict their behavior and keeps them in a state of constant anxiety. (Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1971; Madriz). Is it rape women fear or just crime in general? According to Gordon and Riger (1989):

> This fear is more than a fear of being mugged or robbed; it is the fear of being sexually violated. This special fear, this added burden, is part of the

> contemporary experience of being a woman in the United States... It is worse than fear of other crimes because women know they are held responsible for avoiding rape, and should they be victimized, they know they are likely to be blamed. (p.2)

> Men are more frequent victims of every violent crime except rape yet they do not react by restricting their behavior, suggesting that something more than crime is implicated. Rarely are men warned not to go out alone at night because they will be victimized, even though they are victimized more than women. It seems that *crime against women, whatever the motivation of the individual criminal, has the cumulative effect of reinforcing social norms about appropriate behavior for women.* Women who are victimized, especially in rape, are blamed for that victimization. This is not only because of belief in a "just world," but also because in being victimized women are breaking social norms, and blame acts as cautionary warning to other women not to do the same. (p.122)

Had I been attacked on the occasion I mentioned above, undoubtedly those around me would project the blame for the attack on me. It was, and still is according to many people, socially unacceptable for a young woman to travel around alone at night to movies or concerts. Anyone doing so "gets what they deserve." It is harder for us to imagine a man who is the victim of a violent mugging, for example, being blamed for going out alone at night.[8] According to Madriz (1997) this fear of male violence feeds into the notion that women and men are simply not entitled to the same rights: "women should not and cannot go places where men can go; women cannot engage in activities which are open to men; women should wear "proper" attire so that they are not molested by men; and since women must protect themselves and their children from criminal victimization, they had better stay home and be "good girls" (p. 16). Madriz (1997) argues that from birth, invisible walls are built around women which serve to restrict their lives and activities. If these gendered rules of behavior are not adhered to, women will get blamed for their own victimization, because good women are should "know better."

Fear and Social Distancing

There is however, another aspect to the fear of sexual violence which is especially pertinent to the research questions at hand. That is, how does this fear "fit in" with women's perception of the rape victim? According to Benedict (1992) the idea of the "loose woman" is part of a larger myth that bad things don't happen to good people. If we can make ourselves believe that victims brought the violence upon themselves because of their own behavior, then we can convince ourselves that the same will not happen to us by reason of our "goodness". In short, as long as people can find a way to blame a crime on the victim, then they can find reasons why such a crime will not happen to them.[9]

According to Gordon and Riger (1989), less fear will be evoked if a woman can differentiate herself from the rape victim in some important way. When presented with news accounts of rape, the women interviewed for their study frequently engaged in social distancing. When presented with the question "What is most important for you to know?" more than 90 percent of responses involved information the women could use to estimate their own risks (where and when the rape occurred, what the victim was wearing, what she was doing, how she tried to defend herself, what kind of person she was, etc.) Again, this is dependent upon the degree to which any particular news story allows women to engage in social distancing. Less fear will be induced if a woman can differentiate herself from the rape victim in some significant way so that she may persuade herself she is nothing like that victim. If, however, the news story failed to give specific details of the attack and women readers were unable to establish social distance between themselves and the victim, this generally led to increased fear and the use of

more restrictive self-protective measures. Likewise, if the victims in any news story appeared to be selected at random there was an increase in fear since "it made it more difficult psychologically to "distance" oneself from previous victims and there seemed to be no clear way to protect oneself." (p. 78)

If this social distancing is indeed prevalent among women, and my focus group data indicate that it is, what does this say about the probability of empathizing with a victim of sexual violence? How might a woman reconcile this need for social distancing with a disavowal of rape myths?

A Focus on the Uncommon and Atypical

It is important here to pay closer attention to the role the media play in increasing women's fear of rape. According to Gordon and Riger (1989) stories about rape, sexual assault, or child sexual abuse appeared in newspapers two to four times per week. Violent crimes committed against women receive disproportionate prominence in media representations about crime, criminals and victims. (Madriz, 1997). However, it is not merely the fact of *disproportionate* emphasis that is of concern here. We should be equally concerned with the media focus on only the most bizarre, violent, *unusual* attacks as well as the fact that almost all rapes presented in the media are those committed by strangers (again with the exception of those that are bizarre in some way or those involving celebrities). This is the case despite the fact that most rapes are committed by someone known to the victim. Acquaintance rape, although much more common, is not considered "interesting" enough to capture the readers attention and thus goes un reported leaving behind the impression that the rapist is typically a stranger lurking in the shadows.

While much has been made in criminology literature of women's *unfounded* fear of crime, we might, in effect, say that women are being taught to fear the wrong things – and for good reason. All of the women in Madriz's (1997) study who mentioned rape as their major concern feared being attacked by strangers. "These images are consistent with the prevalent ideologies of crime as presented by the media and politicians. Very few of the participants said they were afraid of being raped by their friends, boyfriends, or colleagues, who are the more likely aggressors." (p. 58) In fact, Madriz argues that depictions of women as victims of strangers are the "lifeblood of the social control that fear of crime imposes on our lives." (p.90). Pointing out the more realistic threats of those that are close to them would not serve the same purpose in terms of social control. Women restrict their activities because it is *strangers* that they fear; this in turn leads them to feel they require the protection of men they are acquainted with.

Focusing on the more bizarre and unusual rape stories serves the dual effect of drawing attention away from other, more ordinary issues which affect the majority of women such as typical rapes, attempted rapes, and sexual harassment, and it also keeps the fear of being raped close to the forefront of women's minds (Gordon & Riger, 1989). But focusing on the most bizarre and unusual is not particular to rape. Journalists use this tactic to report on most crimes.

Feminists as Fear Mongers

While sociologists and criminologists have rightly concerned themselves with society's unfounded, excessive fear of crime, two such recent studies (Glassner, 1999; Best, 1999) have not only missed the mark in their discussions of sexual violence, they have contributed to the ongoing attempts to discredit feminist arguments about rape and

have, perhaps unwittingly, jumped on the backlash bandwagon. Their arguments concerning fear of crime are similar and sociologically sound until each begins their discussions of sexual violence.

Glassner (1999) begins by pointing out the fact that Americans spend almost $100 billion a year on police and prisons yet these increases in prison cells and police officers bear no correlation with reduction in crime. "While fortunes are being spent to protect children from dangers that few ever encounter, approximately 11 million children lack health insurance, 12 million are malnourished, and rates of illiteracy are increasing." (p. xvii) Ironically, with all the public spending being diverted from child welfare and antipoverty programs to prison systems, there was not even a reduction in the *fear* of crime. "Increasing the number of cops and jails arguably has the opposite effect: it suggests that the crime problem is all the more out of control." (p.xvii). Another paradox of this culture of fear is that serious problems continue to be disregarded even though these exact problems give rise to the dangers the public fears most (i.e., poverty leads to increased crime and drug abuse, a large income gap leads to more property crimes, etc.). In short, pseudodangers are created to steer clear of problems we do not want to confront. The crux of Glassner's argument is that with every crime scare, rather than confront the troubling shortcomings in our society, the public dialogue focuses on disturbed individuals instead (i.e., focusing on crazy drivers in discussions of road rage rather than outlandish public policies which do not deal with crowded roads and other problems drivers face).

The arguments Glassner makes should be very familiar to feminists; they have been making these arguments with respect to crimes against women for quite some time

and they have been discussed here earlier. For instance, the social and cultural problems that lead to sexual violence against women such as gender inequality and oppression in both the public and private spheres with its concomitant misogynistic belief system continue to be ignored. Again, with respect to the focus on disturbed individuals rather than societal shortcomings, feminists have long argued against the portrayal of rapists as crazed psychopaths and each rape an "isolated" incident in favor of seeing violence against women as a *pattern* and one of the many cultural byproducts of patriarchy. Likewise, feminists have pointed out how instilling the fear of rape in women (especially by "psychopathic strangers") acts as a tool of social control in much the same way that Glassner talks abut fear mongering distracting the public from real social problems.

One must then wonder as to Glassner's curious logic when he denounces feminist rape activists as "fear mongers" rather than seeing women as the victims of fear induced social control. In one discussion of child sexual abuse he says that "[w]ell-known feminists such as Gloria Steinem and Catharine MacKinnon took up the cause depicting ritually abused children as living proof of the ravages of patriarchy and the need for fundamental social reform." (p.xxvii) He goes on to claim that "[t]his was far from the only time feminist spokeswomen have mongered fears about sinister breeds of men who exist in nowhere near the high numbers they allege." (p. xxvii). Who would have thought that feminists had such public power of persuasion, especially since it is so extremely rare they are quoted at all in the mainstream press? There is however, one so-called feminist that backs up Glassner's theory of fear-mongering feminists:

> When studies came out in the 1980s indicating that one in three female college students is forced to have sex against her will, feminist groups played up the findings. Before long a backlash developed. Conservative columnists and politicians disputed the statistics, and in 1993 Katie Roiphe, a recent Harvard

> grad, launched her writing career with a polemic titled *The Morning After*. Condemning women she called "rape-crisis feminists," Roiphe spoke of a "grey area in which someone's rape may be another persons' bad night." (p. 150) .

In case the reader was unsure of where Glassner stood on the issue, once could simply consult his wording. For instance, he claims feminist groups "played up" the findings, clearly indicating dishonesty on their part. Perhaps most interesting is the fact that he would point out that conservative columnists and politicians disputed the statistics. In every other instance and discussion of crime in his book Glassner appears to debunk anything such columnists and politicians claim. It is only *here* when the dialogue concerns *rape* that such conservative groups unexpectedly become the arbiters of truth. He then goes on to describe Katie Roiphe, the media darling of anti-feminism, as a recent "Harvard grad" as if that, in and of itself, bestows credibility on her findings. Never mind that numerous critics have discredited her work for being totally ungrounded in any research whatsoever. Glassner then proceeds to offer the reader Roiphe's "sound-bites" and catch-phrases that made her so popular with the press. Ironically, several paragraphs later he does admit that recent research shows that 1 in 5 college women are raped yet he does not back down from previous statements accusing feminists of being "fear mongers" when it comes to rape.

Joel Best (1999), much like Glassner, makes the feminist analysis of violence against women a central, albeit latent, theme in his study while couching it in his larger theoretical discussion of random violence. His initial discussion of "random" violence proves helpful in elucidating society's unfounded fear of crime. In terms of our present discussion, his theory echoes previous feminist analyses in explaining why women tend to fear the stranger rapists lurking in a dark alley, rather than an acquaintance. Best

correctly argues that "focusing on "random violence" distorts our understanding of society's crime problems, and that this distortion makes it harder for us to address those problems... We fear sudden, unexpected undeserved chaos, pointless suffering at the hands of brutal barbarians." (p.xi) The term "random violence" implies that there are no patterns involved in violence and that it could happen to anyone, that it is pointless and that the problem is rapidly growing. Best (1999, pp. 11-14) gives us a clear and concise breakdown of crime statistics in which he points out the fact that nonwhite males have the highest homicide victimization rates, white females have the lowest. With rape being an exception to the rule, males are more likely to be the victims of crime as well as the perpetrators.[10] Adolescents and young adult males have the highest rates of both victimization and offending and nonwhites are more likely to be both victims and offenders. In short, the risk of violence is not spread out equally among all members of society – criminal violence is not random at all, but patterned.

It is this belief that violence is "random" that keeps people so fearful. In terms of our discussion, it is this fear of "randomness" regarding rape that acts as a tool of social control. Best also points out that:

> Defining violence as patternless not only discourages us from searching for and identifying patterns; it keeps us from devising social policies to address those patterns. Defining violence as pointless eliminates any need to consider and address the motivations for violence. (p. 25)

Again, this definition of violence as being "patternless" is especially pertinent to our discussion of rape. Since the inception of public dialogue about sexual violence, feminists have been attempting to educate the public on the obscured patterns and motivations of violence against women. As we are well aware the public have been

particularly resistant to feminist analyses of violence against women and thus continue to focus only on stranger rapes with the motivation for violence being some form of psychoses. In applying Best's analysis above, it is clear that this definition of violence against women as being "random", has indeed prevented us from devising any kind of nation-wide social policy to address such violence.

On the other hand, Best argues that the media quite often take what is really an *incident* and attempt to turn it into a *pattern* when in fact there is none. As we mentioned earlier, the media tend to cover certain cases precisely because they are especially gruesome. According to Best, news coverage transforms these cases from "terrible tragedies" or incidents, into typical examples (i.e., drive-by shootings). Best chooses two examples to elucidate this phenomenon: Freeway violence and, curiously, the Central Park rape.

From the start Best makes the same mistake that the media made in this case; that is, defining the problem as "*wilding*" and not *rape*. While his point that wilding was a media generated term is well taken, the actual *crime* was rape. Defining the *crime* (as opposed to just the *term*) as "wilding" fits neatly into his analysis of "new crimes" which garner undeserved attention in the media and contribute to public fear and outrage, but he is falling into the same trap he purports to argue against. Just as the media at the time discussed the crime in terms of *everything but rape*, *(see* for example, Benedict 1992) Best follows a similar line of thought. Had he correctly defined the crime as *gang rape* he would have a terrible time fitting this example into his analyses. Ironically, when media critics attempted to shed a new light on the crime by arguing that wilding resembled fraternity gang rape (which is the closest approximation to reality) or that we

must look at the treatment of women in music, pornography, and popular culture, Best dismissed these suggestions falling back on his argument that "wilding" did not constitute a crime problem.

Best argues that the media are quick to link isolated cases to larger social problems: "We problematize events, turning particular criminal acts into examples of types of crime... Even extraordinary unusual episodes are interpreted as having larger significance." (p.35). Here his examples are the O.J. Simpson case exemplifying the problem of domestic violence and stalking and the Charles Stuart case in which a man murders his pregnant wife. The next logical question of course, would be why Best considers two cases of wife beating and murder to be "*extraordinary unusual episodes.*" In fact, the only extraordinary or unusual thing about these cases were their involvement with celebrity and/or the amount of media attention paid to them. Best, it would appear, is attempting to overlook the *patterns* involved in these cases in favor of using them as examples of isolated *incidents.*

Lest we think these examples are an aberration in his thinking we can move on to other examples, mostly all of which attempt to discredit feminist analyses of violence against women. Best is troubled by the fact that stalking, originally considered a crime perpetrated upon celebrities, has become a "women's issue." He is also distressed by claims that many stalkers were former husbands or boyfriends and therefore virtually all women are potential victims.

> "Once they linked stalking to battering, advocates had little difficulty attributing the same characteristics to both crimes. Stalkers were "essentially evil" men trying to dominate women" (p. 54)

Here, one almost gets the sense that Best is accusing advocates of being maliciously deceitful in their attempts to gain public recognition of crimes against women. It would seem Best spends a disproportionate amount of his study to discredit feminists and how they "create" new crime (social) problems where none exist. In case feminists took issue with his analyses:

> "A catchy expression, "blaming the victim" quickly took on a life of its own; ...Feminists, for instance, attacked institutional arrangements for blaming female victims – the rape investigation that amounted to a second assault... Within universities, victim blaming assumed the status of a logical fallacy, an unacceptable line of reasoning that, once identified, seemed to discredit any argument. The term became a rhetorical trump card, playable in almost any political contest." (p. 100)

Best tells us that this idea of "blaming the victim" redirected critiques away from the actions of individuals and toward the social system and then goes on to lament the loss of earlier studies of victimology where there was still talk of victim precipitation or provocation.

Finally, Best includes a section entitled "The Contemporary Ideology of Victimization". Here he continues the diatribe against feminists and their excessive claims of abuse. This section, and one could argue, the greater portion of his book, is little more than an attempt to discredit any feminist analyses of victimization. He argues that seven ideas form the contemporary ideology of victimization. For almost every one, feminists are the culprits of misleading and misdirecting public understanding of crime. I will examine four examples here.

a. *Victimization is widespread.* Here Best complains that "the evolution of feminist thought on rape has led to increasingly broad standards for redefining the domain of sexual assault, including arguments that "no means no," that anything short of

an explicit "yes" means no... "(p. 104). Another example of how the public has been duped into thinking victimization is widespread, is sexual harassment. First, Best argues, sexual harassment involved male supervisors "extorting sex" from female employees. By the 1990s however, this problem encompassed "anything that individuals experienced as intimidating, hostile, or otherwise adverse environment." (p. 105) Best also finds fault with rape statistics. He argues that feminists surveys define violence based on women's subjective experiences and therefore uncover very high levels of violence. One might ask in this instance, upon whose experiences should the surveys be based?

b. Victimization is relatively straightforward and unambiguous. Here Best argues against feminist interpretations of domestic violence. He is critical of the fact that feminists don't examine the "interactional processes" and claims that blame is not so clear cut. "Similarly, if the person labeled the victim is unsure whether an offense "really occurred, advocates define this confusion as part of the pattern of victimization." (p.107). In one clean swipe Best attempts to discredit years of research on why battered women continue to stay with abusive spouses.

c. Victimization often goes unrecognized. Here Best takes issue with advocates who argue that victimization goes unrecognized not only by the larger society, but may even go unrecognized by the victims themselves. Best attempts to discredit Robin Warshaw's study, *I Never Called it Rape*, by opposing her method of the researchers applying their own operational definitions for identifying victims. If not the researchers operational definitions, then whose? Perhaps Best would prefer to return to former definitions of rape in which the victim could not be married to her attacker, violent force has to be used, proven physical resistance on the part of the victim must be evidenced,

penetration with anything other than a penis was not rape, etc. Best goes on to say that "studies of date rape may count incidents that the women involved say were not rapes [], and estimates of UFO abductions count people who report sleeping disorders and other abduction symptoms, regardless of whether they recall being abducted." (p.110) This is not the first or last time that Best compares women's claims of victimization to UFO abductions.

d. Claims of victimization must be respected. Best takes issue here with feminist advocates denunciation of courtroom proceedings where victims face questioning irrelevant to the rape (such as past sexual history). He also rallies against the claims that children rarely lie about sexual abuse and that women have no reason to make false rape claims. "...they may argue that the similarities in the stories of many victims (e.g., parallel accounts of satanic ritual abuse or UFO abduction) constitute strong evidence for the stories' truth. (p. 115)

It is interesting to note that in all of Best's discussions relating to excessive claims of victimization some form of violence against women is the only example he uses with the noted exception of UFO abductions or satanic rituals. The latter two, it would appear, are thrown in with the sole purpose of making the reader believe the three claims are on par and are equally ridiculous.

Best's campaign against what he terms "new victims" (although from reading his work we know he is really talking about victims of various forms of gender related abuse) continues with the claim that new victims encounter very little skepticism or opposition:

> Their few vocal critics encounter harsh, discrediting reactions: they are blaming the victims; they are part of the problem, not the solution; they represent a backlash of traditional, oppressive values..." (p. 128)

He fails to point out however, that these few vocal critics are given disproportionate mainstream media attention, to wit; Katie Rophie and Camile Pagalia.

Now Best turns reality on its head when he argues that claims about the new victims receive sympathetic coverage in the press and that:

> ...the media typically feel no obligation to "balance" their coverage by presenting "both sides" of the issue. In most cases, advocates frame the issue, and the media's coverage retains that frame. (p. 129)
>
> Media coverage rarely criticizes claims about new victims... Usually there is no organized opposition for the media to seek out and quote. (p. 130)

I'm quite certain that feminist activists against gender related violence would be surprised to learn that it is themselves who frame the issue in the media. And if victims of sexual abuse have been getting sympathetic press coverage all along one must question what would be considered "unsympathetic".

As far as the media feeling no obligation to present "both sides" of the issue, here Best is correct, albeit not in the sense that he intends. All one must do is examine the press coverage of rape cases to see how rarely the feminist interpretation is ever presented. (*See*, for example, Benedict, 1992). Typically, there is one, and only one, slant to any media story on rape and that is the one based on, as Garfinkel would say our "shared common sense understandings" about rape that involve many of the rape myths we have been discussing. One would be hard pressed to find many examples of crimes being given a feminist analysis. That being said, journalists *still* try to find quotes from sources who will disparage the victims character in some way. Journalists often go out of

their way to make sure the public understands that the victim might not be all that innocent. All this without ever giving the feminist interpretation of rape. If by chance a journalist *did* give the feminist version – we would be sure to see opposing quotes everywhere, especially from the media darlings such as Katie Rophie and Camile Pagalia.

The Focus Group Participants

Two very interesting themes emerged in my focus groups in response to the introductory and transition questions posed to the participants. At the beginning of each session the participants were asked if they were concerned about the levels of crime in our society, if they felt crime was a problem in their own neighborhood and what neighborhoods they felt had a "crime problem." With the notable exception of my group in the Bronx, most participants felt that crime was not a serious problem in their own neighborhoods. Those that did say crime was somewhat of a problem in their own neighborhoods mentioned drugs and petty property offenses like car theft as being a concern. The participants' understanding of crime was clearly focused on drugs and property crime, so much so that even when asked whether they have ever been the victim of a crime, *other than a property crime*, I was still deluged with stories of car theft and burglaries. Perhaps the most interesting facet of these initial discussions was not what was said, but what wasn't said. When asked about crime, *not one of the 41 participants mentioned rape*. This poses an interesting question with respect to our culturally produced, media-driven definitions of the "crime problem" which will be discussed in more detail later.

The class distinctions were crystallized in this initial discussion as well. As I mentioned above, the young participants from the Bronx clearly had a different

experience with respect to crime than the other three groups, the majority of which come from suburban Long Island neighborhoods. While the latter often felt drugs and property crimes were a problem for them, when asked what neighborhoods they believe have problems with crime they overwhelmingly mentioned city neighborhoods. While most identified Brooklyn and the Bronx as having crime problems, those participants that did mention Long Island areas pointed out areas that were considered to have a high Hispanic and African-American population. None of the participants in the suburban groups said they felt fear in their own neighborhoods.[11]

Crime and the fear of crime is something the Bronx participants dealt with every day. When asked whether or not they felt crime was a problem in their own neighborhood there was a simultaneous and thunderous affirmative response, some responding incredulously at the absurdity of my question. These participants relayed numerous accounts of shootings, stabbings and murders in their immediate neighborhoods. Interestingly, while the suburban participants think of drugs and property crimes when asked the general question about crime, violence is what comes to the Bronx participants' minds first. One young woman, relating to the group how it really was not that bad on her street said "In my neighborhood there's not outrageous crimes like shooting or anything like that, it's like little crimes like selling drugs and stuff like that. But it's not like crime, like violence." And two others:

> [Lauren] There's shootings in my neighborhood. Three people under the age of 21 got shot at last month. Two of them died, one of them is in the hospital.
>
> [Lucia] It's so hard to think that these crimes could happen around my neighborhood cause my neighborhood is right next to a police precinct. I mean I live like right across the street from a police precinct and uh, basically everything is kept under wraps. Even, I mean, I hear gun shots all the time. It's not a, I mean I don't even flinch when I hear one because, um, I'm just so used to it, you

> know the sound of gunshots, that it's normal. The police pretty much ignore it or they just like, you know, I don't know. I mean, I don't really know that type of business. But I mean, I see it happen. I used to live in, I compare it to other places that I've been living in and um, right now where I'm living I just believe that since I do live right across the street from the precinct it would be safer. But it's actually the total contrary. It's weird.

As with the other three focus groups, not one of the participants mentioned rape in the general discussion of crime. When asked however, about their biggest fear with respect to crime, the response was immediate and overwhelming. In two of the groups the participants actually shouted their response of "rape." While one participant said she feared being mugged because she was mugged twice before and another said she feared being shot, all other participants in the four focus groups agreed that rape was their number one fear.

> [Jean]. The one thing I'm afraid of is getting raped. I think if someone want to rape me I would rather they kill me. Maybe I'm saying this now because I'm not in the situation but all I think about is that if someone wants to rape me, I prefer they kill me and then rape me.
>
> (Suburban focus group #4)

> [Jane] The reason I say rape is because like if you get, the wounds heal from a gunshot. But if you get raped its like so much, it's like they're raping you emotionally too. It's like so much psychological things that go on with that. So that's my biggest fear.
>
> [Rosa] The reason I would say rape is because there's so much disrespect toward woman out there. I mean I walk in the street and I literally have cars following me. And it becomes a real annoyance. And so then I don't know whether I should go up to the car and talk so that he could just leave me alone or keep walking. And I'm put in that position and then I'm like no, I gotta keep walking no matter what, you know, I just gotta get into a public place. And it's really scary because these guys just harass you. You understand? To the point that if you say no they start screaming at you and calling you names and calling you things for no reason. So that's the scariest part for me.
>
> (Bronx Teenagers group #2)

While many reported altering their activities in some way due to fear such as not going out alone at night, restricting where they go and where they park or what time they take the subway, a couple said they did nothing different and would not let fear rule their lives. One participant carried a pen when she walked alone, others carried keys between their fingers to ward off attack. Every single participant in the Bronx group carried mace.

In conformity with the cultural understanding of "rapist as stranger", their safety precautions were largely informed by this notion of rape (although they were clearly aware that rape often occurred among acquaintances and had some lively discussion in that respect):

> [ ] I fear being alone at night.
>
> [ ] If you have to walk at night always take a guy with you or your brother or something. If I go out I always have my brother with me. I always have a guy friend with me. I never go out with a bunch of girls... [Suburban focus group #4]
>
> [ ] When I'm walking to my car at night, like when I'm leaving school late or something, I always like hold the keys like this just so I could go for their eyes...
>
> [ ] I look under my car when I get to my car at the mall at night because I've heard stories of someone being underneath the car and they grab you or even inside the car in the back seat. So I'm always aware.
>
> [ ] I work at night. I work with a lot of men so they usually look out for me or when I come home my husband is waiting for me. You know, he leaves the back door open and he's usually right there. [Suburban focus group #1]

Some participants in focus group #2, the Bronx teenagers, struggle with their need to be aware of danger and excessive worry:

> [ ] You always have to be aware of your surroundings.
>
> [ ] But being so aware all the time, I don't know. I thinks that's like a little paranoia. I don't know, like always watching. Like oh my gosh he's gonna rape me. You know...
>
> [ ] There are some people like that.

[ ] ...I know but I mean, if you are really like always thinking about "oh my God something bad is gonna happen" well, you know. I don't know.

[ ] It's not paranoia. It's just knowing. It's just being aware like... just a sense of knowing, not paranoia.

[ ] I have my mace with me.

[ ] I had gotten an email and it said that which women are like really prone to rape. And it says women who have their ponytails out there jacket, they'll just grab your ponytail from behind, women who are walking at night with their cell phone, women who aren't looking.

[ ] I don't think about. But like the other day I was walking down her block [points to friend next to her] and I was alone and it's a long street. So then I started thinking about it.

Social Distancing

The discussions that took place in my focus group are indeed closely aligned with Gordon and Riger's (1989) findings that what is most important for women to know with respect to news accounts of rape, is information they can use to distance themselves from the victim, to persuade herself that somehow, no matter how trivial, she is different. Some responses include:

How close it is to where I live.

If they knew the person.

Was it at night or the day.

The place.

How violent it was.

How old was she.

What does she do.

Does she live alone.

How they got into the house, if they followed her or was she getting out of her car, or did she leave her doors open...

Did she fight back or scream for help?
His mental state. Like if he was crazy.

[Suburban focus group #1]

What type of woman does he target? Tall, short, long hair

Or maybe they only like heavyset women
Or maybe blondes.
Where it happened.

[Suburban focus group #3]

Other social distancing techniques such as victim-blaming, were used by several participants in suburban focus group #4 during their discussion of the Central Park jogger case:

> [Sandra] Well, the initial thing is "what was she doing jogging in the park by herself?" I mean, like putting herself in that situation. Well, initially you know, you can't, you know, Central Park, what was she doing there by herself? She shouldn't have done that. You know, that kind of thing. But, she, you know, certainly, clearly it was not her fault. I mean, but you shouldn't put yourself in a situation where you think you could get hurt.
>
> [Jean]. If you're jogging every day at that time you should think that maybe, Central Park, that there's someone out there that might attack you. You know, you have to be more careful. Look around first, try to be more aware or something.
>
> [Sandra]. Yeah but what could she have done...?
>
> [everyone speaking at once] Yeah! Right.
>
> [Sandra]. I mean there were 15 boys. Even if she looked around, I mean 15 against 1, you know.
>
> [Brenda]. I go jogging all the time in the summer. But I don't go at 6:00 in the morning. I go at 1:00 in the afternoon. I try and go with friends. I mean it sucks. She should be able to go. If she wants to go running at 6:00 in the morning she should be able to.
>
> [several voices at once] Definitely
>
> [Brenda] But me personally, I, it's the chance that you take. It's not worth it.

Here the women try to differentiate themselves from the victim in order to lessen their own fears of attack, while simultaneously being careful not to place the blame *entirely* on her. We can clearly see how the participants *want* to empathize with the victim yet in so doing they must relinquish all or part of their need to distance themselves from her. We can also see in a case such as this, how it has served as an effective tool of social control. Although they agree a woman *should* be able to jog whenever she wants to, they would not engage in such "risky" behavior. In another group a similar

interaction took place when one participant, using a distancing technique in which she argues that some people can make themselves an easy target for crime, comes up against another participant who calls her beliefs into question .

> [Cindy] I think it's also how you carry yourself. I think certain people probably uh, make themselves targets for certain crimes just by the expressions you might ...
>
> [several people at once] No, no.
>
> [Cindy] No. I mean, I shouldn't say that. What I'm saying, a lot of people shrink or they look away, averting their eyes. Where if you were paying attention they might not target you. If you look away for one instant they might just pounce on that opportunity and you know. Or if you put a blank expression on your face. I'm not saying that you did something wrong [addressing this comment to a woman who was mugged]. Believe me. But sometimes people right away they get that fear in them and then, just like an animal might pounce on their prey.
>
> [Noel] I've had someone grab me three times. I don't know why, but ever since then... I'm from Germany. I lived very rural. So I think no matter where you are, no matter what country it is, no matter if you live in a big city or not, uh, you know, it's the same everywhere and if there is someone that clicks at some point then you're a victim no matter what happens. Like I said it happened 3 times and I was in a public area, people all around me. I was walking and a guy grabbed me and just tried to pull me someplace else. And um, I ran away. I hit him. It was really, it was bad. And I had, one night when I was walking home, and I lived in an area that was so safe. There's nothing, there's really nothing. And I guess the guy was drunk or something and I was walking, you know, and ever since then, and then the third time it happened I just now dress differently at night.
>
> [I ask] In what way?
>
> [Noel] I would never wear a skirt at night. I just don't. I wear pants. I put my hair back I would never dress like, you know. That's what I'm saying, I just don't think to say that someone dresses that they behave like a target.
>
> [Cindy] No! Not that they behave like that. But I'm saying if you're approached by somebody you think might look a little shady, how you react to that person might also depend on what they actually decide to do. Whether or not to attack you or whether or not you might, you know, be a formidable opponent. You know. Because I think the face you put on too, you know. If you say look you're not gonna mess with me, I'm not afraid of you. But that's not easy to do, if you think the guy might have a gun or something, of course you're gonna do whatever they say.
>
> [Noel]Yeah, but what does a robber or a rapist look like? You know what I mean?
>
> [laughter, general agreement with the statement]

> [Noel] There was no pattern. All three of them had nothing in common. So how can you see?
>
> [Cindy]. Yeah but you obviously, you didn't let the guy get away with it. You fought...
>
> [Noel] Yeah, but if they guy would have been bigger or something like that or did have a gun, I don't know what I would've done. I probably would've just gone.
>
> [Cindy]Yeah well I think you have to in that case. Police suggest not fighting with somebody that's got a weapon. You obviously fought back and luckily...
>
> [Suburban focus group #3]

In this passage we witness how Noel's reality conflicts with Cindy's social distancing technique and we can glimpse the concomitant re-negotiation of meaning that ensues. Cindy is obviously averse to relinquishing her method of coping with fear and tries several times to modify it to better fit Noel's lived experience. Noel attempts to persuade the group that she is an average woman who has done nothing out of the ordinary to bring on her assault and will not allow any re-negotiation of meaning that does not fit with her experience. Although Cindy was very close to a concession, another member tires of the exchange and changes the subject. We can also see how Noel's fearful experience has served as, what I believe to be, a tool of social control in that she now restricts how she dresses.

This process of negotiation and renegotiation of "acceptable" and "unacceptable" victims took place frequently in all four focus groups. There seemed to be a need amongst the members to come to some sort of consensus before the end of each such topic, perhaps in order to reconfigure their distancing techniques and rest on a comfortable, non-fear inducing solution.

Chapter 5

Rape in the News

The news media's reluctance to relate sex crimes to the social order is fairly well established among feminist social scientists and social critics. Most people reading about incidences of sexual violence or rape trials in the newspaper or watching television coverage know little or nothing about the feminist alternative to mainstream ideas about rape. Meyers (1997) asserts that since news coverage is rooted in "cultural myths and stereotypes about women, men and violence, the links between sexist violence, social structures, and gendered patterns of domination and control are disguised." (p.9). Likewise, Cuklanz (1996) argues that hegemonic forces such as the mass media "work to reinforce the myths that comprise dominant ideology, rendering current relations of power logical or even natural." (p. 4). Reporters and journalists continually highlight the personal and dramatic details of a story, yet they almost always recoil from opportunities to explain the power structures and political processes that lie behind the issues. (Bennett, 1988).

In her analysis of high-profile rape cases, Benedict (1992) has found that in all but one case, the news stories were covered by male reporters. She also notes that since most editors are still men, rape stories tend to be edited my men. "The paradoxical fact that rape, a crime that happens overwhelmingly to women, is usually covered by men may partly explain why the press has been so slow to change its approach to sex crimes." (p. 5). She is quick to point out however, that more important than the reporter's gender is

how "myth-saturated" the journalist is. A myth-saturated woman will be just as insensitive to the subject of sexual violence as a myth-saturated man.

Another matter of relevance is how the very medium of television contributes to the trivialization of issues of social importance, including sexual violence. Neil Postman (1985), in ***Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business***, offers an excellent exposition of the effects of television on public discourse and mentality and I discuss it here at length. In beginning his analysis Postman points out that speech, the primary medium through which humans communicate, varies considerably with such differences often resulting in variations of worldview. How we think about things (time and space etc.), is largely influenced by the grammatical features of our language. "Each medium, like language itself, makes possible a unique mode of discourse by providing a new orientation for thought, for expression, for sensibility... Whether we are experiencing the world through the lens of speech or the printed word or the television camera, our media-metaphors classify the world for us, sequence it, frame it, enlarge it, reduce it, color it, argue a case for what the world is like." (p. 10) Postman argues that when the printing press was the sole medium available, discourse was quite different from the present day. It was generally rational, serious and coherent. Whereas under the governance of television, discourse has become "absurd.":

> Seeing is believing has always had a preeminent status as an epistemological axiom but "saying is believing", "reading is believing", "counting is believing," deducing is believing," and feeling is believing" are others that have risen or fallen in importance as cultures have undergone media change. As culture moves from orality to writing to printing to televising, its ideas of truth move with it." (p. 24)

Thus, the very concept of truth is intricately bound up with the biases of each form of expression. According to the Greeks, for example, rhetoric was a form of spoken writing

whose power to reveal the truth rested in the written word's ability to lay out arguments in an orderly fashion.

Postman also points out that the printed word, unlike television, makes stringent demands on our bodies and minds. For example, we must be able to sit still for long period of time, derive meaning from words, decipher tone of language, know the difference between a joke and an argument, judge the quality of an argument by postponing a decision until the entire argument is completed, hold questions in your mind, and form counterarguments. We must also have become skilled at navigating the world of abstractions. "In a print-culture, we are apt to say of people who are not intelligent that we must "draw them pictures" so that they may understand. Intelligence implies that one can dwell comfortably without pictures, in a field of concepts and generalizations." (p. 26) Every technology has an inherent bias. Within its physical structure it has a predilection for being used in very particular ways. For Postman, television is:

> ... a beautiful spectacle, a visual delight, pouring forth thousands of images on any given day. The average length of a shot on network television is only 3.5 seconds, so that the eye never rests, always has something new to see. Moreover, television offers viewers a variety of subject matter, requires minimal skills to comprehend it, and is largely aimed at emotional gratification... American television, in other words, is devoted entirely to supplying its audience with entertainment." (p. 87)

Thus, the problem is not that television is entertaining but that *all subject matter* is presented as entertainment.[12] Entertainment is, in fact, the ideology of discourse on television. The news is no exception. The news is essentially a vehicle for entertainment, not for education or reflection. This represents a somewhat natural progression – the news is not assembled to be read or broadcast, but to be heard. Those

who format the news do so in order for it to be *seen*. No conspiracy exists, they are simply following where the medium leads. "Good" television has very little in common with what is "good" about oral or written communication. It has to do with what the pictorial images *look* like. So it is that discussions of relevant social issues on television are not really "discussions" at all. There are rarely definitions, explanations, arguments, counterarguments or the scrutinizing of assumptions. According to Postman, there is a more compelling reason than time constraints for this phenomena. When a television show is in progress, it is nearly prohibited to say "Let me think about it" or "I don't know". Such discourse not only slows the pace of the show but it also creates the impression of unfinished business. "It tends to reveal people in the act of thinking, which is as disconcerting and boring on television as it is on a Las Vegas stage." (p. 90). Also, since the news is about entertainment and brings us nightly stories of violence, devastation, and political corruption in very quick succession, we must be taught not to dwell on any particular matter for too long. Thus, the newscaster changes the subject typically every 30 to 45 seconds and the program is always interrupted with a series of commercials that instantly defuse the importance of any news story. This, in and of itself, refutes the claim that television news is designed as a serious form of public discourse. Youthful viewers, according to Postman, rely on television for their clues as to how to respond to world and are thus particularly affected. "In watching television news, they, more than any other segment of the audience, are drawn into an epistemology based on the assumption that all reports of cruelty and death are greatly exaggerated and, in any case, not to be taken seriously or responded to sanely." (p. 105.)

Since people use television as their primary source of information, television has become our culture's primary mode of knowing about itself - "how television stages the world becomes the model for how the world is properly staged ." (p. 93) For Postman, it is not simply that entertainment is the metaphor for all discourse, but that off screen the very same metaphor prevails. People no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They no longer exchange ideas; they exchange images. Rather than arguing with propositions, they argue with good looks, celebrities and advertisements. It is not just that all the world is a stage, as Goffman argued, but that the "stage is located in Las Vegas, Nevada." (p. 93). Similarly, Gabler (1998) argues that entertainment is the primary standard for value for virtually everything in modern society. Life has become a movie that all want to be part of (rather than being relegated to its anonymous audience). Thus, the rise of exploitation talk shows. People will be willing to humiliate themselves to become part of the movie.

And finally, Postman points out that while we are in fact, being deprived of important information, it is much more relevant that we are losing our sense of what it means to be well informed. While ignorance may be correctable, what do we do if we mistake ignorance for genuine knowledge?

We should also keep in mind that the above arguments now also apply to printed news. At the time Postman was writing (1985) USA Today was the most glaring example of a newspaper taking on the format of television. Presently, almost all newspapers (some to a further extent than others) have adopted an attention grabbing, tabloid format in order to compete. Thus written news stories will often sound more and more like the beginning of a novel, complete with stage settings and characters. (*See*, for

example, Gabler, 1998). Televised news has also almost completely worn down even the thin veneer of respectability. As of this writing, CNN has announced that they will "revamp" their news format. They intend to use an anchorwoman who was previously a nude model and actress on a popular police drama (giving her an 11 week "crash course" in journalism) as well as utilizing popular music and splashy graphics to attract the younger audience.

These facts do not bode well for our hope at any serious media discussion of sexual violence. We will, of course, continue to receive our daily barrage of cop shows, dramas, and true crime programming filled with all the lurid details of sex crimes against women. But again, such programming is for entertainment purposes only - not to promote any serious thoughtful analysis of gendered power relations. In addition, there are other significant factors (aside from those discussed above) that seriously curtail the possibility of any progressive or overtly feminist ideas being discussed in the mainstream media. One such factor is the decline of public broadcasting coupled with the increasing control of media outlets into fewer and fewer (pro-business) hands. (See Chapter 6).

I Saw it on TV!

In several discussions with the focus groups, participants attempted to utilize cases in the media, be they fact or fiction, to bolster whatever argument they were making at the time. The implicit understanding between the group members was that cases on television, film, or in magazines clearly reflect reality and can be used to convince other members of the authenticity of that participant's claims. This should not surprise us in an age where Americans receive most of their information from television and other mainstream, corporate controlled media outlets where entertainment programs

mask as "the news" and (as discussed above), we can no longer differentiate reality from entertainment and entertainment from reality (because the two have become one in the same).[13] A brief glance at our focus group members indicates that 22 out of the 39 women responding to the question, or 56 percent, watch two to four hours of television each day. Forty-six percent of the participants report seeing two to four movies per month.

In some cases the media examples utilized by focus group members were used to support rape myths already held by the individual while in others they were used to refute them. Several members of focus group #2, the Bronx teenagers, are discussing women who lie about being raped and one member adds:

> [ ] I heard of a case like that. It was on the talk show Montel Williams. It was a case of statutory rape where the girl was 12 and you could see the girl. She looked like she was 17 and the boy was 17. And they considered that, since he was older, that he should not be having sex with a minor. So it's like, no matter which way, if the girl even consented and said I consented to having sex with him or not he was still going to jail for up to 22 years. Whether she said yes or not. She told him, she told him that she was 17. But then she said she told him once he touched me that I was only 12. So no matter what the boy...

And later, in a discussion about whether or not you can tell if a victim is lying:

> [ ] Ok. I don't like to bring a movie in here but um, but I saw "Wild Things" and the girl, she totally convinced me that she was raped. And, I mean, I wouldn't have saw it coming. I wanted to kill him. I mean you can't say that, I mean.. If you're that convincing, trust me you can convince me cause I'll be like, I'll sympathize with you. I'd be all like "I'm sorry" and stuff. I'd feel bad for you. I mean you can't say that you can tell by the eyes [if they are telling the truth] because other people eyes gleam more than others.

In suburban focus group #3 a participant uses a case she saw on television to convince the others that, although it may appear the woman is lying, we shouldn't be so easily convinced:

> [ ] I saw on NBC, they were talking about this doctor, he was a gynecologist. He drugged her and when she woke up [inaudible]. She took him to court. And he was famous at the time so everybody was like "she's lying, she's lying." And so they found, she took to the police station her underwear that had sperm all over it so they tried to use that to get DNA. Every time he went to take his blood out, he put in the tube somebody else's blood, inserted inside his arm. So when they took the blood from him it was no match. So she hired a private detective. They stole some chapstick out of his car, put it in an envelope, took the DNA sample from that and it was a match. But it wasn't proved in court until they found that insertation in his arm.
>
> [several voices at once] Wow. Incredible.
>
> [ ] And he was doing this to all his patients and they couldn't catch him

A participant in suburban focus group #1 tries to convince the others that women lie all the time about being raped:

> [ ] Do women lie about being raped? Yeah. What about if somebody gets pregnant and they don't want to tell their parents you know, they're not supposed to be having sex and they say that somebody raped them so that, you know, it's not so bad.
>
> [ ] Yes. I think that could be a reason also. I saw it on Law and Order.

The Typical Rape

This question was put forth to each focus group: "People have different ideas about what rape is like. Try to describe what you think of as being a typical rape." As we mentioned in the chapter on fear, stories about rape in the media are almost exclusively focused on the stranger variety even though the majority of rapes are committed by someone known to the victim. While most of the participants in the four focus groups utilized safety strategies that conformed to the rapist-as-stranger belief, their ideas of what constitutes a "typical" rape tended to stray from this notion. One possible explanation for this diversion is the extent of their personal knowledge of someone who was raped. In each focus group there were at least three members who had friends or

relations that were sexually assaulted. In focus group #2, the high school students from the Bronx, 14 out of 16 members had a close friend or relation that was raped. It may be argued that this personal experience with sexual violence helped to counter the dominant cultural image of the stranger jumping out of the bushes. Out of all the focus group members that had a friend or relation that was raped, not one was raped by a stranger. In addition, a few participants described situations that they experienced which amounted to attempted rape (although they may not have labeled the experience as such) and one disclosed being raped. Again, none of these involved strangers. It would also appear that the predominately white suburban participants of groups 1, 3, and 4 tended to rely on media driven images of rape to a somewhat larger extent than the more experienced young women from the Bronx group.

Below we have an interesting intermingling of media-driven conceptions of rape and those that reflect the women's lived reality. In suburban focus group #1 only one participant strays from the rapist-as-stranger idea:

> [Lisa] Violence. Beat up by a stranger. Bigger than me.
> [Kit] Someone bigger than me. I wouldn't think of a small guy as somebody who could rape me.
> [laughter]
> [Winnie] Just a big man, scary, a stranger. At night, in the dark somewhere.
> [Jackie]. I think someone you know. Someone maybe someone you thought you trusted. Maybe in a family situation or a friend or colleague or anybody that you sort of felt comfortable with. I think that would be a worse situation as opposed to a stranger.

No one in the Bronx focus group mentions a stranger rape in response to this question:

> [Jane] I think that rape is just touching a person that doesn't want to be touched. That's it. That's all it takes because right there you're making this

person feel something that you have no right to and makes them uncomfortable. So right away that's rape.

[Tanisha] Well when you say "rape" to me, that's not what pops into my head. I think that like rape, the typical rape, you don't hear about cases of someone touching someone wrong and she files rape charges against him. The way rape is portrayed now, rape is someone forcibly having sex with someone without their consent.

[Alyson] To me like, if somebody touches me, like that's more of a sexual harassment than a rape. I mean that's just to me. I mean, like, as she said it, a rape is just, I mean, it deals with more [pause] sex. You know what I'm saying? It's more intercourse than you touching me. I mean if I don't want you to touch me a certain way and you still do, I mean that's kinda more a sexual harassment.

[Camille] I think what Jessica was talking about was more of a violation. Like we get violated a lot in our own neighborhoods and sometimes our own homes. So that's being violated...

[Jane] Excuse me. The reason I said that is because just a few months ago I was faced with making a decision, a family decision. One of my cousins was touched by her step father. You know touched. I mean I don't care if it's like this [gesturing]. I mean you make a 12 year old feel uncomfortable in her own home that to me is already messed up. Do you know what happened? Nothing. You know why? Because they didn't want to do anything. But I couldn't sit around and take that. So I called whatever places that had to be called for my cousin to be removed from that house and I didn't care if I had to face things from my family. But I was not gonna let a 12 year old live with someone who's touching her. You understand? And making her feel uncomfortable. Now she's gone out of the house and she's fine and she's living in Miami and she's fine. And I'm feeling fine because I know that man didn't get away with it. So to me rape is anything that violates the woman's rights.

[Lucia] To me rape is not like when you're in a dark alley. It's usually a family member or close friend that rapes you and it usually goes unsaid because you feel funny like "oh well" like you might not want to hurt the family. That's the way it usually happens. It's not really a stranger, even though that does happen. It's usually in your home.

Suburban focus group #3:

[Cindy] After a party. Because people are drinking at parties and then they like to go off.

[Christy] Their inhibitions are lowered.

[Noel] Yeah. And if he or she says "no" then it's a rape.

[Gloria] Women jogging alone.

[Dina] Well you've heard of stories where a male motorist might bump the woman's car and make it seem like an accident and then, you know.

[Cindy] Late night walks.

[I ask] Where does the most danger reside in terms of being raped?

[Fran] Anywhere where a woman would be alone and far away from any kind of resources that might be able to help her

Suburban focus group #4:

[Sandra] A guy wants to have sex and you don't want them to.
[I ask] Do you think they're strangers...?
[several people at once]. No. Usually they no each other.
[Kay] Sometimes they're best friends.
[Jean] Most people are in relationships. Maybe at the time, they wanted to and you didn't and they force you to. That would be rape. You don't want to have sex at that time. For them to force you, to me that's rape.

Interestingly, while focus group members tended to rely on the experiences of those with whom they are acquainted and/or on their own experiences with respect to the "typical rape" question, rape myths were to resurface again in response to questions that perhaps involved the need for more "social distancing" than was required here (*See* Chapter 4)

The News Interprets Sexual Violence

What follows below are examples of two relatively recent cases (and one from the late eighties) that were given predominant media attention – two involve strangers, the other an acquaintance. It should be pointed out that it is not my intention to place blame or discuss the guilt or innocence of any of the parties involved in these cases. Rather, my intention is to unearth not only the underlying rape myths which the news media so heavily rely upon, but the utter failure of the news to effectively deal with sexual violence as an important social issue.

On Sunday June 11, 2000 mobs of men estimated at anywhere from twenty-five to forty in number attacked and sexually assaulted women who were passing through Central Park after the Puerto Rican Day parade. It began with men, many strangers to

each other, indiscriminately splashing water on women along the parade routes final blocks and escalated into the mob surrounding women who walked into the park, knocking them down, tearing at their clothes, and sexually assaulting them. Witnesses describe the scene as being akin to roving gang rape with alternating victims. The men were cheering "Get her! Get her!" and other misogynist obscenities that the newspapers wouldn't print. Approximately fifty-three women were sexually assaulted in broad daylight while police officers (who were out in full force due to the Parade) stood idly by refusing to assist those women who ran to them hysterically begging for help after being attacked. One victim approached different police officers three times telling them she was assaulted and that the assaults on women were continuing as they spoke. But each time the officers did nothing. One officer told her to "go file a report" others just stood there, arms crossed, refusing to even look in the direction of the mob. This particular victim was so angered by the police response that she immediately went home and contacted the news media. Had she not done this, we may have never learned of these attacks at all. Not one attacker was arrested that day. After assaulting over fifty women (dozens of whom reported the attack to the police), uninterrupted by law enforcement, the group eventually disbanded, going their separate ways.

While many have expressed shock and outrage over this incident, particularly the response of law enforcement on that day, those who are familiar with the history of public and private responses to sexual assault are not so taken aback. Women have long been accustomed to the criminal justice system ignoring or belittling their complaints of sexual or domestic violence. The attitude of the police in this instance seems to be one of "boys will be boys" heard all too often in defense of athletes or frat boys accused of

sexual assault. This also appears to be the attitude of many bystanders who witnessed the attacks but did nothing to stop them.

The newspaper accounts of the attacks are of particular interest here because they help to frame the public's perceptions and opinions of what went on that day. First, it is important to point out that without the discovery and subsequent release of videotapes of the assaults, public opinion, more likely than not, would take an entirely different turn. Without these video tapes showing the men in a party-like atmosphere, laughing and having a grand old time as they grope and assault women, the victims accounts would probably have been dismissed – not only by law enforcement, but by the general public. In fact, no arrests would have been made at all without the videotapes. Due to the public outrage over police nonchalance, images were taken from the videos and released to the public in order to identify and arrest the attackers (something that could have easily been done that day while the attacks were going on).

If we examine reports from the New York Times in the weeks following the attacks an interesting pattern emerges. The first major news stories follow the typical reporting method when it comes to crimes against women. That is, to implicitly deny that it *is* a crime against women. Rarely will we see a news article on the sexual assault of a woman being linked to the larger societal problem of violence against women by men or as a gender crime in the same way that racial crimes may be acknowledged and reported. There is still overwhelming reluctance on the part of the media and, I believe, the general public to acknowledge that the rape and sexual assault of any particular woman is not an isolated incident but part of the much larger and more insidious problem of the acceptance of violence against women and every day misogyny in general. The

public is much more comfortable believing that attacks such as these are committed by a few brutish thugs or criminals and thus it has nothing at all to do with the treatment of women in our culture in general. Women too, are more comfortable with this assumption because to believe otherwise would greatly undermine their sense of every day safety. Too many comfortable, accepted, ingrained assumptions about gender relations would have to be called into question in order to report on such cases accurately.

On June 13, two days after the assaults took place, one of the first major articles on the attacks appeared in the New York Times.[14] The article begins by describing the attacks (where they happened, what happened, etc.) with several victims recounting their assaults and their inability to enlist the help of police officers nearby. With all this said, the article, like most others of its kind, reverts to the obligatory discussion of the crime rates in Central Park:

> Indeed, Central Park in recent years has seen a striking drop in crime, a trend that has continued this year. There have been no murders in the park this year. The police said yesterday that from the beginning of the year through Sunday, there had been one fewer robbery in the park, 13 versus 14, and one fewer assault, four versus five, than for the same period last year.

There is no discussion of rates of violent crimes committed against women, no quotes from any experts in the field of gender related violence, and no connection made between this violence and misogyny generally. Once again, this form of news coverage merely serves to preserve the notion that each individual act of violence against women is an aberration committed by a "thug" or "sick person" and further, presents the crime as akin to all others (i.e., robbery, murder, etc.) the fact that it was committed against only women deemed irrelevant and unimportant. Mayor Giuliani is quoted in the New York Times on Wednesday, June 14:

> This is not a police department that was asleep that day... Sometimes, sick, crazy, criminal or drunk kids do sick things.[15]

On June 15 Mayor Giuliani again notes that crime in New York was still down sharply:

> It's like an airplane crash. When an airplane crash takes place, people have a fear of flying and people cancel flights. As things return to normal and they realize that airplane flying is not more dangerous than riding in an automobile, or maybe less dangerous, they gain perspective. Their perspective is lost right now."[16]

Subsequent articles attempted to portray the attackers as "good boys" who had never been involved in any crime before. The tone in describing the attackers is highly sympathetic:

> One of the suspects, a barber from Queens, described getting into "an innocent water fight that got out of hand." Another, a minister's son, planned to go to college and hoped to become a lawyer. A third, a high school student, told his mother that he was actually trying to help a woman being attacked. And a fourth, a father of two boys from Jersey City, was described by friends as a good parent."[17]

Here the journalist attempts to frame our perception of the attackers as fine young men who perhaps were in the wrong place at the wrong time. After all, these were the sons of ministers and fathers of small children ! These were not some deranged rapists! Had more journalists consulted an expert in sexual violence they would have been made aware that perpetrators of sexual violence are more often than not, your average, "normal" male, not a stereotypical pervert hanging around Central Park in an oversized raincoat.

In a more humorous (albeit not meant to be) explanation of the attacks, Patrick J. Buchanan suggested that "liberal cop-bashing" by Hillary Rodham Clinton had

encouraged the sexual assaults in the park.[18] It seems that almost anything, perhaps even the alignment of the stars, could have caused these violent sexual assaults. Anything, that is, except the pervasive misogyny and trivialization of violence against women in our culture.

In what is perhaps the most offensive in the series of articles written about these attacks, the journalists attempt to poetically assign blame to anything other than the perpetrators' obvious belief that women were there for the taking, to be abused at their discretion.

> Just as a thundercloud is fueled by moisture and heat, Sunday's attacks on women in Central Park were fueled by an alchemy of alcohol, marijuana, oppressive weather, testosterone and lapses in police strategy, tactics and communication.[19]

Interestingly, attempts to blame sexual violence on alcohol, drugs and testosterone are most typically played out in defense of fraternity members or athletes accused of gang rape. And this is exactly the type of atmosphere that surrounded the attacks that day. Large groups of young men, many who were total strangers, banded together in a male bonding ritual of abusing women. (*See*, for example, Reeves-Sanday, 1990). The testosterone defense has been played out ad nauseaum in sexual assault cases and is barely worth mentioning. It is used in this context, I believe, in order to frame the issue for the reader as one of the "boys will be boys" variety.

It is important to point out here that the media in this case is being extremely cautious in its portrayal of events. This is not the typical sexual assault case in which it is the victims word against her attacker and thus the media is free to speculate on the victims character, just how bad the attack was, etc. Here, we have four separate video tapes showing the raw brutality of the attacks. The public has seen the images of crying

women emerging from the mob of men clutching only torn bits of clothing to their chests. They have heard the men chanting and cheering as they assault their victims. The public, it would seem, is truly outraged. Thus attempts at ideological framing (however unintended) are much more subtle in this case. For example, in reporting how the perpetrators began pressing bags of ice against the backs of women and then punctured the ice bag, dropping ice cubes down women's shirts they describe this as "the ice cube horseplay." The simple word "horseplay" sets the stage for what we are supposed to believe is innocent activity gone awry. There is clearly no mention that it is perhaps altogether unacceptable for strange men to pour ice down women's shirts as they walk through the park.

To further reinforce this notion of "horseplay" we are told:

> Several women laughed and smiled and sassed the young men. But at least one woman grew angry when men surrounded her and trapped her against a storefront, dousing her with water, witnesses said.[20]

Over 50 women were assaulted that day. Only ***one*** woman that the journalists are aware of became angry? Did they ***ask*** any of the other victims how they felt upon being doused with water by a mob of strange men? Are we supposed to believe that the "several" women who laughed and smiled were clearly the ones with a sense of humor and the woman who became angry was clearly the uppity bitch with no sense of humor? To reinforce this subtle notion that perhaps we are taking all this too seriously, the article is accompanied by a very large color photo of a woman laughing and smiling as she has ice pressed against her back. This photo should offend our intellectual sensibilities the most. Again, the public has seen the videotapes of the brutal attacks. We have seen dozens of women running half naked out of the park. We must then ask ourselves why this

particular photo was chosen to accompany the article and not the perhaps hundreds of other frames of video that more clearly represent what happened.

Two more articles are worth mentioning here. On Sunday, June 18 an article appears with a picture of women demonstrators gathered at Central Park.[21] The women are holding placards reading "Stop Men's Violence Against Women" and "Not 1 More Rape." Sound promising? I thought so, until I read the article. The actual text had absolutely nothing to do with the picture. There was no mention, let alone a discussion, of the demonstration held by the women. Instead this article was yet another in a long series devoted to Mayor Giuliani and all his political troubles. The following day another article appeared with a picture of women demonstrating at the park.[22] Women held up signs saying "Hey, NYPD: Stop Trivializing Anti-Women Violence" and "Women Fight Back Against Central Park Attacks." Although the majority of the article is devoted to another suspect arrested that day, the last few paragraphs mention a rally held by the National Organization for Women as well as two quotes only scratching the surface of a real discussion of gender-based violence: One from the Rev. Al Sharpton who called the attacks "reckless, misogynist behavior" and another from a college student who said "It shows what society thinks of women. We're either out here marching or out here screaming for help."

Interestingly enough, without these two photographs and those two small quotes readers would be totally unaware that organized groups of women were protesting and that there were people out there who considered this to be a gender-based violent sexual assault. If one read beyond the news articles to say, the op-ed page or opinions by regular columnists, here we find discussion we would never see in a news article where it

is needed most (as the judgments offered in a news article are perceived as being more legitimate than just the "opinion" of an op-ed writer). For example, in Joyce Purnick's Metro Matters Column, June 19:

> The women are pained that in the year 2000, they are still victimized, still objectified. Because – make no mistake – the crimes in Central Park were sexual assaults. Young men in a mob decided to have a good time – by terrifying women... Look at the videotapes (a blessing those videotapes). See the joy of these young men. See them leering, laughing, having a grand time terrorizing women. And look at the screaming, cowering women on those videotapes; see the face of abject fear.

She goes on to quote Kathy Rodgers, president of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund explaining how this is gender-based violence and it is in fact a hate crime. She also mentions how we must think about the role men and women play in objectifying women in advertisements, movies and rap lyrics.

Perhaps even more interesting are the letters to the editor sent in by women. Despite the near total lack of discussion in the newspaper about gender motivated violence many women remain keenly aware of what's going on.[23] From the letters to the *Editor* June 16:

> ... The fear of violence against us is something that all women live with their entire lives. As the mother of three daughters and a survivor of rape, I have had to teach my daughters constantly to be aware of their own vulnerability ... Women are not safe, and last Sunday's rampage and violation are the perfect example of how women are viewed by many men in our society and culture.

Another woman writes:

> ... I wonder whether the praise that the French honeymooning couple voiced for the police response to their molestation in Central Park is not in fact a further indictment of gender insensitivity on the part of the police. It seems to me very telling that the testimony of a husband was taken at face value, while those women unaccompanied by male guardians, whose allegations went unsupported by male witnesses, were treated dismissively. Clearly, the police understand and

> take seriously the grievances of fellow men. But those women who would venture out onto Manhattan streets without the legitimizing presence of a man can lay no claims to police protection, or even credibility.

And on June 13:

> ... The assaults in Central Park were apparently aimed at women and have terrified women around the city and beyond. It is time to start recognizing women as a class of people who are routinely attacked with impunity...

Another infamous case of sexual violence in central park, that of the female jogger (a white investment banker) brutally attacked by a gang of young men, warrants attention here. Briefly, the facts of the case were as follows: On April 19, 1989 a group of up to 36 black and Hispanic teenage boys (some as young as 13) entered Central park. Beginning around 9:00 p.m. the group (often splitting up to commit separate acts) mugged, beat, or chased any victim who crossed their path. There acts included beating a homeless man and assaulting two male joggers beating them severely, to name just a few incidents. At around 11 p.m. they found a woman jogging alone and jumped her, tore off her clothes, and took turns sexually assaulting her. They then beat her unconscious using a lead pipe and rocks, (crushing the bones around her face), cut her legs with a knife and raped her. They then left her for dead in a puddle at the bottom of a ravine.

As most of us will remember, in that particular case the overall focus became race, not gender. Journalists consistently played up the racial angle when searching for answers as to why the perpetrators would commit such a horrible act. Not only did this focus serve to inflame racial tensions in the city, it also completely swept under the carpet the dynamics of sexual violence.

> That these reporters and editors were willing to go to sociologists, psychologists, and community leaders to talk about class and race hatred but not about the hatred

> of women revealed the extent to which they considered racism a subject for news stories, but saw sexism as fit only for columns and editorials. (Benedict, 1992, p. 246)[24]

The aversion of the press to understand sex crimes in terms of gender relations was revealed in many articles lacking even the slightest comprehension of the history and pervasiveness of sexual violence. "Instead, when addressing the question of why the gang had raped the jogger, and had done so with such brutality, the editors and reporters writing these stories acted as if no one had ever explained or studied gang rape. This revealed that none of them had read any of the literature on rape that has been available since the min-1960s." (Benedict 1992, p. 209).[25]

I can recall my own frustration upon reading articles in every newspaper and magazine scanning them for any hint of understanding of the nature of violence against women. What was found all to often was not only a total lack of feminist viewpoint, but also the age old methods of blaming the victim. Article after article alluded to the idea that had she not been jogging in the park that late at night, none of this would have happened. Here we have one of the many cases where news coverage of violence against women serves as a warning to women by defining the boundaries of proper conduct and the punishment for misbehavior (See Madriz, 1997; Meyers, 1997).

It becomes glaringly obvious in this case and others that the press is exceedingly reluctant to even consult feminist sources, let alone defend a particular victims right to be in a public place at whatever time she chooses. Defending a victim in this fashion would be deemed to "radical" and consulting feminist sources are often considered by journalists to be "biased" while maintaining the status quo seems to be their very definition of neutrality. Sex crimes will never be covered properly until the press relieves

itself of its unwillingness to consult feminist sources. According to Meyers (1997) "News values constitute a framework that supports the dominant ideology while marginalizing, trivializing, and constructing as deviant or dangerous any challenge to it." (p. 22)

The representation of sexual violence in the media as separate and isolated incidents perpetrated by pathological or deviant individuals reinforces the notion that these occurrences are unconnected to the larger social structure in which patriarchy flourishes. "In maintaining this mirage of individual pathology, the news denies both the social roots of violence against women and that individual incidents of abuse are part of a larger social problem. This denial works to absolve society of any obligation to end it." (Meyers, 1997, p. 117).

"Oh, No! For The Yes Man"

On February 12, 1997 Vanessa Perhach, a 42-year-old divorced mother of two, had plans to meet sportscaster Marv Albert (with whom she was having a 10-year affair) at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Pentagon City near Washington. According to Perhach, Albert had called her several times that day, asking her to bring another man along for sex, as he has done on previous occasions. After she arrived at the room alone, Albert became angry, hurled her to the bed, bit her repeatedly on the back and sexually assaulted her. Albert claimed the sex and the biting were consensual. Albert was offered a plea bargain by prosecutors that would have involved a misdemeanor with rehabilitation and no jail time. Albert refused the offer, assured by his attorney Roy Black that no one would believe Purhach (a Dominican-born woman of very modest means). In preparing their case for trial, prosecutors located another woman who says she was similarly

assaulted . She told police she was invited to his hotel room and found him dressed in women's clothing. He grabbed her, biting her lip, and when she attempted to break free she pulled off his toupee. Police sources also confirmed that his name, phone number and a price appeared on the client list of a dominatrix found murdered in her Manhattan apartment. These tantalizing tidbits were just too much for the media to pass up. All the necessary elements for selling papers and grabbing ratings were present: allegations of rough sex, sadomasochism, cross-dressing, scorned lovers, etc. After four days at trial, and when the prosecutors made clear that they had evidence of assaults against still more women, Albert plead guilty to the misdemeanor assault charges. He served no jail time and within 2 years was back at his handsomely paying job as a sportscaster, embraced by the public.

Once again I should make clear that Albert's guilt or innocence is irrelevant to the present subject matter. My primary concern here is with the *media treatment* of the case and its utilization of numerous rape myths and misogynist stereotypes. In other words, we should reflect upon the fact that it *should be* possible to believe in an accused man's innocence without having to rely upon such negative images of women. It is also important to point out that the treatment of Albert's accuser followed the same patterns displayed in other cases where women from lower socioeconomic groups or different races accuse an upper class, well-known man. That is, they are generally discredited from the start and labeled untrustworthy, vindictive, greedy" women. Several articles would discuss Albert's glorious career juxtaposed with the reference to his accuser as a 42 year old "divorced, Dominican-born hotel operator", thus painting the picture for the

reader of a non-traditional, foreign woman who works in a lowly occupation and is not to be respected.

A small sampling of newspaper reports on the case illustrate the extent of media sympathy afforded Albert. Some common themes emerge: (a) the case is not really about assault, but Albert's private, sexual peccadilloes that are really not the public's business anyway; (b) his accuser is a typical scorned woman out to destroy a wealthy, powerful man; (c) It is Albert, and not his accuser, who has been humiliated by the ordeal and thus our sympathies should lie with him; and (d) Albert's long and prosperous career are evidence of innocence and it is nothing short of a nightmare for a man to have his career and reputation tarnished by a woman's ridiculous claims. In addition, the case was routinely trivialized by "cute," catchy headlines like "Oh, No! For the Yes Man" and by transforming the facts of the alleged assault into something resembling a right to privacy issue, thus making Albert the aggrieved party.

In an article for *Time* magazine in Canada,[26] the sub-heading was "A strange and steamy four-day trial destroys the 30-year career of famed sportscaster Marv Albert." The fact that the trial is referred to as *steamy* serves not only to trivialize the incident, but to make it about *sex* rather than assault. And again, the hand-wringing over Albert's career:

> In the course of four days, more than 30 years of hard work, hustle and talent were reduced to a series of headlines in the New York Post. Each headline not only summed up the previous day's developments but also had a little fun with the revelations about Albert's sordid personal life. There was nothing fun, however, about watching a man's career and reputation unravel before a nation's eyes, especially in the steadfast presence of his father, his children and his prospective wife.

In response to the question of why Albert would suddenly plead guilty on the fourth day of the trial, the writer quotes Roy Black, Albert's attorney:

> "He was raped," Black complained to CNN's Burden of Proof last Thursday. "He was raped in the tabloids and the news... If he had been anyone else than Marv Albert, I don't think this case would have been brought."

A Newsday[27] article about the case (appearing in the sports section, as are many of the articles about athletes accused of rape) portrayed Albert in a warm, lighthearted way, focusing on his sex counseling and describing him as a "humbled" man:

> Instead of being whisked around the country to announce Knicks games for MSG and NFL games for NBC, Albert spends a great deal of time in the Upper West Side neighborhood where he lives, confidants say. "He's on the phone to certain friends, his father and children regularly, and only a select few people have visited him," a friend said. Albert and his fiancée, Heather Faulkiner, occasionally dine at local restaurants. Albert, a movie buff, also has seen some current films, including "The Game," starring Michael Douglas, friends say. "He gets away from it all for tow hours," one friend said.

And to further the perception that Albert has been (or should be) forgiven by the public:

> "He told me that when he goes out and people recognize him, it's basically positive stuff," said a local media executive. "They say, 'Good luck, we hope everything's OK, we hope you find another job.'"

And in ***People***[28] magazine, after discussing how Faulkiner is "standing by her man" and forgives him for his "indiscretions" another attempt to show why he should be (or already is) forgiven:

> And if a woman wronged can find it in her heart to forgive, who is the average fan to hold a grudge? Unlikely as it might have seemed at the end of the trial, there has been a groundswell of support for Albert's eventual professional rehabilitation...

In an article in the American Bar Association Journal[29] questioning the "fairness" of rape shield laws and quoting the defense lawyers as saying they had evidence about the victim's past "vengeful" behavior, we find a tabloid style introduction:

> Despite its lurid details, the trial of former sportscaster and confessed back-nibbler Marv Albert brought something to the table other than the tale of a guy in women's underwear with a bad toupee and a Mike Tyson-size appetite.

In just one sentence, the author has managed to (a) trivialize the serious bruising and bite marks on the accusers back by referring to it as "nibbling"; (b) make light of the case by referring to it as a "tale" that was really a laughable story of kinkiness; and (c) minimize the seriousness of Mike Tyson's rape of a young woman by referring to it as an "appetite" (this despite the fact that Tyson was actually *convicted* and served jail time for rape). And finally in another ***Newsday*** article (also in the sports section) entitled "Career, Life in Shambles: Why was Marv Fired Over a Misdemeanor?" the author could hardly contain his hostility toward the accuser:[30]

> Six months ago Marv Albert was the colorful voice of the peacock, the best sports announcer ever, a plus to NBC's basketball and football broadcasts. This morning he's a man without a microphone, a humiliated and disgraced figure who had his most intimate and insane bedroom secrets exposed. Well, the Virginia court may say one thing, but the feeling from the gut says another. It says Albert was railroaded by a bullet train carrying bad circumstance, crummy luck, a confusing legal process and a hypocritical TV network policy.
>
> He was fired from a job he did well because a woman, whose credibility is highly suspect, accomplished what she wanted to do, which was effectively ruin his life.

And the author's final tribute:

> But what he did in the privacy of his bedroom was his business. In his real business, he was kind, thoughtful, loyal and hardworking to everyone who knew him. He was professional. He did his job as well as possible. He doesn't have a job or his reputation today.

In addition to the tabloid newspaper frenzy, ABC aired a highly sympathetic (and much publicized) interview with Marv Albert conducted by Barbara Walters at the end of the case. From the outset, the pre-show advertisements let the audience know where its sympathies lay. The voice-over proclaimed: "Marv Albert: In His Own Defense: His public humiliation and the woman who stood by him through it all." Barbara Walters chimes in: "We'll hear his side of the story and it's a very different one from what we've heard in court." She begins her interview by telling the audience that the headlines in this case were "merciless", that the accuser told her story in "raw detail" and how "he [Marv Albert] has been waiting for his chance to tell his side of the story." We are also told that Albert's fiancé, Heather Faulkner, has "stood by him" and is also a television producer with the Disney Company "by the way" (here working for Disney is obviously supposed to legitimize her and confer an air of "family values" around her as well as serving to set up the dichotomy between the lascivious accuser who is not to be believed, and the wholesome "stand by your man" Faulkner who we can readily trust.

Viewer sympathy is further manipulated with clips from Marv Albert's glorious career (complete with the proper emotional music). Throughout the interview Barbara Walters repeatedly refers to the rape victim as Albert's "former lover" and to Heather Faulkner as his "loyal partner." Faulkner tearfully tells Walters "It would have been easier for me to leave, but he's my best friend. I know all he's guilty of is bad judgment." Walters then asks Faulkner "Did he ever bite you?" to which she replies "No." The audience is left with the inane idea that if he didn't bite Faulkner during sex, he didn't bite anyone else. When asked about the accuser's taped phone call to 911 wherein she sounded very upset, Albert simply replies "It was an Academy Award

performance." Barbara Walters then brings up another man who supposedly claims the victim loved to be bitten and loved group sex. In a disapproving tone she tells the audience that he was not called to court because of rape shield laws "but Marv Albert's past was put on trial." She then allows Albert to discredit a second woman who has accused him of assault with Albert calling it a "complete fabrication again" and telling Walters that "she had a crush on me and wanted to have sex." Walter's does not question Albert any further about this other accuser.

Walters then asks the obligatory ratings-catching questions about Albert meeting with a Dominatrix, having a relationship with a transvestite and wearing women's underwear to which Albert refers to as a time when "I was going through my period of curiosity". The interview closes with Walters asking Albert in an overly dramatized sympathetic fashion "What was the worst time for you?" to which Albert replies, "I cried thinking of what it was doing to Heather."

The Focus Groups

The focus group participants were asked their reactions to several well known rape cases, not only to generate discussion concerning rape myths, but to also gauge their acceptance or rejection of the media's predominant interpretation of the case. As we will see below, there were varying levels of acceptance. Suburban focus Group #1 was asked about the events at the Puerto Rican day parade:

> [Kris] I was surprised. It was the middle of the day too.
> [Winnie] I felt that the police could have done something to minimize what was happening. They were being told what was going on. They used poor judgment.
> They said it was like a lot of policemen in the park. There wasn't. I was there.
> [Kit] I was there too. I was right there at 59th by central park and there was just a lot of commotion. A lot of young men and women running all over the place. And I didn't know what was going on because I was just leaving. But the

cops were just being like really nasty and telling you to get on the sidewalk. But there was just a lot of confusion. Nobody knew what was happening and there was a lot of people running into Central Park but I, you know, didn't even know what happened until that night when I got home and watched the news. And then I heard what happened. I don't think there was a lot of people who knew what was happening. It was just happening. And that was it.

[Winnie] But there were people that, I followed it a lot, on TV, I read about it. There were women, even men, who went up and told the cops outside the park what was going on in the park and they didn't go in.

[Kit] They said they couldn't leave their post.

[Winnie] Inside the park there were no police. There was not. Most of them were in the street not the park.

Two participants in focus group #2, the Bronx teenagers, relate the events to some of their own experiences:

[[I was happy it happened. Not for the girls, but because I had gone to Orchard Beach the summer before and my cousin Kathy, she overdoes it. I can tell you that this girl walks around in a string. And that's her bathing suit. But no matter what, it's her body and you shouldn't touch it. We were at the beach walking and these guys were doing the same things, like at the parade, to her. So she got real offended and she started screaming and she [inaudible] but I never thought that 2 years later in a Puerto Rican parade this is even gonna be worse, you understand? And its like, you know, sometimes we women don't act on things right away. I would've went back and acted on it.

[ ] When my cousin was at Virginia beach this girl had on a bathing suit that tied around here and tied around there. So the guys made a joke and untied it and her bathing suit just fell straight off. They thought it was a whole big thing and she's running back with her towel on to cover herself up. Cause she was just walking on the beach with her bathing suit. It wasn't really, it's the style. They just pulled the string off.

Participants in suburban focus group #3 tended to rely on common stereotypes:

[Cindy] And for instance what happened at the Puerto Rican Day parade last year. Some women weren't even there or weren't even at the site and they just decided to come forward for attention or for..

[Vera] Money maybe?

[Fran] Yeah. And there's some there that it did happen to but...

[Noel] I don't understand that. Are you saying that the people that it didn't happen to came forward and said it did happen...?

[Fran] She's saying that it might have been people that just said you know, what, "here, have me too. I wasn't even there, but I'm gonna say I was there."

[Cindy] You know like "I was on the other side of Central Park but I'm gonna say that I was there too.."

[Fran] Yeah, like she wasn't even part of it but she's gonna say "maybe I can get some money out of this."

Some of the more interesting responses from participants came when I asked about the sportscaster Marv Albert and his rape trial. Their responses seem to almost directly mirror the media coverage of that case. I ask focus group #1, "Does anyone remember the Marv Albert case?":

[laughter]

[Kit] She absolutely lied. She said well, I enjoyed the rough sex and I liked him to hit me the first 10 times we had sex but that 11th time I didn't want him to do that.

[everyone starts laughing]

[Kit] They had like a two year affair.

[I ask] So that would definitely make a difference to you if they were in a relationship already?

[Kit] She said it (the rape charge) right at the end of the relationship. That's what made the difference. He probably said I'm not involved with you anymore and then...

Members of focus group #4 also adhere to the media driven definition of the case:

[I ask] What about the case with Marv Albert?

[laughter]

[ ] Yeah. Deviant relationships.

[Sandra]. I think, it's hard to say was she like a scorned lover and you know, doing this, trying to destroy him or was he this sexually deviant member of society? [laughter] I mean, I don't know. It's, uh, these cases because like, what happened today. It's like watching a soap opera and um, I think it loses, because of the names it becomes a different experience.

...And in focus group # 3 some seeds of doubt:

[Marissa] That was weird.

[Fran] I think he didn't rape her. Because if he raped her she should've come out in the beginning and said it. She waited until he got this big job and then came out and said, you know, he bit me. I mean it's...

[Noel] This is not really on track but the woman that he said was his fiancé at the time of trial, did he ever marry her?

[Gloria] Yeah because everyone was saying that was like a ploy to make him look like he was somewhat normal. I just was wondering.

[I ask] Did anyone think he was guilty?

[several responding at once] No.

[Dina] I think his credibility was probably thrown a little bit for a loop when the bisexuality or the trans.. what was it?

Chapter 6

Music and Media

> "I am not certain, nor should you be, that somehow a burgeoning ménage a trois of political interests, corporate interests, military interests will not prevail and literally annihilate an inhabitable humane future. It is possible that with the company of obedient, quisling media such an unholy trinity can arrange things so that human invention called fascism... We can no longer rely on the separation of powers to keep this country invulnerable to that possibility while finite humans in the flux of time make decisions of permanent damage... So I'm not going to speak to you about the future.
>
> - Excerpt from Toni Morrison's commencement address to Smith College, Northampton, Mass., May, 2001.

While the mid to late eighties could not be seen as a progressive period by any standard, I can fondly remember large demonstrations at the conservative campus of my Catholic University when Ronald Regan paid us a visit, protest rallies against U.S. involvement in Latin America, and lively mainstream feminist discourse concerning the treatment of women in all areas of the media. As with many other progressive causes, such feminist debate has now been labeled passé by the mainstream press and the new media-hyped term "post-feminist" has appeared to take it's place. But as second wave feminist ideas and principles are deemed "outdated" or no longer useful by our popular culture in areas from music to fashion to politics, the latest backlash is somewhat more insidious than the decade preceding it due to the paucity of feminist criticism of popular culture outside academia (or the pages of Ms. Magazine). Books like Faludi's "*Backlash*" and Naomi Wolf's "*The Beauty Myth*" (both published in 1991) which were widely read and discussed by a non-academic audience 10 years ago and whose basic tenets found their way into public consciousness are rare today. In fact, as we will discuss below, the portrayal of women as one-dimensional sexual objects to be used in music, film, etc. has

become so common place and normalized that those who dare to criticize it are often silenced by either (a) being ignored in the popular press; (b) being labeled reactionary and/or obsolete or; (c) being labeled ignorant and unappreciative of "artistic expression." Also, young female fans of misogynist music and popular culture are held up as "examples" to the world that such fare could not be degrading to women or so many wouldn't like it - this being a familiar argument totally devoid of any social or historical context (by the same logic we may argue that Clarence Thomas is a civil rights champion).

First, perhaps the connection between the above and the subject matter at hand should be made clear. My primary interest is in how attitudes and perceptions of victims of sexual violence are formed, shaped, etc. When women are consistently portrayed in sexually denigrating ways, being shown as desirous of sexual exploitation and abuse, or reduced to one-dimensional sexual playthings (coupled with the lack of public oppositional discourse deemed too risky or threatening by a private commercial media system) one might expect an increase in rape myth acceptance and adversarial sexual beliefs. Of course my focus group data is not conducive to making such a connection – nor is it *possible*, I believe, to establish such direct causal connections . However, the purpose here is to make clear that the construction of sexual violence does not occur in a vacuum. The power media has to shape and influence our ideas, as well as reflect upon them, is something whose importance should not be underestimated. A system of rape supportive beliefs in certain aspects of popular culture certainly deserves attention here.

The hypothesis linking the portrayal of women in sexually denigrating ways and rape myth acceptance has been examined and confirmed in numerous studies with respect

to pornography (*See*, for example, Linz, et. al., 1984; Linz, et. al., 1988; Malamuth & Check, 1981; Malamuth & Check, 1983; Malamuth & Donnerstein, 1982; Zillmann & Bryant, 1982). Weisz and Earls (1995) found significant changes in male attitudes toward rape victims after viewing commercial feature films that were sexually aggressive – with such subjects indicating a belief that women deserve or secretly desire rape. Women were not so affected. Malamuth and Check (1981) found that exposure to films portraying women who benefit from sexual violence significantly increased males' but not females' acceptance of interpersonal violence. In fact there was some indication of an opposite effect for women: women were less accepting of rape myths and interpersonal violence after exposure to sexually violent films.

Studies concerning the image of women in advertising are also of importance here as they delineate the power of negative images of women to effect attitudes concerning sexual aggression. In Erving Goffman's (1979) classic study of "gender advertisements" he identifies several poses used in advertising that present women as subordinate or inferior to men (poses that subtly demean the woman such as assuming awkward positions with legs thrust in the air) and also notes the stereotypical female subject with a vacant gaze which he terms "licensed withdrawal" and implies that the female is passive and not in control. Plous and Neptune's (1997) study of magazine advertisements from 1985-1994 found a substantial increase in the exposing of women's bodies as well as their bodies being shown in low-status, animal-like positions. Fashion photography now consistently borrows images from pornographic publications posing the models with closed eyes, open mouth and legs spread (Myers, 1987; Steele 1996).

According to Crane (1999) by 1987 the model in fashion magazines was much more likely to be partially nude with the camera's vantage point below it's subject in order to emphasize legs and thighs. Over a period of time the photographs have ceased being a tool to exhibit the latest trends in fashion and now "provide a kind of visual entertainment analogous to other forms of media culture, such as Hollywood films and music videos." (p. 546). In addition, several of the photographs used in Cranes's focus group study presented women "in a manner consistent with the representation of women in many aspects of rock music, including lyrics, album covers, and public appearances – in other words, in highly sexualized poses, suggesting that a woman's role is that of sex object." (p. 549). However, Crane argues that what we are seeing now is a type of "conflicted hegemony" of the presentation of women in fashion advertising. Advertisers are also forced to incorporate oppositional elements in order to keep the attention of the consumers. Thus, we will also see scattered images of women portrayed as empowered and androgynous. Crane's focus group results indicate that younger participants were more likely than older women to interpret the aforementioned sexualized images as a woman being in control of her sexuality while others interpreted the poses as demeaning. These younger participants also found it quite natural to make comparisons between themselves and the models and were disappointed when they were unable to identify with them. Interestingly, regardless of age, the "[i]mages that conveyed feminine empowerment and dominance evoked ambivalent responses. On the one hand, they admired women who appeared to be strong, but expressions of strength that deviated from norms of feminine personal demeanor evoked negative responses. (p. 560).

Lanis & Covell (1995) point out that while the youth, beauty and sexuality of women have been stressed in advertising for years, increasingly the emphasis appears to be on sexuality and sexual availability. Their findings indicate that males who view advertisements in which women are presented as sex objects are more likely to evidence increased sex role stereotypic and rape myth beliefs. The authors argue that by "viewing women as exclusively sexual beings whose purpose is to sexually arouse and gratify men, a power differential is created in which women generally are subordinate. This power hierarchy may facilitate the perception of women as appropriate targets for sexually aggressive behaviours." (p. 647). More encouraging however, they found (similar to the studies mentioned above) that women's rape myth acceptance was actually lowered when they saw these images in advertisements. This is attributed to the fact that:

> "... the images used in the experimental conditions may have brought to the attention of the female subjects the issues of sexual exploitation of women in the media, and perhaps the social alternatives available to women, thus decreasing their tolerance for rape-supportive beliefs." (p.646)

For many years now feminists writers and researchers have been examining the negative effects of advertising on young women with respect to their self-image and self-esteem and the resultant increases in such things as eating disorders and other emotional problems. (*See*, for example, Wolf, 1991; Faludi, 1991; Kilbourne, 1999). The constant barrage of sexually exploitative images and glamorization of sexually violent imagery aimed at girls and young women has also drawn significant attention.[31] One must keep in mind that advertisers spend billions of dollars each year for one simple reason: *advertising works*. If advertising had no effect on public mentality the corporate sector would not waste their time and money, and we would not be carpet bombed daily with commercial advertising. To argue that the endless bombardment of negative images of

women have absolutely no effect on the population would, at this point, be an exercise in naiveté. While many media pundits insist the medium has no direct bearing on attitudes or behavior, citing as evidence the fact that social science has yet to prove a direct causal link between the two, we must keep in mind that very little in the social (as well as the physical) sciences can prove direct causal links. Nothing in the social world operates this way – one can always point to numerous interrelated factors operating on many different levels as bringing about a particular social effect. To expect a linear cause-effect relationship for *anything* is bordering on the ridiculous. One might also question the logic of requiring direct causal links between hateful portrayals of homosexuals for example, and expressions of homophobia amongst the public. Why must there be a direct causal link to admit such fare contributes to a social climate of hostility?

As my general focus here however, I would merely like to point out that the music video, aside from being a form of entertainment in and of itself, is also a prolonged advertisement. The video is expected to sell the album – which is why artists spend upwards in the millions to make their music videos. It is in this context that one may question, what exactly is being sold? According to media critic Mark Crispin Miller, MTV was the first 24 hour, seve-day-a-week commercial channel. "Rock videos are highly sophisticated, irresistibly seductive commercials for songs and also for clothes."[32] (And as we shall see, ideas).

MTV Incorporated

The importance of music television in popular culture should not be underestimated and is particularly interesting for the purposes of our discussion. MTV is the most popular broadcaster of music videos. Viacom's global MTV networks reach

300 million homes or one-quarter of the worlds' households with a television. And, as we shall see, commercial imperatives put limits on the nature and type of music that gets produced. Its audience is made up of primarily young people ranging in age from early adolescence to early adulthood. It is easy to view MTV as one large marketing machine, packaging and selling what is "cool" to teens. Recently PBS aired a Frontline documentary examining how what is cool and hip is aggressively marketed to young people.[33] Host, Douglas Rushkoff claims that "teens are like Africa – they are being colonized." With a population of 32 million spending 100 billion a year themselves and pushing their parents to spend another 50 billion, today's teens are the most marketed to group in history. Five major companies (part of the 10 that dominate the entire media landscape) are responsible for colonizing the teen market: Disney, Viacom (which owns MTV and VHI), V.Vivende, AOL Time Warner and Newscorp. According to Rushkoff, there is no non-commercial content on MTV. Every video, show etc., is a paid advertisement. For example, Sprite hires out a ballroom for a hip-hop party, the affair is taped and then aired as programming and advertising for MTV's "Direct Effects" show. Thus it is a commercial within a commercial within a commercial. When not marketing cool, corporations sell gender stereotypes. Rushkoff argues that corporate imagery has reduced youth culture to two prevailing stereotypes. Guys are "mooks" – crude, loud, obnoxious, in your face (i.e., Tom Green, The Man Show, etc.). Girls are packaged as "midriffs" – consumed by appearances, obsessed with sex, proud to be a sexual object. This marketing package tells girls: "your body is your best asset, flaunt your sexuality."

Rage rock, known for hatred of women and gays, have been aggressively marketed. One need only look at the engineered rise of "Limp Bizkit" as evidence of how a controversial band is marketing for the mainstream. MTV had a stake in making Limp Bizkit stars (Viacom, owners of MTV, also own Limp Bizkit's record label). Their rise was orchestrated and then relentlessly promoted on air. The corporations claim they are just mirroring teen behavior. Rushkoff argues that kids, in fact, take it as a cue. Who is mirroring whom? Is the media really reflecting the life of kids or is it the other way around? Its a great feed back loop where it becomes impossible to tell which came first – the anger or the marketing of the anger.

Mark Crispin Miller[34] argues that youth culture has tended more and more to be defined by the mass media. We no longer get a sense of the advertisers and the media trying to keep up with developments that are out in the streets. Now we get the sense that the youth culture and the youth market are somewhat indistinguishable. Corporate America is now setting trends, instead of following them. The corporate sponsors and the mass media now set the agenda, and this has a lot to do with the general way in which they have tended to appropriate all the common spaces of life. MTV is not in the business of listening to youth in order to find startling new kinds of music. MTV tunes into youth so it can figure out how to pitch what Viacom has to sell.. This, Miller says, "speaks to the inexorable narrowing of the range of content, despite the fact that so many champions of the status quo keep talking about all the choices that we now enjoy." As the media become more and more concentrated into fewer and fewer hands, commercial logic rules the day and they are not inclined to take any risks that might jeopardize the

bottom line. Thus, shock-value music and programming (extremely cheap to produce and always attention-getters) become standard fare. Miller argues:

> "...this has tended to make the quality of most media product highly dubious. Whether we talk about the TV news, which is in this country more idiotic and lurid than ever before; or whether we talk about the content of most magazines, which is increasingly soft porn; or whether we're talking about newspapers, which are more and more like television; or movies or music; we're talking about a decline in quality that most of the people who work in these industries have recognized ... There are other factors at work here, but what it all comes down to is that this all-pervasive commercial propaganda, which sells not only countless products but a whole view of life, has itself become much nastier since, I'd say, the mid 1970s."[35]

MTV's audience of adolescents and young adults are also the age group which is particularly vulnerable to gender role input (Galambos, Almeida, & Peterson, 1990). Tooney and Weaver (1994) found gender to be of critical importance as a determinant factor in reactions to popular music. The more disturbing their female subjects found a music video the less they enjoyed it. For the male subjects, the opposite held true. The more disturbing the images the more they found it enjoyable. Tooney and Weaver raise an interesting question: To what extent does perceived disturbance, which can be linked to several aspects of music such as rebellious, violent and sexual themes, mediate and predict music appreciation? It should be pointed out however, that since this study was conducted 7 years ago much has changed on music television. Images that were once deemed "disturbing" have now become so common place that perhaps many female subjects would no longer be "disturbed" at all. A longitudinal study, designed to measure the subjects perceptions over time would be interesting in that it could take into account a "desensitizing" effect.

Sommers-Flanagan, et. al. (1993) found, in their content analysis of music videos, that the most frequently observed categories of camera focus or behavior were implicit sexuality, objectification, dominance, and implicit aggression. Not surprisingly:

> "...males exhibited significantly more dominant and implicitly aggressive behavior than females. In contrast, females were significantly more likely to engage in implicitly sexual and subservient behavior. Further, they were significantly more likely to be recipients of behavior rated as implicitly aggressive, explicitly sexual, implicitly sexual and as combining sexual and aggressive components." (p. 750).

What follows below is an examination of one example of MTV marketed misogyny.

Eminem: The White Man's rapper[36]

As the reader may well be aware, since rap music first become popular its lyrics have been attacked for inciting violence, being "anti-cop", and glorifying criminal street culture to name just a few. Numerous studies have rightly pointed out the racial element in such criticisms by noting that the attacks on rap music (created and listened to primarily by African-Americans) are really racially motivated. (*See*, for example, Fried, (1996) and Fried (1999)). In both Fried's studies she finds that "when a violent lyrical passage is represented as a rap song or associated with a Black singer, subjects find the lyrics objectionable, worry about the consequences of such lyrics, and support some form of government regulation. If the same lyrical passage is presented as a country or folk music, or is associated with a White artist, reactions to the lyrics are significantly less critical on all dimensions." (Fried, 1996 p.2135). While it is true that the sexually violent lyrics of heavy metal music have also garnered attention (*See* Wester, et. al., 1997, for a review of this literature) rap or hip-hop music has far surpassed heavy metal in popularity. Even as one agrees with the results of Fried's research with respect to racial

bias, it should be noted that in the past few years, rap has experienced an explosion in popularity among white youth. As rap music finds a large white audience it is no longer feasible to talk about this genre of music *solely* with respect to race. In addition, as most readers are already aware, much hip-hop music is progressive, engaging and politically astute. But these are not the acts that MTV typically chooses to promote. For the reasons discussed above, such acts are seen as a commercial risk and are thought to have a lower profit factor than acts with a higher shock value.

One type of rap music, often referred to as "gangsta rap" (GR), prominently features themes of sexual violence and the objectification of women. Wester, et. al. (1997) in their study of the effects of sexually violent rap music on men with little prior exposure found that the lyrics significantly increased men's adversarial sexual beliefs. Their findings also suggest that:

> "brief exposure to misogynistic media may result in increased adversarial sexual beliefs among naïve listeners. Larger effects and more widespread attitude influences may occur, however, when GR primes preexisting misogynistic attitudes. Chronic exposure to sexually violent material may, as in past research, produce more negative attitudes toward women by facilitating the encoding of antifemale messages.... Thus, GR songs may serve as primes in individuals familiar with GR subculture, but chronic exposure may create or enhance negative attitudes toward women within individuals not familiar with GR subculture." (p. 505)

While this type of rap music has become increasingly popular, so has the White rapper Marshal Mathers, known by his stage name "Eminem" (and also referring to himself on his records as "Slim Shady"). Eminem is a protégé of another popular "gangsta rapper" known as Dr. Dre (who also acts as Eminem's executive producer and guest rapper on the albums). Not only does Eminem command a huge audience of both white and Black youth (one of the first rap singers to do so) he has gained unequaled

commercial success. His first album, heavily promoted on MTV went triple-platinum and his follow-up album "The Marshall Mathers LP" sold 1.76 million copies in its first week, the second-highest opening-week sales figure in history.[37] His second album was greeted almost exclusively by raves. While the critics noted the violence towards women and gays in the lyrics, (often with just a mere mention) they ended up praising him from his "talent" and "originality."[38] Rolling Stone magazine gave his album a four-star review, Newsweek claimed he was "arguably the most compelling figure in all of pop music", and yet another critic said "It's mean-spirited, profane, shocking – and actually quite entertaining if not taken too seriously."[39] MTV bent over backwards to promote his music and to proffer an image of him as a musical "rebel." MTV went so far as to devote an entire weekend to him in which he acted as a guest VJ, and where MTV was renamed "EMTV." All this despite the fact that raping and murdering women is the principal theme in his music (with gay bashing thrown in for good measure). In fact, during my literature search I found it quite difficult to find serious criticism of the misogyny in his lyrics. If the articles weren't praising his originality or talent (again, after merely mentioning sexism or homophobia) they were devoted to the "white man in a black medium" theme, praising his rise to stardom in the rap world as promoting racial harmony.

A brief perusal of the lyrics should give one pause as to why, at this particular moment in time, he has achieved such tremendous success and an almost cult-like following. Eminem's music contains a gang rape fantasy about his sister and murder fantasies about his mother and his wife Kim (a song in which you hear the sound of her choking and the lyrics, "Don't you get it bitch, no one can hear you?...BLEED BITCH

BLEED...)[40] Also popular with the crowds at his concerts are lyrics about sex with underage girls (Yo, look at her bush, does it got hair?/Fuck this bitch right here on the spot bare/Till she passes out and she forgot how she got there.")[41] In another song he says (referring to a woman), "I'm a kill you! Like a murder weapon, I'm a conceal you in a closet with mildew, sheets, pillows and film you." In yet another he tells his listeners that even if the singer Jennifer Lopez were his own mother, he'd still have to have sex with her without a condom. That way he could "have a son and a new brother at the same time and just say that it ain't mine."

After describing how, on Eminem's latest album, Slim Shady dumps his murdered girlfriend's body in a lake with the help of their baby daughter, rips "Pamela Lee's tits off" and heads out into the night yelling, "To all the people I've offended, yeah, fuck you, too!", Anthony Bozza, in his fawning article for Rolling Stone Magazine, goes on to say "This ***hard-core attitude*** has won him acceptance not just from teenagers taken with his video but also from the hip-hop community."[42] *(emphasis mine)*. In yet another complimentary article in the Village Voice Eminem's violent lyrics are defended on the grounds that the lyrics are "realistic" and reflect the truth that sometimes evil triumphs. The author also defends such lyrical violence against women on so-called "artistic" grounds. The author writes:

> When MTV and BET air the new Eminem video "Guilty Conscience," they run into the small problem of the song's conclusion, where bad-angel Slim Shady convinces good-angel Dr. Dre that of course you shoot our bitch when you catch her boning another man. The networks have to fade out early, with Dre still trumpeting his new been-there-done-that maturity, before he says "oh fuck it" and squeezes the trigger himself...
>
> I'd defend Eminem's original version on artistic grounds. The back-and-forths in the record are grounded in real life—Dre's punching of Dee Barnes, Em's battle with his ex-wife—and tweak the tabloid culture both men feed off, without

> claiming to be above it. They're funny, without sacrificing a moral awareness that extends to others. And they admit that a lot of the time, hey, evil wins."[43]

Eminem reserves much of his vitriol for his wife Kim. In 1997 when Eminem and Kim were separated and (he claims) she made it difficult for him to see his daughter he sat down and wrote the song "just the 2 of Us" about a father killing his baby's mother and cleaning up the mess with the help of his daughter: "Here, you wanna help Dada tie a rope around this rock?/ Then we'll tie it to her footsie, then we'll roll her off the dock/Here we go, count of three. One, two, three, wee!/ There goes Mama, splashing in the water/No more fighting with Dad, no more restraining order."[44] Kim did in fact have a restraining order against him at the time. He also went so far as to lie to his wife, telling her he was bringing their daughter Hailie to Chuckie Cheese while in reality she was taken to the studio to record her voice and play herself on the song.[45] Questioned about this song Eminem responds:

> "When she gets old enough, I'm going to explain it to her. I'll let her know that Mommy and Daddy weren't getting along at the time. None of it was to be taken literally. Although at the time, I wanted to fucking do it. My thoughts are so fucking evil when I'm writing shit. If I'm mad at my girl, I'm gonna sit down and write the most misogynistic fucking rhyme in the world. It's not how I feel in general, it's how I feel at that moment. Like, say today, earlier, I might think something like, 'Coming through the airport sluggish, walking on crutches, hit a pregnant bitch in the stomach with luggage.'"[46]

While critics and the public alike tend to be "forgiving" when it comes to the hatred of women expressed in Eminem's lyrics, often justifying the anger with discussion of his difficult childhood, they are (only slightly) less likely to forgive the homophobia he eschews. In one song Eminem says: "My words are like a dagger with a jagged edge/ That'll stab you in the head/ Whether you're a fag or lez/ Or the homosex, hermaph or a

trans-a-ves"/ "Hey, it's me Versace/ Whoops, somebody shot me/ And I was just checking the mail/ Get it? Checking the male?"; "Slim Anus?/You're damn right, slim anus/I don't get fucked in mine/ Like you two little flaming faggots"; "You faggots keep egging me on/ Till I have you at knifepoint/ Then you beg me to stop."

Thankfully strong protests from gay rights organizations such as The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), gay activists, and social scientists specializing in gay and lesbian issues have resulted in media attention to Eminem's hateful lyrics. However, articles critical of Eminem's lyrics are often focused primarily on the homophobic content while ignoring the misogynist content after merely mentioning it's existence, providing no further analysis. One might ask where are the feminist critics? Why haven't the feminist activists been questioned or quoted for any of these articles? Why are the articles critical of Eminem's misogyny confined to ***Ms.*** Magazine? [47] One answer, touched upon by Michael Hoyt in his article[48] is that critics, especially music critics, are deathly afraid of being considered "uncool." He quotes another critic who claims that music writers are so afraid "to give an inch to the Bill Bennett moralists of the world" that they champion the Eminems of the world. One could argue that at present, gay bashing has thankfully become unacceptable or "uncool" in the music world and is much less likely to be tolerated in music or music video than the normalized and often celebrated brand of misogyny practiced daily on MTV. While the feminist critics are alive and well, they are not given a voice by the media.

The record companies, radio stations, and consumer outlets however, will often place gay bashing and women hating on an equal footing. That is, deeming both to be harmless. This is evidenced in their contradictory methods of self-censorship when

promoting a "controversial" record. For example, one radio station trying to mask offensive lyrics bleeped out a derogatory term for blacks but left in a derogatory term for gays. Meanwhile, Eminem's record label has extensively edited some songs to produce an alternative album that can be marketed to children. References to drugs, violence and profanity have been removed. "Most anti-gay slurs were removed while a derogatory term for women remains, cropping up scores of times."[49]

Yet another important factor to consider regarding the near absence of feminist voices in the media is the now common, all pervasive label of "sexual prudery" attached to any one daring enough to publicly criticize the misogynist, sexually objectifying images of women in music, music videos, film and the like. The label of sexual prudery has been an extremely effective tool, unlike any other, for silencing criticism of sexually misogynist material. Perhaps it may be argued that one of the reasons critics of racially motivated hate material and anti-gay material are more successful is because they have not come up against as effective a weapon as "sexual prude" to silence their ideas. Once ideas are given the "sexual prude" label they are automatically negated, without further discussion. All too often feminist analyses of sexually objectifying images of women in media are, I believe, wrongly equated with the "moral" arguments of the religious right (another quite effective silencing tool) of which they have absolutely nothing in common. This association, coupled with the "sexual prude" label serves to effectively de-legitimize and render invalid any claim for serious intellectual discussion. In effect mainstream popular culture has relegated such criticisms to the scrap heap with other ideas considered out-dated, reactionary or, in the case of much younger consumers of popular culture, "unhip" and "uncool".

Music Critics or apologists for misogyny?[50]

At the close of the year 2000 I came across a small piece in Newsday with the boldface type headline "Eminem Honored." The short paragraph read in part: "Controversial rapper Eminem was named artist of the year by both the critics and readers of Rolling Stone magazine." More recently, Eminem was nominated for a Grammy award (in it's top category of "Album of the Year"). One important contributing factor of Eminem's popularity (among many others) may well be the consistent labeling of the rapper as "controversial" or "rebellious" rather than a "hatemonger" which is entirely more appropriate. This labeling is important, I believe, on several levels.

It is well known among those in advertising that young people are continually drawn to images of "rebelliousness", "danger", etc. It is no secret that advertisers spend billions of dollars each year trying to present their products to young people in this fashion. The tobacco and alcohol industries in particular are notorious for using this marketing method. Alcohol and tobacco advertisers try to appeal to the image of ourselves as young courageous rebels. According to Jean Kilbourne (1999):

> "The tobacco industry has spent a fortune on research designed to understand the psychology involved in getting young people to smoke. This research has found that people in their early and mid-teens are beginning to shape their self-image, to differentiate themselves from their parents and other adults, and that cigarette advertising can exploit this natural need by offering a destructive manner of rebellion..." (p.185).

Marketing music to young people is easier, one could argue, if the artist can be differentiated in some way from artists of earlier generations. In other words, they must be thought of as "edgy", "hip" or in someway "pushing the envelope" to use the tired

expression of our pop culture. One could argue that Eminem and others like him would not be as popular if it weren't for his "controversial", "bad attitude", "hard-core" label. According to Miller[51] there is a kind of "official and systematic rebelliousness that's reflected in media products pitched at kids. It's part of the official rock video worldview. It's part of the official advertising worldview that your parents are creeps, teachers are nerds and idiots, authority figures are laughable, nobody can really understand kids except the corporate sponsor." Likewise, McChesney[52] argues that real political critique of music is gone, but people still want controversy and conflict. Real conflict is replaced with "Howard Stern – Eminem stuff, a lot of misogyny, a lot of violence, which gives the illusion of conflict and tension and excitement without the real thing. It's just picking on the weakest members of society. That seems very controversial, and it's commercially viable, but it's not the real thing."

Other parallels to the commercial music industry become apparent. The tobacco industry spends millions on its public-relations campaign to convince people that smoking is a symbol of freedom and our "right to choose". They are:

> attempting to get even more mileage from this image by portraying public health advocates as antismoking fanatics who want to tell everybody else what to do (what R.J. Reynolds refers to as the "Lifestyle Police") and setting us against the courageous, independent, free-thinking smoker. The billions of dollars the industry has poured into advertising campaigns equating smoking with freedom have had an extra dividend: Critics of smoking are seen as enemies of freedom. For several years the tobacco industry has been running a very expensive public-relations campaign that equates smoking with freedom and the criticism of smoking with totalitarianism. (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 213).

This type of marketing ploy is consistently utilized in the commercial music industry in defense of many of its misogynist "products." Those who are critical of sexually violent and objectifying music videos or lyrical content are consistently

portrayed as being "pro-censorship", "anti-democratic" reactionaries. As we have seen earlier, the defense of Eminem by the majority of music critics, as well as the fans and the artists themselves, often entail the familiar slogan (divorcing the First Amendment from it's historical context) that we may not like what he is saying but he is entitled to his freedom of expression. The familiar argument often omits any mention of the public's right and/or social responsibility to speak out against speech that contributes to the continued oppression of and/or violence against women and homosexuals. Such a pat response also omits any mention of the very real problem of the lack of access to the media by those wishing to voice opposition. Often once such a First Amendment defense is raised, all criticism of content is silenced. This is what may be called a "paradox of free speech". A person presenting a critical analysis of a particular social issue will often be in danger of having their analysis silenced by their opponents merely by utilizing the standard issue line of attack; that is, accusing them of being "pro-censorship". Once this "pro-censorship" label has attached itself to the cultural criticism there is little hope of the criticism being taken seriously. The criticism becomes de-legitimized by the label. When a cultural criticism is given the "pro-censorship" label it is, in effect "silenced" and it thus becomes a type of "de facto" censorship used against the critic. In short, as I discuss in later sections of this chapter, our commercial media system does not *need* overt censorship. McChesney (1999) quotes George Orwell (in his unpublished introduction to Animal Farm) as saying that censorship in free societies is much more sophisticated and thorough than in dictatorships because "unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts dept dark, without any need for an official ban." (p. 110).

Interestingly enough, in all the articles criticizing Eminem appearing in mainstream publications that I have come across while researching this topic, I have not found one that actually proposes any kind of official censorship of his music. Yet each and every time an article appears which is critical of Eminem's misogyny and homophobia, twice as many appear by Eminem apologists proclaiming their love of "free speech" and deploring the critics for their "pro-censorship" stance. To cite one recent example, Bob Herbert, an op-ed columnist for the New York Times wrote a piece entitled "A Musical Betrayal"[53] in which he expresses his outrage over Eminem being nominated for a Grammy award in the prestigious "album of the year" category. Herbert describes Eminem as a "white rapper who has successfully burrowed his way to the nauseating depths of degradation and self-loathing pioneered by gangsta-rapping blacks[54]. "In Eminem's world all women are 'whores' and he is eager to rape and murder them." Herbert then clearly states "This is not about censorship. Eminem is making millions exercising his unassailable right to artistic freedom. But there is a legitimate question here about sanity...Album of the year? Only a lunatic could think this was the finest album of the year."

In response to this piece, the New York Times received several letters from readers praising Eminem for his artistic genius and criticizing Herbert for his "pro-censorship" viewpoints. Worse yet was the op-ed piece by Kelefa Sanneh which appeared on February 9 – a response to Herbert. Acknowledging the palpable hatred in Eminem's lyrics (as all music critics do before they begin to heap praise upon him) Sanneh says:

> "His lyrics are a barrage of invective: he refers to women and gay people with the crudest of slurs, and he seems to view murder and rape as recreational activities."

...and then the inevitable praise:

> "What tends to get lost in the hub-bub is the music itself. 'The Marshall Mathers LP' is filled with impish, instantly hummable beats that could be the soundtrack to a children's cartoon ... his lyrics are packed with internal rhymes, unexpected analogies and sharply observed narratives."

One must keep in mind that these are narratives about beating, raping and murdering women and homosexuals. Sanneh then places himself on the long list of music critics referring to Eminem as a "genius". This should beg the question; is the ability to find a plethora of words to rhyme with "bitch", "ho", "slut" and "fag" now evidence of artistic genius or is it evidence of the dragging down of standards brought on by the corporate concentration of media and its sole focus on increasing the bottom line?

Article after article defending Eminem commences with a discussion of how this "great talent" is being "attacked" by critics at every turn. But where is the evidence of all these so-called attacks? Try as I might, I had a very difficult time locating such articles. One would know they existed only by the second hand reference to them in the articles which applaud Eminem. The reader must keep in mind that the articles gushing with praise for Eminem were not found in so-called radical magazines or newspapers but in mainstream, politically moderate to conservative publications such as Newsweek ("he's arguably the most compelling figure in all of pop music"); the Washington Post ("[it] may be among the most objectionable albums ever to receive mainstream release, but that does not make it a bad album."); London's Daily Telegraph ("The new album from Eminem is absolutely outrageous. And I mean that in the best possible sense."); Entertainment Weekly (which declared the 'Marshall Mathers LP' to be "the first great

pop record of the 21st Century")[55]; as well as the New York Times articles previously mentioned.

As the Grammy awards drew near the articles defending Eminem grew almost hysterical in nature. One New York Times article by Jon Pareles was entitled "While Eminem is Attacked, Steely Dan Gets a Free Pass."[56] Pareles argues that music groups like Steely Dan often have lyrical content that is just as offensive as Eminem's; one song on their album refers to an affair with an underage girl and an attempt to pressure her into a threesome. Another tune is about a man propositioning his young cousin. Several things come to mind here: (a) it would seem reasonable to argue that there is a small difference between an "attempt" at sexual pressuring and Eminem lyrics such as:

> My little sister's birthday, she'll remember me
> For a gift I had ten of my boys take her virginity
> ("Mmm-mmm-mmm!)
> And bitches know me as a horny-ass freak
> Their mother wasn't raped, I ate her pussy while she was 'sleep
> Pissy-drunk, throwin' up in the urinal
> ("you fuckin' homo?")
> That's what I said at my dad's funeral. ("Amityville" (featuring rapper Bizarre).

And other lyrics such as:

> Bitch I'ma kill you!
> You don't wanna fuck with me
> Girls leave — you ain't nuttin' but a slut to me
> Bitch I'ma kill you!
> You better kill me!
> I'ma be another rapper dead for poppin' off at the mouth with shit I shouldn'ta said But when they kill me – I'm bringin' the world with me
> Bitches too!
> You ain't nuttin but a girl to me ("Kill You," a song about Eminem's mother)

(b) Steely Dan is hardly a popular fixture on the music scene with young people (i.e., MTV and VH1 do not even play their videos and "popular" radio stations do not play

their music. In fact, this is the first album Steely Dan has made in 20 years; and (c) perhaps it should have occurred to the author that Steely Dan's lyrics might also be an indication of the same misogynist backlash in popular culture that has produced Eminem. Rather than pointing to all the other musical artists whose lyrical content is hateful (yes, there are many) and then bemoaning the fact that it is only Eminem who is disparaged, why not engage in a critical analysis of the whole trend?

In an attempt to weaken the arguments of those who would oppose his insights, Pareles refers to Eminem's critics as "watchdogs of content" – an obvious reference to right-wing conservatism thrown in for discrediting purposes. Pareles then renders his own argument totally absurd by attempting an inane comparison of Eminem's songs to the 1997 Grammy award winner for record of the year, Shawn Colvin's "Sunny Came Home." He laments the fact that the song, "about a woman who takes revenge on an abusive husband by burning down the house" won a Grammy "even if it was pro-arson". Finally, Pareles gushes, "the music connotes comedy: bouncy keyboard lines, whiz-crunch sound effects... the fans may be better literary analysis than the horrified adults." Whether or not they are set to bouncy music, the lyrics are still about rape and murder.

The same day Pareles' article appeared in the Arts and Leisure section, another fawning article appeared in the New York Times Magazine.[57] Here the author, Mim Udovitch refers to the quality of Eminem's work as "superb" and writes "It is intentionally offensive, as many great works of art are..." He then goes on to argue that all the criticism of Eminem is really an attack on a white guy using a black medium:

> "...it is because he comes from a world that is not supposed to exist, the world of the white underclass. On a very, very, ugly level, it is because a white suburban kid identifying with Eminem is basically, as Eminem is regarded to have done,

> turning "black", thereby muddying the pools of cultural and racial class separation."

He makes an interesting point here and what is perhaps a very valid argument, (others too, have pointed out that black rappers whose lyrics are similarly misogynistic received little attention). However, as I mentioned previously, these facts should not be used as a tool of justification for misogyny in popular music. Merely pointing out all the others who gleefully sing of violence against women and gays is an attempt to bolster a poor argument for allowing Eminem's lyrics to pass uncriticized. In addition, it must be pointed out that Eminem's popularity far surpasses any of the other singers who he is compared with for such purposes ("The Marshall Mathers LP" debuted at No. 1 and sold 1.7 million copies in just one week, becoming the second biggest selling debut in history and the most successful by any rapper to date)[58].

Udovitch too falls back on the standard favorite by claiming that Eminem's critics fear that if he is allowed free rein, his music will "destroy civilization and corrupt American youth." (A not so subtle attempt to link feminists and gay rights groups with the conservative right and their attacks on rock and roll music in the 1950s.) Udovitch even has the impudence to compare Eminem to Elvis Presley! And once again we find Udovitch obeys the rules that other music critics adhere to and refers to Eminem as a "rebel" and a "great artist" who is "truly subversive" and "truly threatening" because, Udovitch claims, he is a child of a welfare family and thus speaks for the millions of others like him. He speaks about Eminem as if he expects him to lead some kind of revolution. But a revolution against whom? Women and homosexuals? Where earlier pop idols and rock and roll stars raged against those in positions of power or political

authority, Eminem reserves his brutal and violent lyrics for members of society that have traditionally been oppressed. If he is a rebel, exactly what is he rebelling against?

Aside from feminist and lesbian/gay publications, it was extremely difficult to find any genuine critical analysis of Eminem in mainstream media.[59] Two of the most insightful articles (by the same author) were not found on the newsstand but on an online magazine called "Salon.com.."[60] According to Boehlert:

> Not only have Eminem's foul lyrics not sparked a debate among serious music observers, they've barely even caused a stir. It'd be as if Bret Easton Ellis wrote the murderous "American Psycho" and no critic questioned his judgment or the book's content – and those who did pause briefly to consider the book's moral or social implications simply dismissed the consequences because: A) the story's only fiction and B) Ellis is a really, really good writer. That's basically what most music journalists have done as they eagerly explain away Eminem's psychopathic subject matter.[61]

Boehlert also points out that GLAAD (the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) has said the album "contains the most blatantly offensive homophobic lyrics we have ever heard. Ever." Such lyrics include:

> New Kids on the Block, sucked a lot of dick
> Boy-girl groups make me sick
> And I can't wait 'til I catch all you faggots in public
> I'ma love it [hahaha]
> ...
> Talkin' about I fabricated my past
> He's just aggravated I won't ejaculate in his ass
> ("Marshall Mathers")

According to Boehlert, "when you get done parsing the critics' language and logic about how it's all just satire, or cartoons, or Eminem's alter ego talking, the bottom line is that they've given Eminem a pass. (On this point we should note that it was Eminem, and not

his alter ego, who has been arrested twice for brandishing a weapon and has had an order of protection against him for domestic violence in the past.)

When Michael Greene, president of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences was questioned about Eminem being honored with Grammy nominations he, according to Boehlert, "simply reads off the standard Eminem apologist talking points." Greene commented that "[t]here is racism and homophobia in this country, and it's an artist's responsibility sometimes to throw things like that in our face in a way that [infuriates] everybody." Boehlert comments that "[h]is lame defenses were echoed elsewhere in medialand: While hyping Grammy's Eminem picks, VH1's Rebecca Rankin hit a new low: 'Some people didn't like what Shakespeare had to say.'" According to Boehlert:

> "It's interesting Greene threw "racism" into the mix when defending Eminem, since the topic has nothing to do with the "Marshall Maters LP" controversy. (The record's strictly an anti-woman, anti-gay thing.) Unless of course, you count the fact that it took a white artist to become the first hardcore rapper nominated for album of the year."[62]

Greene also relies on the stereotypical "rebel" defense discussed earlier, by arguing that "if music is to remain the voice of rebellion, it's got to continue to unnerve and upset parents." To this Boehlert replies, "[t]his is a warped conflation of rebellion – rock's great tradition – and oppression. Are parents upset that Eminem's lyrics are loaded with profanity and violence – or because their elementary school child came home distraught after being mocked as a "fag" by his Eminem-loving classmates?"[63] And finally, with respect to the nominating committee claiming it could honor the recording without honoring its message, Boehlert replies:

> "By the same logic, "Mein Kompf" could qualify for a Booker Prize. Maybe Grammy should have checked in with MTV to see what that Faustian bargain feels like. The music channel tried the same Eminem sleight of hand last year by endlessly pumping up the rapper's image while at the same time trying to distance itself from his raw message of hate."[64]

One final note about the music critic's defenses of Eminem and others like him. There appears to be some genuine confusion here between the expression of sexuality and the rape and murder of women. It would seem that the Eminem apologists we've been discussing believe they are somehow defending the musical artist's right to express sexuality (as with Elvis) against the conservative religious and moral crusaders and sexual prudes. This is quite disturbing from a feminist perspective as it represents the age-old conflation of rape and sex and the eroticisation of violence and murder of women. (*See* Barry, 1995; Bart, 1993; Sanday, 1996 and 1990).

Eminem Steals the Grammys

Several weeks before the Grammy awards it was announced that Elton John, who is openly gay, would be performing a duet with Eminem during the live broadcast. This obvious ratings ploy virtually guaranteed Eminem's position as the true "star" of the 2001 Grammys (whether he won a Grammy or not) and lent him the aura of credibility as an artist that he so sorely needed. It was also, I would argue, an obvious attempt by Michael Greene and others to "prove" to those who objected to Eminem being honored that he did not "really" hate gay people.[65] This somewhat transparent attempt to disprove Eminem's homophobia left me wondering if music critics would also use this twisted logic to claim that Eminem's performance with a woman would negate his misogyny .

Continuous, relentless hype concerning the performance drown out any brief, innocuous mention that may have been made in the press about the protests by gay and women's rights groups that were planned for the evening. In a Newsday cover article entitled "The Eminem Mystique"[66] which appeared right before the Grammy awards, journalist Letta Tayler in the unoriginal apologist fashion describes Eminem as a "master of irony and sardonic humor, which gives a cartoonish hue to his ghastly imagery." She also sadly predicts that Eminem would not win in the "album of the year" category and terms those responsible for not voting for him "chicken-hearted."

Although Eminem swept up the hip-hop awards, he did not walk away with the "album of the year" award. In the end, it didn't really matter. It was Eminem who was splashed across the pages of every newspaper the following day. His performance with Elton John was deemed the highlight of the show and was the focus of every article covering the Grammys. The *New York Times* even used a line from a popular Eminem song ("Your Attention, Please, ...") as a heading to its list of Grammy award winners. After quoting from Eminem's acceptance speech thanking everybody "who could look past the controversy" Neil Strauss of the *New York Times* claims that he went on to "prove that he is a family man by thanking his daughter and saying that he loved her." MTV, in its characteristic fashion, broadcast their coverage of the Grammy's the next day with their primary focus on obtaining quotes from other nominated artists praising Eminem.

A final note of interest concerning Eminem's duet with Elton John. Eminem performed his song "Stan" (the obvious choice to appease those pesky naysayers) which is a tale about an obsessed fan who ties up his pregnant wife, locks her in the trunk of his

car and then drives the car off a bridge killing both of them. At the end of the song Eminem responds by telling the fan (a little too late) to get help and not to take his lyrics too literally. The obsessed fan repeatedly says "shut up bitch" to his wife who is bound in the trunk. In fact, "bitch" references crop up several times while other terms such as "fuck" are bleeped out of existence.

The Invasion of the Pole Dancers

One of the things that are becoming immediately noticeable to pundits of popular culture is the similarity and borrowed imagery of pornography. From film to television and fashion to music video, porn imagery is all the rage. Teens and young women sport low slung jeans with the tops of G-strings high above the pants. In a New York Times Fashion section in October 2000[67] we are told that "fetish wear" is the new trend in fashion:

> "But behind all the foofaraw were darker and not unfamiliar strains of influence, specifically in clothes that made frank allusion to bondage, fetishes and sadomasochism... For the final look in his debut collection for the house of Yves Saint Laurent, Tom Ford expressed sensuality with a sculptured bodice reminiscent, critics pointed out, of an outfit Saint Laurent himself had shown long ago. But this corsetlike garment, unlike Mr. Saint Laurent's, was anatomically accurate down to the nipples, one of which was pierced. Similarly, Helmut Lang's New York presentation was filled with clothes whose straps and closures evoked other designers (Azzedine Alaia) and the sort of get-ups you'd see at XXX specialty stores."[68]

Cable television stations regularly show "soft-core" porn after 11:00 p.m, such as HBO's popular "series" "The G-String Divas" and advertising is often indistinguishable or distinguishable only by small degree, from porn (Kilbourne, 1999; Russell, 1998; Soly and Kurzbard, 1986). But it is the music industry, which specifically targets pre-adolescents, adolescents and young adults, that I will focus on here.

At the outset I would like to make note here that it is not my intention, nor is it the focus of my inquiry, to deliver a lengthy treatise on the different feminist interpretations of pornography nor to discuss the often contentious debates surrounding the issue. As I will point out below, I feel such debates are futile in the present culture of mass produced, marketed and packaged sexuality. However, for the purposes of the immediate discussion, I will note a commonly offered distinction between "erotica" and "pornography." Russell (1998) defines pornography as "material that combines sex and/or the exposure of genitals with abuse or degradation in a manner that appears to endorse, condone, or encourage such behavior... Erotica refers to sexually suggestive or arousing material that is free of sexism, racism, and homophobia and is respectful of all human beings and animals portrayed." (p.3). Steinem (1995) offers a similar distinction:

> "Look at or imagine images of people making love; really making love. Those images may be very diverse, but there is likely to be a mutual pleasure and touch and warmth, an empathy for each other's bodies and nerve endings, a shared sensuality and a spontaneous sense of two people who are there because they *want* to be.
>
> Now look at or imagine images of sex in which there is force, violence, or symbols of unequal power. They may be very blatant... They may be more subtle: the use of class, race, authority, or body poses to convey conqueror and victim; unequal nudity, that leaves one person's body exposed and vulnerable while the other is armored with clothes; or a woman by herself, exposed for an unseen but powerful viewer whim she is trying to please... But blatant or subtle, there is no equal power or mutuality." (p.238)

That the women surrounding the male artists in music videos are made to mimic the actions of women in porn is not really a new concept. Since the late 1980's to early 90's this style of video was popular with the so-called "big hair" heavy metal bands. A content analysis of MTV videos conducted by Sommers-Flanagan, et. al. (1993) found

that "(a) men appeared nearly twice as often as women; (b) men engaged in significantly more aggressive and dominant behavior; (c) women engaged in significantly more implicitly sexual and subservient behavior; and (d) women were more frequently the object of explicit, implicit, and aggressive sexual advances." (p. 745). Although there is no doubt that these findings would still hold true today, at present women's sexual objectification in music video has surpassed all past standards.

MTV's official anthem for its Spring Break 2000 was the "Thong Song," the R&B artist Sisqo's ode to women's thong underwear. In fact, so all-pervasive was this inane song in 2000 that in order to escape it one would have to turn off music videos and popular radio stations altogether. Putting the juvenile lyrics aside it is the video and its concomitant popularity that is of interest here. First, the focus of the camera is almost exclusively on the buttocks (naked with the exception of the thong of course) and breasts of the women, who play absolutely no role in the video other than to dance around Sisqo and thrust body parts at the camera. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to even glimpse the faces of these women. This focusing of the camera on body parts (to the exclusion of the person as a whole) has become highly fashionable on MTV (as well as in advertising, film, etc.) and is, of course, standard fare in porn. This camera focus is just one method used in these different, though quite similar, genres to reduce women to their body parts and create the objectified image that we are all so familiar with today.

Again, videos such as these are not limited to one artist or one style of music. Referred to as "booty" videos (for their emphasis on women's buttocks), a viewer could not watch music videos for an hour without coming across several of them. Some of the more popular one's such as Jay-Z 's "Big Pimpin" and Juvenile's "Back that thing up" as

well as any Kid Rock video, have the camera positioned in such a way as it would appear the camera operator is actually lying on the floor aiming the camera directly up towards the women's buttocks. Critics should take issue not with the question of sexual explicitness, but with the blatant objectification of women. Women's humanity is compromised when they are reduced to specific body parts. Again, as Russell (1998) aptly points out, what is objectionable about porn is its "abusive and degrading portrayal of females and female sexuality, not its sexual content or explicitness." (p.5) Unfortunately it is the sexual explicitness theme that is often picked up on when criticism is heard, thus feeding into the notion of all opposition to such material coming from the "religious right" and thus framing it as a "moral" rather than a political, feminist issue.

These so-called "booty" videos often incorporate yet another standard fare issue of many music videos: the pole dancer. Once seen only in porn, pole dancers crop up in so many music videos and appear so often on television during music awards shows as to become commonplace. Wearing nothing but a g-string and perhaps a bra (though typically topless with nipples blurred out or hands over nipples) they dance in music videos in exactly the same fashion as a porn video, that is, simulated sex around the pole and on the floor, etc. And like in porn, the camera is focused on the woman's crotch, breasts and buttocks. In one of Dr. Dre's music videos a pole dancer in a strip club has champagne sprayed all over her by the howling men in the club. Interestingly, it was at the height of this video's popularity when the attack on all those women occurred after the Puerto Rican day parade in Central Park (the women were sprayed with water or beer before being sexually attacked by dozens of men).

But it is Madonna's "Music" video that perhaps puts all other pole dancing, booty videos to shame (with the possible exception of Sugar Ray's latest). Known in the music industry and popular culture as nothing short of a trend-setter and master of originality, Madonna has reached such "God-like" status in the industry that music critics rarely do anything but praise her in glowing terms for anything she creates. In her "Music" video Madonna is dressed up like a pimp (in what critics decide is yet another one of Madonna's "brilliant" gender role reversals) riding around in a limousine with several strippers. Toward the end of the video they arrive at a strip club where g-string clad pole dancers abound. Madonna is then shown taking the role of a man at a strip club, taunting the strippers and cheering them on. She takes out a bracelet of some sort (which closely resembles a dog collar) and waves it in front of the strippers face, making the stripper sniff it and put it in her mouth. We also have a fine close-up camera shot of one stripper on the floor, buttocks raised in the air, with her hand coming through her legs massaging her genitals for the camera. Then as the stripper is gyrating, simulating sex on the floor, Madonna is whipping the stripper's buttocks with the bracelet and dollar bills. This imagery has been standard fare in porn for years. While the music industry pundits would have us believe Madonna is once again breaking all boundaries[69] and using her genius to empower women by taking on the male role, I would argue that there is nothing new or groundbreaking in this video at all. In fact, making women the aggressors against other women is a quite common theme in pornography (*See* Russell, 1998).

How does this not-so-subtle imagery effect the young women watching it? Is it a possibility that women who had negative reactions toward other pole dancing/booty videos are led to believe in their ultimate acceptability because now a female artist (and

Madonna at that) is jumping on the bandwagon and creating them? It would seem that MTV is very anxious to lend itself to this aura of acceptability.. When the video first aired to much fanfare, MTV showed various clips of other artists' and regular viewers' reactions to the video. Naturally there was not one negative comment, no voicing of any oppositional stance whatsoever. Rather, we heard the same "Madonna is brilliant", "Madonna reverses roles and empowers women" commentary that we are all so familiar with.

Porn to Rock

In 2000, VH1 (another music video station) came out with a special called "Porn to Rock." The show was to explore the relatively new phenomena of the connection between pornography and rock and roll. The show informed viewers of all the porn stars who appear in music videos, how many music videos use the same themes used in porn, and all the porn stars who are struggling to break into the music industry – complete with compassionate vignettes of their stories about how difficult it is to become a recording artist. Interspersed with these vignettes were brief glimpses of each star's porno films as they discussed how wonderful and empowering it was to be a porn star. Throughout the entire show scenes were shown from the videos mentioned above (and others) as well as scenes from porn flicks. This fact, coupled with the near total lack of any feminist or oppositional perspective, made the show seem like one long gratuitous pole dancing/booty video. Attention was also paid to popular rock stars and their love affairs with pornography. Blink 182, a very popular band who has a porn star on the cover of their album and also in their video, was described as "porn-loving" and Fred Durst, the lead singer of Limp Bizkit[70] talked about his appearance in a recent porn flick and his

dating porn stars. The perspective of this show can only be characterized as "the connection of porn and rock is an acceptable and good one, porn is healthy and natural, and any one who disagrees is obviously a prudish, politically conservative, right-winger." "Porn to Rock" never really questioned the legitimacy of the connection. The only small statement of protest came when host Rebecca Rankin (not noted for her feminist viewpoints) was interviewing a male porn star and promoter. He was surrounded by naked women (nipples blurred out of course), one of whom was on the floor on all fours as he threw slices of lunch meat at her buttocks (using it as a target and trying to get the cold cuts to stick on her.) Rankin asked, "don't you think its degrading to women to sit here and throw lunch meat on their naked butts?" To which he gave the stock answer about the women being willing to do it, etc. The show was so popular "Porn to Rock II" was produced several months later and MTV created similar programming called "Indecent Exposure".

The Corporate Connection

The present dominance of the corporate commercial mentality has undeniably altered the landscape of popular culture. Our profit driven, advertising-obsessed culture attempts to spoon feed us every new "trend" (be it in fashion, music, or politics) while simultaneously blocking any attempt by public citizens at disseminating oppositional discourse by means of a near total lack of access to the corporate-controlled media.

In 1956, C.Wright Mills argued in his classic work *The Power Elite*, that the vast concentration of power in American society was making a mockery of our democracy. While very true in 1956, it certainly pales in comparison to the present day situation. In *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988), Herman and

Chomsky give a comprehensive account of how an underlying elite consensus structures the news media. One of the functions of the mass media, they argue, is to "inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society (p. 1)". In order to accomplish this goal, systematic propaganda is necessary. This system of propaganda is difficult to see since *formal* censorship is absent. "This is especially true where the media...aggressively portray themselves as spokesmen for free speech and the general community interest." What follows below is a brief discussion of these trends and the effects of the corporate concentration of media into fewer and fewer hands.

The core premise of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was to eliminate restrictions on firms moving into other communications areas (phone companies moving into cable television, etc.) with the result being a massive corporate consolidation of the communication industry. In order to reduce competition and increase profit, media firms have merged and/or established joint ventures. In short, with the passage of the Telecommunications Act the FCC "gave away" the airways that the public is supposed to own and control, to a handful of multinational media conglomerates. Since the telecom Act, the number of television station owners in the U.S. has dropped by half.[71] With deregulation came a wave of media mergers that have created an intricate web of business relationships that now define our media system.[72] Such relationships also offer massive opportunities for cross promotion[73] and selling products among different companies owned by the same powerful parent corporation.[74] In 2000, the U.S. media system is dominated by fewer than ten multinational conglomerates: Disney, AOL-Time Warner, News Corp., Viacom, Seagram (Universal), Sony, Liberty (AT&T),

Bertelsmann, and General Electric (NBC). The top five most powerful: AOL Time Warner, News Corp., Disney, Viacom, Bertelsmann, and Vivendi Universal. (For a diagram of their holdings, *See appendix A*). This tightly knit community of owners is dominated by some of the wealthiest people in the world. Thirteen of the hundred wealthiest individuals in the world are media magnates.[75] On April 19, 2001, the FCC voted to eliminate the "dual network" rule, which had previously prevented one television network from buying another. The "cross ownership" rule, prohibiting a newspaper owner from also owning a television station in the same market is also due to be lifted (waivers to this rule have been granted in the past to Murdoch's News Corp. which owns WNYW and the New York Post).[76] While the FCC is supposed to guard and protect the public interest, FCC Chair Michael Powell has referred to broadcast corporations as "our clients" and has mocked the concept of unequal access to technology (often referred to as the digital divide) by saying "I think there is a Mercedes divide. I'd like to have one; I can't afford one."[77]

Another, and more recent, comprehensive account of the state of our media system comes from Robert McChesney's *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* (1999). It may be said that the core premise of his work is that our current media system buttresses our "neoliberal" democracy (a vacuous political culture which is only formally democratic). Neoliberalism, he argues, works best when there is a formal electoral democracy, but when the population at large is diverted from the information, access and public forums that are necessary for any real, meaningful participation in decision making. The problems begin when we realize that the media are now full participants in the corporate

community – in effect, they represent the interests of corporate America. The large firms mentioned above:

> "...are run by wealthy managers and billionaires with clear stakes in the outcome of the most fundamental political issues, and their interests are often distinct from those of the vast majority of humanity. By any known theory of democracy, such a concentration of economic, cultural and political power into so few hands – and mostly unaccountable hands at that – is absurd and unacceptable. On the other hand, media fare is subjected to an ever-greater commercialization as the dominant firms use their market power to squeeze the greatest possible profit from their product. This is, in fact, the most visible trend in U.S. media today." (p. 30)

One of the popular misconceptions tackled by McChesney is that the media are just giving people what they want. Although it may be true that demand creates supply, we must also acknowledge that supply creates demand. The media giants are averse to any risk taking and will continually return to what has been a commercial success in the past. Over time, this may create a demand in the fare that is commonly presented. Often, he claims, audience research is really a circular process whereby consumers are permitted to choose from the narrow selection of commercially profitable items that are already widely distributed. With tremendous financial pressures to keep costs down and not take chances, the standard route of the media will be to fall back on the attention-getting formulas of sex and violence that have worked for them in the past. "Programming that features lurid and infantile discussions of sexual behavior, like talk shows hosted by Howard Stern or Jerry Springer, cost virtually nothing to produce and does not need to "develop" an audience." (p. 34). Thus, even though the ratings for such programs may decline they will still make a profit due to their "next to nothing" production costs. This is not to say that quality programming does not exist. Some excellent fare will be produced because the media giants often utilize the talents of very creative people. If

these creative talents have enough commercial success they might be granted a larger amount of freedom to stray from corporate norms. This will always be an uphill battle however, since the nature of our commercial system mitigates against such creativity. Journalism is especially risk-averse. Commercial journalism has become less and less receptive to ideas critical of capitalism and "free market" ideology as well as progressive ideas and movements.[78] In addition, to avoid any controversy over determining what is considered a legitimate news story as well as to give the appearance of "impartiality" journalists rely on "official" sources as the basis for news stories (Thus, the police department, rather than a rape crisis center, will be used as the source of information. This gives those in a position of power the ability to influence what is covered in the news. Coupled with the fact that commercial journalism needs "new hooks" to justify a news story, long term issues requiring historical and ideological context (like racism, sexism or homophobia) that are of public concern will be left unexamined).

Our Corporate-Friendly First Amendment

The FCC and the appeals courts, departing from decades of Supreme Court opinions, are becoming increasingly more sympathetic to the free speech rights of corporations and more skeptical of the role of government in promoting diversity in the mass media. Earlier opinions by the Supreme Court and other courts sought to balance the limited First Amendment rights of corporations against the competing public interest responsibilities of the FCC in assuring a diversity of voices. Andrew Jay Schwartzman, president of the Media Access project, was quoted in the New York Times as saying "The erosion of these rules portends a troubling sameness and enables a cartelization in which a handful of owners with increasingly common interests have the ability to shape

public tastes, and less likelihood that one will be off the reservation."[79] What we must keep in mind for the purposes of this discussion is that the present interpretation of the First Amendment has only begun to take hold since the 1970s and goes against earlier case law and philosophical writings on free speech and democracy. According to McChesney (1999), radically different and far more democratic readings of the First Amendment are every bit as legitimate, but they have met with disapproval because they contradict the corporate, commercial domination of our society. He argues:

> "...the proponents of the newfangled corporate-friendly First Amendment insist that their interpretation alone represents the true meaning of free speech and free press. This new theology extends the logic of this "laissez-faire" First Amendment to include the rights of the wealthy to virtually purchase elections and the rights of advertisers to operate without government regulation. In short, this is a First Amendment for society's owning classes." (p. 258)

McChesney is also highly critical of the ACLU's absolutist position. In the first decades of the 20th century the ACLU and other civil libertarian groups began with a strong commitment to the protection of dissident political opinion as well as protecting labor activism from government harassment. The ACLU, in other words, was focused solely on protecting political speech.[80] The ACLU's present argument is that the First Amendment must be applied to *all* forms of speech including commercial (thus putting corporations on the same level as people) and the end result will be a grand marketplace of ideas. As long as the government is kept away from regulating any forms of speech then democracy will flourish. If campaign spending (or advertising, broadcasting, etc.) is an aspect of speech and if we attempt to regulate it than we are on the slippery slope to censorship. The ACLU argues that if business and commercial interests lose their First Amendment rights then liberals may be next. McChesney argues:

"But we have massive firsthand experience to show how absurd this claim is. In the past thirty years the First Amendment has been extended by the courts to cover vastly more areas – generally commercial – and our media and electoral systems may be the least regulated in the developed world. According to the ACLU laissez-faire formulation this should be the golden age of participatory democracy. But, in fact, this is arguably the low point in U.S. democratic participation. In many respects we now live in a society that is only formally democratic, as the great mass of citizens have minimal say on the major public issues of the day, and such issues are scarcely debated at all in any meaningful sense in the electoral arena." (p. 260.)

According to McChesney there are two fundamental flaws with the ACLU vision. The first is the notion that the government is the only antidemocratic force in our society. While government deserves constant vigilance, the corporate commercial sector is equally, if not more of a threat. Second, markets are not value-free or neutral. They will always work to the advantage of those with the most money and will always emphasize profit above all else.

This corporate friendly version of the First Amendment has been aggressively promoted by the media, advertising, and corporate lobbies who are always eager to eliminate any government regulation of their activities and "always quick to invoke high-minded principle to justify their self-interest." (p. 268). The corporate media giants will always fan the flames of absolutist First Amendment interpretations "using their immense resources to popularize the notion that a gulag-style, darkness at noon, media system was the only possible alternative to the corporate, commercial status quo. Hence any challenge to their power was a challenge to democracy." (p. 275).

It might also be argued that in the aforementioned climate (coupled with the increasingly depoliticizing effects of the media overall), the First Amendment has been de-clawed and reduced in the public discourse to be of concern only in all things sexual. Thus it is that we will often hear First Amendment discussion in the media with respect to Mayor Guiliani's misguided battles with city-funded museums over "decency" but not with respect to the commercial media silencing of advocates for the poor, labor activists or union officials, the FCC handouts to large multinationals, or most any progressive cause. Thus it was that very loud, vocal First Amendment commentary was found in defense of Eminem and other forms of speech oppressive to women and homosexuals but practically no First Amendment discussion with respect to the more pressing issue of the silencing of speech with each new corporate media merger. While Eminem and others are aggressively marketed to young people (due to the huge potential for profits), the rest of us argue over Eminem's First Amendment rights - and the media giants who market him (as well as pushing this depoliticized, corporate-friendly notion of the First Amendment) laugh all the way to the bank. The real issues remain obscured.

It is also noteworthy that anything that falls outside of the hegemonic sexuality being offered by popular culture is not deemed worthy of such First Amendment Protection. On May 17, 2001, the FCC issued a $7,000 fine to a Portland, Oregon, listener-sponsored radio station for playing a song called "Your Revolution" by Sara Jones claiming it violated decency standards. The song challenges the sexualization of women in rap music, and asserts "your revolution will not happen between these thighs."[81] Interestingly, the overt expressions of violent misogyny are virulently protected, while the challenge to it is not. Also, it is not insignificant that the FCC never

felt the need to fine all the mainstream, *corporate owned* radio stations playing Eminem's music while having no qualms about fining a small *listener-sponsored* station. This important incident went unnoticed by the mainstream press and the usual media pundits who are so concerned with censorship.

Corporate Porn

It might also be argued that the notion of the First Amendment put forth in popular culture as being the "protector" of all things sexual, is a very safe, convenient portrait. The media conglomerates have a large stake in promoting the First Amendment in this fashion. First, as was argued above, this takes the First Amendment out of the realm of overt politics where it is most dangerous to corporate media owners wishing to increase their profits and to promote their pro-business, anti-labor worldview. And second, since the largest media conglomerates now have more of a financial stake in the growth of the porn industry than do Larry Flynt, the Playboy empire, or any other "traditional" source of such material, it is quite rational for them to promote the First Amendment as the sole champion of sexual freedom.

The porn business generates $10 billion annual revenue with production of films growing tenfold in the last decade. The General Motors Corporation, the world's largest company, sells more porn films then the Hustler empire. EchoStar Communications Corp., the number two satellite provider (whose financial backers include Rupert Murdoch) makes more money selling porn films than Playboy does with its magazine, cable and internet businesses combined. AT&T owns the porn channel Hot Network and also owns a company that sells porn videos to nearly a million hotel rooms. AOL-Time

Warner, Liberty Media, the News Corp., Marriott International, Hilton, LodgeNet Entertainment, are all companies with a huge financial state in the porn business. For most large corporations there are sound business reasons to get into the highly profitable porn business. For example, unlike the distributors of mainstream Hollywood films, porn film distributors normally offer the programmer a split of 80 percent of the revenue, compared with 50 percent or less for routine films. Revenue-wise, porn is one of the biggest moneymakers for the large corporations.[82]

These facts portend some very interesting issues. For example, knowing the huge financial stake the corporate community has in the porn business, is it merely coincidental that many areas of popular culture such as fashion, music, film, etc. increasingly resemble porn? Or that these branches of popular culture are all owned by the same multinationals who in turn, make billions of dollars on pornography? Obviously answering such questions lies beyond the scope of this discussion.

For the purposes of this research however, I believe it is important to point out several things. First, I would argue that we need to get away from the often fruitless and divisive debates about pornography. Our focus in the present political and commercial climate should be on the corporate colonization of sexuality, how sexuality is packaged and commercialized for profit and the possible implications for the future. If for example, we find that there is a hegemonic sexuality being sold in which there is one predominant image of women and where such a view of women is exploited at increasing levels due to it's profitability (with dissenting views increasingly marginalized), this may speak to the possibility of increased levels of adversarial sexual beliefs as well as rape myth acceptance. The media portrayal of women must also be

viewed in conjunction with the decline in public service broadcasting and the domination of corporate commercial media discussed above. As the media become increasingly conservative due to the influences discussed earlier, less and less attention will be paid to progressive or feminist issues deemed too "risky" or threatening to profits. (*See*, Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

It is also important to point out that while the media may present us with all the negative imagery and commentary discussed above, women will very often resist, and view with a highly critical eye, such portrayals of themselves. This was often evidenced in the focus groups, as well as the previously cited research (Lanis & Covell, 1995) which found such imagery often brings the issue of exploitation to their attention. Also, in much the same way as some genuinely good programming may be found in commercial television, we can still find some very positive images of women (and strong female artists such as Melissa Etheridge and hip hop stars Missy Elliot, Lauryn Hill and Eve to name just a few) in mainstream culture. Such female artists often vocalize their opposition to the negative portrayals of women through their music. Finally, the above discussion should not be viewed as one giant media "conspiracy" by "bad" people controlling the mass media. Rather, it represents a conflation of business and conservative political interests and the rational decision making of a capitalist corporate culture in which profit reigns supreme. It also represents just *one* factor (although I believe a very important one) in why popular culture is going in a more politically conservative direction.

With all these issues in mind, I now turn to the focus groups.

The Focus Groups

While the women in the focus groups had varying opinions about the effects of mass media ranging from the belief that mass media has no effect on the public mentality to having a very negative effect, there were two common threads: most participants did not express the belief that such images of women were positive or empowering but felt it was the responsibility of the individual parents to teach their children properly.

In Focus group number 2, the Bronx teenagers may agree that many images of women are negative, but they often view this as "art imitating reality" and voice the belief that "we" only have ourselves to blame since "we" are the ones who produce such fare. In the conversation below they also explicitly reject the simplistic cause-effect relationship while acknowledging that such imagery bothers and concerns them. They are (rightly so, I believe) offended by the notion that young people see something on television and go out and do it. These young women seem to be quite aware that such relationships are far more complex.

> [I ask] What do all of you think about the way women are portrayed on television, videos...
>
> [Cathy] Because TV gets it from what's going on in real life. They like, mostly all TV shows and movies are based on what happens in real life.
>
> [Jane] Well I don't go to movies like that. It makes crime seem like an art. It makes it seem like this person has this...
>
> [Diane] The parents should get more involved with the children. I mean for anything, they should get more involved with the children. Cause, I don't know, if you're letting you child hang out there friend, you know their friend ok. But you should go further than that. Know their friends background and know who their child is hanging out with. I mean, I mean, you know, be a parental figure but also be a friend type.
>
> [Christine] It comes down to the type of person that you are, what you've learned, what they've taught you. If I had a son that would be my constant fear, him going around doing something like that. I wanna know I made the right decision, teaching him right and wrong. You gotta know right and wrong.
>
> [Jane] I think definitely MTV and TV play a role because they just think women are, they're just so disgusting and disrespectful towards me as a woman. But like, I think that basically it starts in school. Because parents are there but school is 8 hours of your day, plus more. And if they have classes in school

teaching us, you know, this has happened. This could happen to you. These are things that you should care about.

[Rosa] We are the people that go and make the videos so it's made by us anyway. It's not like some people from another planet come and put these videos out. We put them out ourselves.

[Shanelle] This porno for instance. You think are men gonna watch sit up there and pop it in [the tape] and say "oh I feel like getting married". No. He feels like being a freak [laughter]. I'm not saying it's encouraging you to be a doggone murderer or go and try to, but you sittin up there and ...

[Diane] Well what happened at the Puerto Rican day parade. They used the example of the Dr. Dre video for why those things happen. It doesn't, a person shouldn't have the right to decide if it's right to do or if it's not right to do. The people bring it out there so it's not basically letting, it's not somebody else putting it out there. So if something happens they can't just blame it on one specific person. Cause I was looking at MTV and they were saying that they were blaming Dr. Dre for, and it was all filmed in a strip club, what happened and..

The conversation above is also interesting in that it reflects what I believe to be a very "American" way of thinking as regards parents bearing the primary responsibility for how their children, act, think, etc. There is far less of a conviction in any social or cultural responsibility with respect to the upbringing of children as there would be in some European countries for example (This, I believe, is also reflected in our childcare, and other policies concerning parental support for raising children. (*See*, for example, Crittenden, 2001.)). This is not to say that an understanding of social responsibility is absent. Clearly these participants and those in the other focus groups are grappling with this issue and the members of the suburban groups 3 and 4 return over and over to this theme (*see* pages 187, 189-90).

Continuing with the Bronx teenagers, the participant below expresses conflicted emotions about Eminem's music. She first offers the disclaimer heard repeatedly by the music critics in defense of Eminem that his work his "art" but is keenly aware of the inherent hatred and hypocrisy in the song "Stan".

[Lucia] I wouldn't you know, I don't hate rap or anything like that or [inaudible] because I think its an art. But me, I was watching the Eminem video about the, "the I killed my wife" video [people call out yeah "stan"] and I say, "dude, you contradicting yourself. You see how that music, your music is affecting the guy which is killing the wife and you're singing about, 'no, I don't effect that'" It's like saying like, o.k., "I sing about killing people and but it doesn't matter. I don't mind. I listen to it. And he puts women down like their shit, you know. And I know that's his art. And I listen to Eminem and I listen to all the people that are saying that we [women] shouldn't have rights and stuff. But it just, it does get to you.

[Tanisha] And like guys today, they know all the lyrics to all these rap songs. And I'm like "do you know what you're singing?" And they're like, "it doesn't matter." Like I was walking by the train, I was waiting for the train, and this guy was rapping to Eminem and the goes "BITCH SHUT UP!" and I'm walking and I'm like, o.k. "What the fuck are you saying to me" And he goes "no, no man. I'm listened to Eminem man." And I'm like, "well you shut your mouth" [laughter]

[Anne] But it's like, if you're a psycho, you're gonna kill no matter what. Like that guy in the video. He was actually a psycho path from the get go, he just used Eminem as an excuse, you know to vent all his... you know. He was insane so I mean, common, he was gonna be influence anyway.

[Lucia] Well I'm not saying that music should be all about peace and love because that would be boring. But it should be like a better message. It's like, you're an artist, show us something different. Like Picasso was one of the best artists in the world. He used women for his artistic beliefs. He used the woman as "that's my art." I didn't like that at all [the art] and I don't like him but you know he made like a difference... it's just like I don't know.

In suburban focus group number 3, we again see the strong focus on individual and parental responsibility. The members try to come to terms with the limits of parental control as well as bringing issues of social responsibility to the table.

[Noel] That's why I'm thinking, like education wise in the schools where you talk about differences in sexes and you know, feelings and emotions. And, you know, all those things. Start early. Not now. We're having health now and learning about all those things and how old am I? People should learn much earlier in school. They read teenager magazines. They look at all television shows...

[Christy] Yeah, but you could learn it , but then, you know you're hearing it from TV how you should be, how you should dress, so...

[Vera] But that's what I'm saying. Start early. Give them the right feeling and then make them think critically about what they see on TV and then maybe they would say "no it's not right." Make them think about it.

[I ask] Well that was going to be may next question. What influence do the media have...?

[Dina] Total.

[Noel] So much violence.

[Dina] The songs that you hear. The videos that you see.

[Marissa] It's annoying. Very annoying what they say. No. I don't want to hear my children say that. I hear them say that "I wanna lick you from your head to your toes" "Shake your ass". I don't want to hear them say that.

[Christy] That's that new one. The Shaggy video.

[Gloria] The children love that song.

[Dina] My seven year old niece was singing that song "caught me buck naked on the bathroom floor."

[laughter]

[Dina] And I was like "shut up" don't sing that!

[Cindy] See, I think you could be taught all this stuff by your parents or you know you go to church, whatever it may be, you can be taught morals and everything else but then when you become a teenager you see all this stuff all around you and you see these videos that go against what you were taught. And there's an internal struggle. How you should behave around your friends and how your expected to behave according to your parents or how you were brought up.

[Vanda] But it deals more with the parents. When I was growing up. I was allowed to talk about "what's this and what's that". I knew what an orgasm was or whatever because I could honestly and openly talk to my parents. So when I went outside in school I wasn't like "oh wow, I wanna try that." So it depends on what your parents bring to the table.

[Vera] I think it's the women on the videos that exploit themselves . They allow themselves to be viewed as a sex object. And they constantly move their bodies in a sexual manner. So everything, it's not about dancing anymore. It's about being in bed, it's about sex. Even the commercials today are about sex.

Below, Cindy notes the problematic implications of "unequal nakedness" and expresses the belief that such imagery makes a man less likely to see you as a whole human being. The passage is also interesting in that Cindy does not appear to have a problem with nakedness per se, nor with the expression of female sexuality, rather it is the sole focus on female nakedness that concerns her.

[Cindy] That's why the men are gonna try and get what they can. They don't want to try and get inside your mind. They don't care if you're smart or whatever. They say "oh your body parts look good to me, that's what I want." So it doesn't allow them to get into your mind and see what you're all about. They don't care about you as a human being. The other thing unfortunately, I think the

big disparity, people always, maybe they laugh at me but women throughout the years have always been, like they say women's figures are beautiful and they've always... It's never men. You never see naked men in videos or movies. Never.

[Noel] That's right.

[Cindy] And I think it should be fair and square. And then they say "oh, well men's bodies are ugly." You know, there's women that might want to see it. I just think that women should have that opportunity. You know what, half the time how many people here have gone to a movie and there's gotta be a woman's body part shown to you.

[Dina] Yes.

[Noel] That's so true.

[Cindy] And women have two different things they can show but men only have one. And you can't see it unless it's in a porno movie. I'm not advocating that. I'm just saying there's disparity when it comes to nudity.

[Marissa] It's true.

[Noel] Yes. Like you'd be shocked if you saw a man's penis on TV.

[laughter]

[Christy] When that happened at the Puerto Rican day parade there was a video.....

[Fran] Oh that's the Dr. Dre video.

The members of this group are in general agreement as to the negative impact of certain images of women in media and often raised their voices in anger. Their acknowledgement below of any social impact will again be tempered with the theme of ultimate parental responsibility in the passage following it.

[I ask] Do you think these images have an effect?

[several at once] Yes.

[Noel] Definitely.

[Gloria] Videos have a strong impact on the way people see things.

[ ] Well, everything, pictures, commercials.

[Vera] That's why you have to teach your children to have your own ideas, have your own personalities. Don't do that.

[Marissa] Just because everyone else is doing it...

[Vera] Sit down and watch it with them. Explain to them this is only a video, or this is what people do to enjoy themselves. You can choose to be like them or you can choose to be your own person.

[ ] If you all think it has a negative effect, what, if anything, do you think should be done about it?

[Dina] Censorship. Censor them. I mean stop them from having strippers you know. Have decent looking women in the videos like doing some actual

dancing, like you know back in the 80s. They were dancing. Not half naked shaking everything all around.

[Noel] What does it have to do with the music anyway? Don't you like the music or the lyrics? Why do they need...?

[Cindy] Yeah. You might like the music and then you see the video... But then the people who talk about free speech are gonna say "well, you know, common now, this is what America's about. We should be allowed to show this kind of stuff."

[Dina] I agree with you.

And then they return to the parental responsibility theme:

[Noel] I'm thinking so much about the children because they don't understand. They cannot understand. There's certain things that they don't understand. They have to learn it. And they see all these things. To them it doesn't make any sense.

[Vanda] Videos like that, I think that maybe they should play them later on at night. Instead of like 5:00 or 6:00 when they know kids are coming home watching TV, doing their homework. They should show them later on at night. Or even, these people, they have so much money, why can't they make two videos? Why can't they make a clean cut version? Cause they do it with CDs and stuff. You know people can buy a clean version. How come they can't make a clean version and then maybe later on at night they can play the nasty version.

[Cindy] well the alternative to that is that the parents are just gonna have to monitor what their kids are watching.

[all voices of agreement]

[Christy] Right. I think parents should watch what their kids...

[Vera] That's the bottom line.

[ ] Right.

[Christy] Or have them read a book.

[Marissa] But what if they're at work? Or the kid's at a friends house?

[Vera] If the parent monitors what the kid watches then the kid will know "this is not correct". You just don't say to the kid "o.k. don't watch that." Teach them why...

[ ] Yeah. I know what you're saying.

[Vera] ...Let me ask you a question. If you had a cake, a nice chocolate cake with icing. Wouldn't your taste buds, you're just sitting there watching that cake. You didn't taste it. But you're just sitting there watching it. Your taste buds will eventually grow to want to eat that cake. So if you're sitting there letting your children watch this stuff sooner or later their behavior will mimic what they see. So if you're telling your child that this is incorrect and your explaining to them the dangers and the pitfalls of that, that child will go outside the house and remember what you told them.

[Dina] Not really.

[Cindy] If you have a good relationship. If they respect you and believe what you say.

[Vera] If you have a nice relationship with your child you explain to your child the dos and the don'ts and your not doing it yourself, you will have a really nice relationship with your child. They will not do wrong.

Below, Cindy attempts to convince the group that parents cannot have total control over, or influence on, their children. She is not entirely successful.

[Cindy] But when they keep seeing the video it's almost like they become desensitized to what the shock value of it is. You see it the first time you might be shocked. But if they see it so many times, they might come to say you know, "that's normal. I've seen that a couple hundred times"

[Noel] Again, but if you have that relationship.

[Vera] Teach them to pick your friends wisely.

[Fran] Or tell them to teach their friends its not good.

[Noel] Although they may be made fun of. You never know.

[Vera] So change your friends.

[Cindy] What if they rebel against what you're trying to teach them, even if you have a good relationship? At some point in time, it's not everybody that's gonna listen. What if they rebel and they say "oh whatever. My parents are old. They don't know." You know what I mean.

[Vera] They will rebel but eventually those kids will go back to what their parents taught them. So in the end, whether it takes 10 years or 20 years or 1 year that child will remember what he was taught.

[some skeptical voices]

[Marissa] Most cases.

[Vera] I think it starts when they're very young. You have to constantly reinforce your relationship with your child from an early age. And if they learn to respect you and if you say to them "tell me the truth no matter what the case may be, you have to come to me no matter how bad you think something is," you know, they'll realize.

In suburban focus group number 4 we see another rejection of the cause-effect relationship. Interestingly, however, when the common theme of parental responsibility crops up again, it is Sandra, the only parent in the group, who expresses some reservation that the media will have no effect on children as long as they are raised properly.

[I ask] Do you think there's any connection between images in the media and....?

[Nina] It gives you ideas.

[Brenda] Like I hate when people do something bad, like a shooting at school and they blame it on Marilyn Manson.

[voices of agreement]

[Brenda] You know, you don't have to do what he says.

[Billie] You have to be watching what you're kids are watching.

[Nina] Yeah, but sometimes parents don't have control. I'm 20. My mom's not gonna tell me what to watch or what to wear.

[Billie] I'm talking about when you're much younger

[Sandra] Well, it's not the 20 year olds that are going shooting in the schools, it's the 12 and 14 year olds.

[Brenda] But you have to know that what's on TV is not true. You need to learn that it's not true and if it's wrong you shouldn't be doing that. You can think about it but don't act on it.

[Sandra]. I think that children are exposed to certain things at a very young age that they really shouldn't be exposed to. My 8 year old son loves Brittany Spears. LOVES Brittany Spears! Loves music. Loves watching all of the female singers. Destiny's child was doing the making of the video yesterday. I mean, you know, he's commenting on women's breasts and women's butts, like "mom, they're nice" and I'm like "yeah, they're big." Now, it's totally, he loves music. I wouldn't let him watch a Marilyn Manson video but he has an 11 year old sister and we also have a baby...

[Billie]. They can't blame it on video games because there's many many children out there that don't do it. That don't even think about it.

[Sandra]. But a child of 14 or 15 has a different vantage point. What they're seeing is the school, their parents, their friends and the media. That's their world. So I think we have to say that the media is having some effect on them. They're teaching them something.

Perhaps one of the more interesting and revealing themes to come out of these discussions are how the members consistently return to the matter of parental involvement. This notion is trumpeted daily in the media and meshes nicely with the American cultural obsession with individuality and the emphasis on personal over social responsibility in all areas of life – be it poverty, unemployment, single motherhood, daycare, health insurance, etc. This stubborn American refusal to see ourselves as anything but "individuals" who are solely responsible for our own fate, has been cited as one of the reasons Americans refuse to acknowledge that advertising has any effect on them (See Kilbourne, 1999). These conversations also made clear to me the necessity of

including more parents in the focus groups in order to discern any differences of opinion with respect to this issue, that actual child rearing experience may bring.

Overall, I would argue that the above discussions indicate that the focus group members were somewhat critical of the images of women in music videos. Rather than being accepting of the stereotyped sexualized depictions of women, most actively resisted such imagery (although there was disagreement over where the ultimate responsibility for said imagery resides).

Chapter 7

Rethinking Rape Myth Acceptance

According to the Justice Department, a woman is raped somewhere in the United States every 90 seconds. Approximately 1.9 million women are subjected to sexual assaults or battering every year – which works out to an attack on a woman every 15 seconds. Rape also has the lowest conviction rate of any violent crime. These facts point to the importance of studying not only the motivations of sexual offenders, but to the cultural and social foundations for rape supportive beliefs as well as the changing public definitions of what constitutes a "victim."

This study is an attempt to gather insight into some of the diverse ways a selected group of women have interpreted sexual violence, defined the concept of "victim" as well as to explore their varying levels of rape myth acceptance or rejection. The present study represents somewhat of a methodological departure from previous work on attitudes toward sexual violence in that, by using focus groups we gain valuable insight into the ways in which such belief systems are subject to negotiation during the process of social interaction. As I discussed in chapter 2, the creation and acceptance of the myths surrounding sexual violence are a social and cultural production and, I would argue, should be analyzed in a way which is sensitive to such social categories as well as possessing the capacity for revealing "taken-for-granted" assumptions and beliefs. A group discussion, I believe, more adequately reflects the social nature of knowledge production than a mere collection of individual interviews or questionnaires. In short, it is a method that does not isolate individuals from their social context. (*See* Wilkinson,

1998). It demonstrates that attitudes towards sexual violence are not fixed and unchanging. Rather, they are fluid and often subject to reinterpretation based upon the attitudes and opinions of those they interact with.

In addition, while previous research has used selected variables such as race, religion, etc. as it relates to RMA, the analysis tends to occur in a social vacuum. That is, there is little placement of such beliefs in the context of the cultural environment in which such belief systems are formed. Again, that cultural environment is also one based on social interaction with others as well as interaction with popular culture. As media of all types, (television and print news, music, film, and other forms of entertainment, as well as the internet) play more and more of central role in our lives, we cannot exclude such factors from any analysis of the subject. By limiting the focus of inquiry to several background variables we are not grasping the larger social climate in which such belief systems are formed. The way in which said belief systems are socially constructed and what factors contribute to the formation of rape supportive attitudes are just as, if not more, important than merely identifying their presence within particular categories of individuals.

The women involved in this study often perceived sexual violence in quite different ways. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Liz Kelly (1987) used the concept of a continuum of sexual violence to illustrate the extent and range of sexual abuse in women's lives. She uses a wide range of experiences, including sexual harassment, pressure to have sex and coercive sex in her analysis. The concept draws attention to the idea that women define sexual violence differently and its impact upon them varies. Thus we may have one woman experiencing an incident of sexual harassment at work as

extremely damaging and upsetting and one with similar experiences who does not suffer any negative repercussions. Likewise, one might find a woman who has had an experience which meets the legal definition of an attempted rape but does not identify it as such and another who defines an incident as rape when it clearly would not meet the present legal definition. Thus the concept of "victim" was often open for negotiation during the focus group discussions evincing some widely varying opinions as well as some quite divergent beliefs on "acceptable" and "unacceptable" victims (i.e., some felt prostitutes and married women could not be considered rape victims, other participants felt strongly that they could be victims). The wide range of opinions may also be considered evidence of the necessity of meeting the socially and culturally acceptable definitions of being a victim of sexual assault and not merely the legal definitions in terms of criminal prosecution of rape cases.

The focus group members also differed in the ways in which media driven imagery of sexual violence was interpreted, accepted or rejected. Many participants, it seemed, incorporated popular media driven conceptions of sexual violence into their belief systems while others actively resisted such imagery. In some cases their beliefs mirrored common rape myths continually found in popular culture while at other times they rejected such rape myths, often using examples from their own experiences to disprove them. This divergent and often conflicting relationship with media conceptions of sexual violence and the portrayal of women in general points to the multi-dimensional and interactive character of the public's involvement with the media. While it did seem at times that some participants easily accepted what I would consider rape supportive media fare and/or negative imagery of women (possibly supporting the existence of an

increasing desensitivity to such issues), there was also a strong indication that said media conceptions increased levels of resistance and brought out anger at the way in which women were being portrayed. In short, the way in which the public perceives sexual violence is important, not only in that it effects all aspects of the criminal processing of those accused of sexual violence, but it also effects the social and cultural support systems available to those who have experienced sexual assault. The more media acceptance of increasing levels of sexual exploitation and abuse in the news and all forms of entertainment the more possibility of public desensitivity to issues of sexual violence. Again, there is also the possibility that with the increased prominence of such imagery there may also be increased levels of resistance on the part of women. My main concern would be how such resistance will make its way into public consciousness. As I discussed in Chapter 6 the concentration of media into fewer and fewer corporate controlled, advertiser-driven hands, will have the effect of decreasing the public capacity for such resistance. I would agree with the arguments made by Herman and Chomsky in 1988 that any progressive social movement without major media support and subject to press hostility will face a severe uphill struggle. Advertisers will not patronize those that they consider a danger to their interests. Thus, as long as negative, sexually exploitative imagery of women, as well as violence in general, continue to be financially profitable the voices of those challenging such imagery will most likely go unheard.

Although the present research was exploratory in nature and was done with a small sample, the results point to some possible avenues for further research. For example, the Bronx teenagers seemed to be the most likely group to reject long-standing rape myths. More extensive research would be needed in order to determine if this was

the result of class differences, their younger age, or the fact that the majority of these young women personally knew someone who was the victim of sexual violence. The fact that they were acquainted with a victim may also explain their disinclination to believe that rapists are typically strangers (they appear to have rejected the characteristic news slant on the primacy of stranger and gang rapes). Also, the fact that the ideas under discussion were continually open for negotiation and renegotiation in all the focus groups would attest to the appeal of conducting further research in a group setting. This study also indicated that the majority of women in all four groups expressed a fear of rape and that some utilized social distancing techniques to feel more secure.

Ideally, further research should attempt to use a larger sample with more variation in age. Although time and money did not permit in this case, additional research should allow for follow-up sessions or substantially increased time allotments in which to examine a host of motivating factors. For example, the present research gives every indication that a multiplicity of factors are involved in the participants beliefs about rape – so many that we should not try to pigeon hole them into a few standard categories. (i.e., the effects of knowing someone who was the victim of sexual violence, beliefs about gender roles in general, fear of rape, the effects of media interpretations, etc.) A useful future study would be able to examine these factors in addition to the participants' world-view, their belief in the just-world hypothesis, as well as background variables such as race, religion and social class. Such a study would present a clearer, more coherent picture of how rape supportive belief systems are formed and maintained.

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[1] Pseudonym

[2] *See* Burk, Martha and Kirsten Shaw. "How the Entertainment Industry Demeans, Degrades, and Dehumanizes Women" in *New Directions for Women* 21, no. 6 (November-December 1992).

[3] Without making mention of her reasons why, Alice Vachss (1993), former sex crimes prosecutor in Queens County, chose to have more men than women on her juries. "The ADAs at SVB already knew by heart the basic profile of the jurors that I wanted for sex-crimes trials: men in their forties to fifties...Mostly what I wanted to avoid was collaborators-anyone who would take a tolerance for rapists into the jury room and express it in a verdict." (p. 198)

[4] Benedict (1992) argues that women reporters do not necessarily do a better job at reporting sex crimes than men. "More important than the reporter's gender, I found, was that reporter's understanding of sex crimes and rape myths. A myth-saturated woman will be just as insensitive to the subject of rape as a myth-saturated man..." (p. 6)

[5] The St. John's University rape case is a good example. Here a young woman went to the home of a male friend on the Lacrosse team, was plied with alcohol and ganged raped by all the occupants of the house while drifting in and out of consciousness. The defense argued that the victim willingly participated in "group sex" and the jury agreed. Race also played a part in this case. The victim was Black, the offenders, White. This case adhered to the general rule that conviction rates in cases with Black victims and White offenders are much lower than for White victims and Black offenders (*See* LaFree, 1989).

[6] It is most interesting that this participant tells the group that women ***have*** to dress this way, even reiterating this idea again by saying "they just have to." We can perhaps surmise that she is referring to the pressure on young women to conform to the fashion trends pushed daily in many aspects of popular culture or the need to appear attractive to men in a way that is currently popular and acceptable. Unfortunately, due to the rapid-fire pace of the discussion and overlapping comments by members typical of a large group, I was unable to interrupt at that point to question her.

[7] The interesting exception to this rule is focus group 3. Although this group tended to answer other questions more conservatively than the other groups, on the issue of the death penalty they were more liberal. They were almost evenly split with respect to their support of the death penalty while in other groups only 1 or 2 members were opposed.

[8] Relations of power play a significant role in victim-blaming. A Black man walking about an upper class white neighborhood (known to be hostile to other racial groups) might be blamed for a violent act committed against him. Likewise, a white man walking around a Black neighborhood in the middle of the night may also be faulted for whatever befalls him. In fact, one can think of many socially discreditable conditions that may lead to victim-blaming (homosexuality, drunkenness, manner of dress, etc.) All of these would apply to men *and* women. But *gender* as the principal justification for blaming a victim applies primarily to women (and also, I would argue, transgendered individuals).

[9] This is also true of other unwanted circumstance or conditions such as serious illness (i.e., "he got cancer because he did not take care of his health" or "she got a heart attack because she never exercised") or poverty ("they're poor because they just don't work hard enough"), etc.

[10] Sexual assault is the only exception he notes here. Obviously this exception is true of other violent acts committed primarily against women such as domestic violence.

[11] Since all the suburban groups contained a mix of races and ethnicities but were from similar social classes, I am lead to believe that class, as well as the fact that they were all suburbanites, was more relevant to their perceptions of crime.

[12] The treatment of high profile rape cases are a glaring example. The rape trials of William Kennedy Smith, Mike Tyson, Marv Albert and others (as well as the televised Clarence Thomas hearings and the

murder trial of O.J. Simpson) were entertainment spectacles which left little or no room for serious, thought-provoking public discourse on violence against women.

[13] See, for example, Gabler, Neal. (1998). **Life: The Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality.** NY: Vintage Books.

[14] Chivers, C.J. and Kevin Flynn. "35 Scary Minutes: Women Tell Police of Assaults in Park." ***New York Times***, June 13, 2000.

[15] Chivers, C.J. and William K. Rashbaum. "Inquiry Focuses on Officers' Responses to Violence in Park After Parade." ***New York Times***, June 14, 2000.

[16] Rashbaum, William and C.J. Chivers. "Police Release Photos of 7 Men Sought in Melee." ***New York Times***, June 15, 2000.

[17] Rashbaum, William K. "Six Identified in Videos Are Arrested in Central Park Sex Attacks." ***New York Times***, June 16, 2000.

[18] Nagourney, Adam. "Buchanan Hints "Cop-Bashing" Contributed to Assaults in Park." ***New York Times***, June 16, 2000.

[19] Barstow, David and C.J. Chivers. "A Volatile Mixture Exploded Into Rampage in Central Park." ***New York Times***. June 17, 2000.

[20] Barstow, David and C.J. Chivers. "A Volatile Mixture Exploded Into Rampage in Central Park." ***New York Times***. June 17, 2000.

[21] Bumiller, Elisabeth. "Assailed From Both Flanks, a Law-and-Order Mayor Can't Win." ***New York Times***. June 18, 2000.

[22] Chivers, C.J. "17th Man Arrested in Park Sex Attacks." ***New York Times***. June 19, 2000

[23] Benedict (1992), in her study of high-profile rape cases, found that opinion pieces and columns were the only forums in which women were consistently more enlightened than men in their treatment of sexual violence.

[24] In one of Benedict's interviews with "Kaufman", a ***Times*** journalist, he suggested that "sexism is not news any more because it does not make people as angry as racism."

[25] Benedict (1992) also discusses a lengthy article in ***Newsweek*** entitled "The Mind of the Rapist" in which there was not one single reference to gender roles. Instead it answered the question of why men rape in the usual terms of individual pathology or with the old notion that rape is motivated by lust.

[26] ***Time*** Canada, October 6, 1997, Vol. 150, Issue 14, p. 28. "Oh, No! For the Yes Man."

[27] ***Newsday***. Friday, October 24, 1997.

[28] ***People***. October 13, 1997. Vol. 48, Issue 14, p. 59.

[29] Gibeaut, John. ***ABA Journal***, Dec., 1997, Vol. 83, p. 36.

[30] ***Newsday***. Friday, Spetember 27, 1997.

[31] A new term has entered the fashion lexicon to describe a ribbed white undershirt: the "wifebeater." This term surfaced in 1997 from several different sources including rap, gay and gang subcultures. While some claim they are taking something oppressive and claiming it as their own, others note that by using the term "wifebeater" as a playful reference to clothing, we are not identifying with victims of domestic violence but with the abusers. (Hayt, Elizabeth. An Undershirt Named...What? ***The New York Times***, Sunday, April 22, 2001.)

[32] PBS Website interview, May 2001.

[33] PBS *Frontline* documentary, "The Merchants of Cool", May, 2001.

[34] PBS Website interview, May 2001

[35] *Ibid.* Miller claims that this highly commercial system allows for only two kinds of musical production: advertising set to a beat (such as 'N Snyc and Brittany Spears) and shock appear (Marilyn Manson, Eminem, etc.).

[36] It should be briefly pointed out here that the following arguments are in no way limited to Eminem. I merely use him as one of the more blatant examples of sexually violent misogyny in music. "Kid Rock" to mention just another, is equally degrading and hateful to women in his lyrics and videos. His videos feature strippers, naked female mud wrestlers, sexually violent imagery and the now obligatory (as it would seem) "booty" sequences. The title of one song on his latest album is called "Fuck you blind".

[37] DeCurtis, Anthony. Eminem's Hate Rhymes." ***Rolling Stone***, 8/3/2000, Issue 846, p. 17, 3p, 2c.

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] Michael, Hoyt. "An Eminem Expose: Where Are the Critics?" ***Columbia Journalism Review***, Sep/Oct. 2000, Vol. 39, Issue 3, p. 67.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] Bozza, Anthony. "Eminem Blows Up." ***Rolling Stone***, 4/29/99, Issue 811, p.42, 7p, 2c, 1bw.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] Weisbard, Eric. "Nookie Monster." ***Village Voice***, 7/20/99, Vol. 44 Issue 28, p.67, 2p.

[44] Bozza, Anthony. "Eminem Blows Up." ***Rolling Stone***, 4/29/99, Issue 811, p.42, 7p, 2c, 1bw.

[45] Last year Eminem was arrested outside a nightclub for pulling a gun on a man he thought tried to kiss his wife. Several weeks following that incident, his wife Kim tried to commit suicide. The couple are now divorced.

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Morgan, Joan. "White Noise." ***Ms.***, August/Sept. 1999, Vol. IX, No. 5, p.96.

[48] Michael, Hoyt. "An Eminem Expose: Where Are the Critics?" ***Columbia Journalism Review***, Sep/Oct. 2000, Vol. 39, Issue 3, p. 67

[49] Strauss, Neil. "Recording Industry's Strictest Censor Is Itself." ***The New York Times***, Tuesday, August 1, 2000, p. c8.

[50] Deconstructing the critics' defenses of misogynist themes in popular culture is almost as important as examining the themes themselves since their defense justifies and legitimizes their continued popularity.

[51] PBS website interview, May, 2001.

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] Herbert, Bob. "A Musical Betrayal." ***The New York Times***, January 29, 2001.

[54] Herbert has written before about his disappointment with gangsta rap and in the present article he says that it "has so thoroughly broken faith with the surpassingly great, centuries-long tradition of black music in America."

[55] *See* Boehlert, Eric (June 7, 2000 and January 8, 2001) on salon.com magazine for a lengthy review of articles on Eminem.

[56] Pareles, Jon. "While Eminem is Attacked, Steely Dan Gets a Free Pass." ***The New York Times***, Feb. 18, 2001, p. 27.

[57] Udovitch, Mim. "Visible Man: Eminem Offends People. Is it the Music or the Fact That He's White?" ***New York Times Magazine***. Feb. 18, 2001, p. 9-10.

[58] Boehlert, Eric. 6/7/2000, *Ibid.*

[59] I do not include in this category articles merely pointing out that Eminem's lyrics are hateful and then failing to provide any other insights.

[60] This is not to say that Boehlert did not publish these articles any where else.

[61] Boehlert, Eric. "Invisible Man." June 7, 2000. ***Salon.com***.

[62] Boehlert, Eric. "Eminem's latest outrage: The Grammys jump on the hate bandwagon and anoint "The Marshall Mathers LP" with four nominations." Jan. 8, 2001. ***Salon.com***

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] *Ibid.*

[65] If Eminem does not "really" hate gay people, the same cannot be said for many of his fans. Scott Seomin of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation received dozens of email messages from Eminem fans threatening his life as the Grammy awards drew near.

[66] "The Eminem Mystique". ***Newsday***, Sunday, Feb. 18, 2001.

[67] "A Detour Into Naughty For Last Seasons Nice Girls." ***The New York Times***, Tuesday, Oct. 31, 2000, p.B12.

[68] *Ibid.*

[69] I would argue however, that in the 1980s Madonna did in fact break boundaries and acted as a positive force for young women expressing a strong sexuality. Her later material, on the other hand, became increasingly little more than packaged commercial sexuality.

[70] The name "Limp Bizkit" actually refers to a cookie that a group of boys or young men are supposed to ejaculate on as they all stand in a circle. The last one to ejaculate has to eat the cookie.

[71] Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) internet action alert. "FCC Moves to Intensify Media Consolidation." April 20, 2001

[72] In July, 2001, the FCC ruled that Fox Television (a subsidiary of Murdoch's News Corp.) could complete its $4.4 billion acquisition of Chris-Craft, which owns 10 television stations. News Corp. will now control the New York Post, WNYW-TV (Channel 5) and WWOR-TV (Channel 9). George Arzt, a political consultant who has worked for Murdoch was quoted as saying "I think that he can't be ignored by any local politician, or for that matter, a national politician coming into New York." (Blair, Jayson. Two Stations, One Tabloid, One Owner. ***The New York Times***. July 26, 2001.)

[73] Two examples of such cross promotion: Just before tickets went on sale for Madonna's "Drowned World Tour", America Online the tour's sponsor, released a large number of tickets ahead of time only to new subscribers to AOL (with a minimum sign up of three months). This drove new members to AOL as well as prompting old members to buy new accounts). This was a most profitable synchronicity between Time Warner's music division (which owns Madonna's Maverick Records) and AOL. (Strauss, Neil. Desperately Seeking Synergy. ***The New York Times***. May 31, 2001.) According to McChesney (1999) there is now increasing pressure to publish and record writers and artists whose work will complement products made in other branches of their empire. Thus, for example, the 1997 James Bond film, "Tomorrow Never Dies" had global promotional tie-ins with Heineken, Avis Rent a Car, BMW of North America, Ericsson Corp.'s cellular phones, Heublein's, Smirnoff vodka, L'Oreal, and Visa.

[74] PBS website (www.pbs.org) May 1, 2001.

[75] Nichols, John and McChesney (2000). ***It's the Media, Stupid***. New York: Seven Stories Press.

[76] Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) internet action alert. "FCC Moves to Intensify Media Consolidation." April 20, 2001.

[77] *Ibid.*

[78] Herman and Chomsky made the argument back in 1988 that a mass social movement without any major media support and subject to press hostility are at a severe disadvantage and will struggle against grave odds. Any progressive and radical media will also suffer from the political discrimination of advertisers. Many advertisers will not patronize their ideological enemies and those they perceive as being a danger to their interests.

[79] Labaton, Stephen. Media Companies Succeed in Easing Ownership Limits. ***The New York Times***. Monday, April 16, 2001.

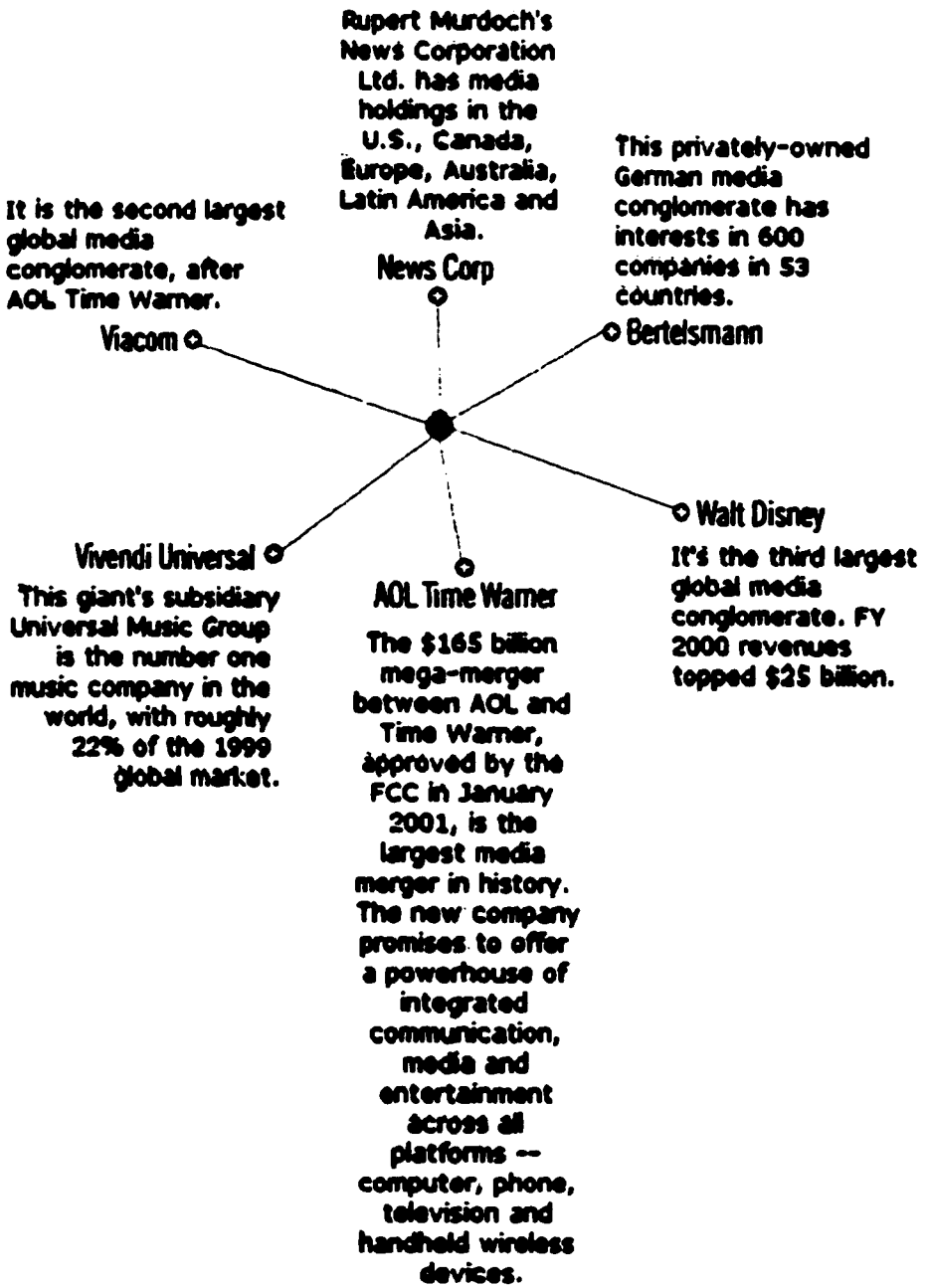
[80] Although a free speech absolutist, Alexander Meiklejohn wrote in 1948 that commercial speech was not protected by the First Amendment. He claimed that if commercial speech were given the same First Amendment protections as political speech, the First Amendment would lose its integrity and ultimately become a tool for commercial interests. (McChesney (1999) p. 267).

[81] FAIR-Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting. Internet Action Alert. June 25, 2001.

[82] Egan, Timothy. Technology Send Wall Street Into Market for Pornography. ***The New York Times***. Monday, October 23, 2000.

The past decade's wave of media mergers has produced a complex web of business relationships that now defines America's media and popular culture. These relationships offer a massive opportunity for cross promotion and selling of talent and products among different companies owned by the same powerful parent corporation.

Examine the charts breaking down what each of the five U.S. media giants now control (as of February 2001).



Reprinted from PBS website (www.pbs.org) May 2001

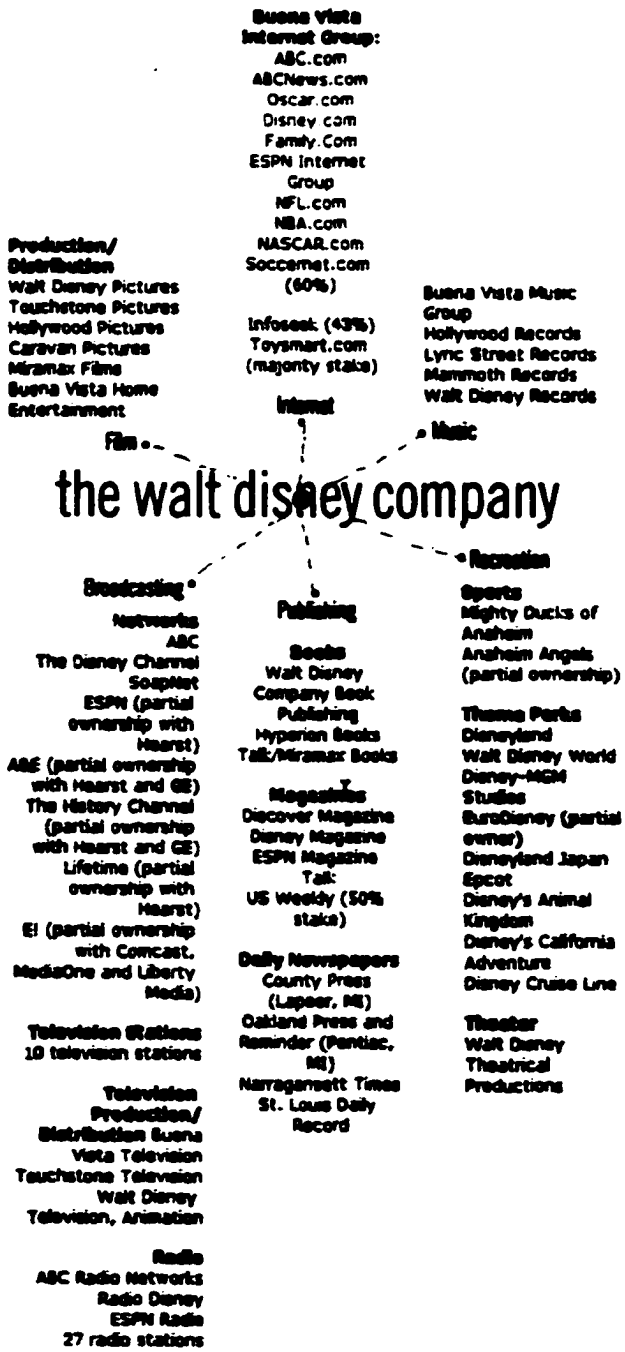
Based in Australia, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation Limited has diversified media holdings in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, Latin America and Asia. As of September 30, 2000, its assets totaled $38 billion and total annual revenues approximate $14 billion. News Corp. is currently in talks to acquire DirecTV, the largest satellite television provider in the U.S.

Reprinted from PBS website (www.pbs.org) May 2001

This privately-owned German media conglomerate, which began in 1835 as a publisher of religious hymnals, is a global publishing and media force today. It has interests in 600 companies in 53 countries. Its 1999 sales figures topped $13 billion. Bertelsmann made headlines in November 2000 when it struck a strategic operating agreement with Napster, lending the internet music provider $50 million to design technology that would force users to pay to download music files. The company's vision is to use Napster's file-sharing technology as a platform to allow users to download other media products, including film, television and books.

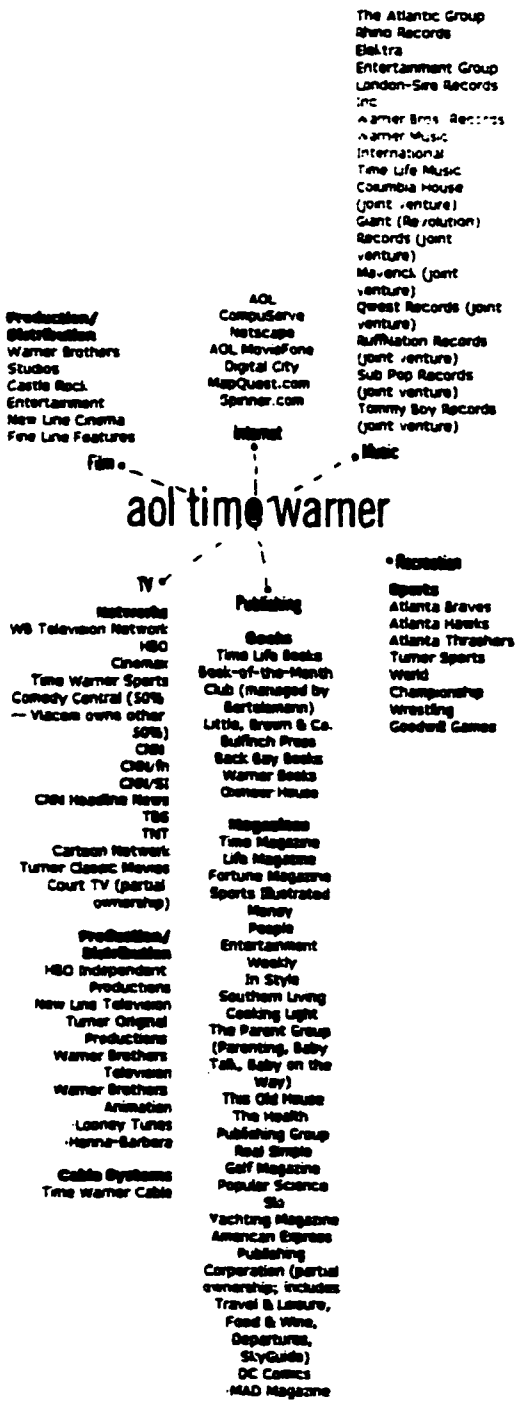
Reprinted from PBS website (www.pbs.org) May 2001

The Walt Disney Company is the third largest global media conglomerate. Its FY 2000 revenues topped $25 billion, with 27% derived from parks and resorts, 24% from studio entertainment, and 17% from media networks. In February 2001, the company opened its newest theme park, Disney's California Adventure in Anaheim.



Reprinted from PBS website (www.pbs.org) May 2001

Approved by the FCC in January 2001, the $165 billion mega-merger between AOL and Time Warner is the largest media merger in history. The new company promises to offer a powerhouse of integrated communication, media and entertainment across all platforms -- computer, phone, television and handheld wireless devices.

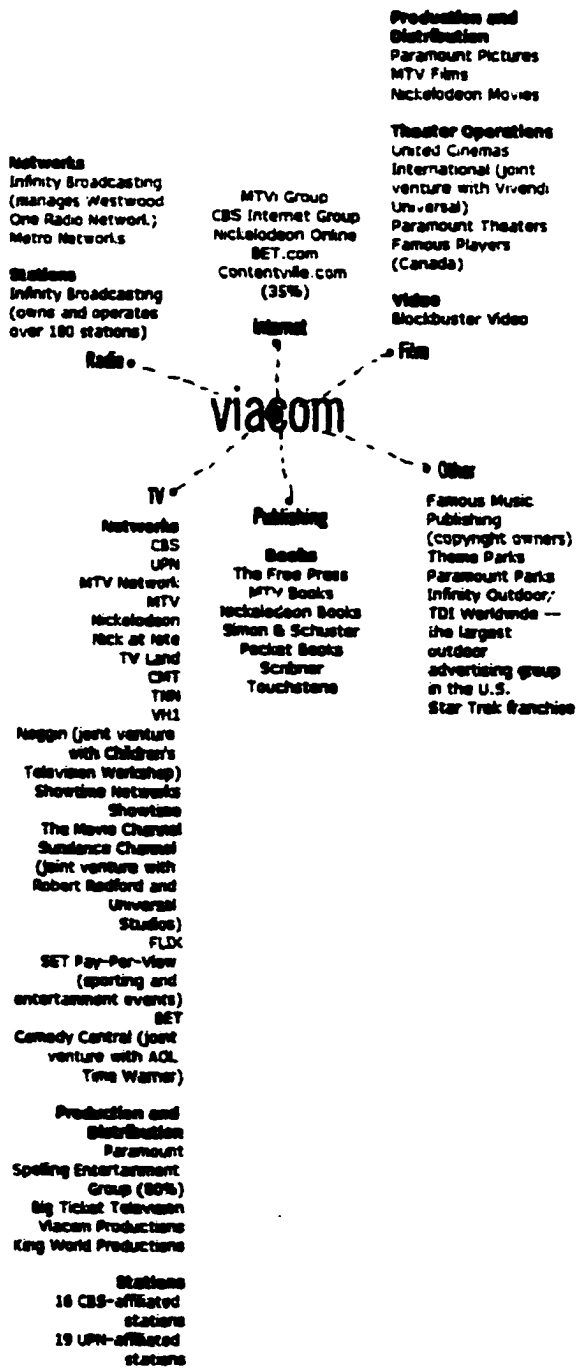


Reprinted from PBS website (www.pbs.org) May 2001

Vivendi Universal was created in December, 2000 out of a merger agreement between Vivendi, The Seagram Company Ltd., and Canal+. The international merger combined Vivendi's telecommunications assets with Seagram's film, television and music holdings (including Universal Studios) and Canal+'s programming and broadcast capacity. Vivendi Universal's subsidiary Universal Music Group is the number one music company in the world, having established approximately 22% of the global market share in 1999.

Reprinted from PBS website (www.pbs.org) May 2001

The $50 billion merger between Viacom and CBS Corporation was completed in May 2000. Viacom is now the second largest media conglomerate worldwide, after AOL Time Warner, with 1999 sales of over $12 billion.



Reprinted from PBS website (www.pbs.org) May 2001

Background Questions

1. Name _____
2. Age _____
3. Race _____
4. Ethnic Origin _____
5. In which city/town/village do you live? _____
6. Marital status:

   Single _____
   Married _____
   Separated _____
   Divorced _____
   Widowed _____

7. With what religion were you raised? _____
8. Do you practice your religion regularly? (a) yes (b) no
9. Would you consider yourself religious (a) yes (b) no
10. Total household income:

    Below $20,000 _____
    $20-$40,000 _____
    $41-$60,000 _____
    $61-80,000 _____
    $81-$100,000 _____
    Over $100,000 _____

11. What is the highest level of education you received? _____
12. Occupation _____
13. Would you describe yourself as (a)heterosexual (b)bisexual (c)homosexual
14. Do you have any children? _____. If so, how many? _____
15. With whom do you live? _____
16. What type of accommodation do you live in? (own, rent, etc.) _____
17. Do you own a car? (a) yes (b) no
18. Do you use public transportation? (a) yes (b) no
19. What type of community/leisure activities outside of home are you involved?

    _____

20. Do you have an interest in national or local politics?

    _____

21. What political party do you support? _____
22. On average, how many hours of television do you watch per day?

    (a) under 1 hour (b) 2-4 hours (c) 5-7 hours (d) 8 or more hours

23. What are your 3 favorite television programs (or types of programs)?

    _____

24. Name 3 programs (or types of programs) that you dislike?

    _____

25. How often do you read a newspaper?

(a) almost never (b) 1 or 2 times a week (c) 3-4 times a week (c) 5-6 times a week (d) every day

26. What magazines (if any) do you usually read?

_____

27. How often do you go to the movies?

_____

28. Name three of your favorite films.

_____

29. Name three of your least favorite films (or types of films)

_____

30. Please read the following statements and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement. There are no right or wrong answers; we just want to know what you think.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.				
Other than for rape or incest, a woman should never have an abortion.				
The death penalty is justified for certain crimes.				
Working mothers can establish as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.				
The death penalty should be abolished.				
It is more important for a wife to help her husband than to have a career herself.				
The movement for women's rights has helped you personally.				

31. Please answer "yes" or "no" to the following questions:

A. Is our own hard work more important for getting ahead than knowing the right people? _____
B. Do you believe that most problems will solve themselves if you just leave them alone? _____
C. Does your success depend more on your own efforts than on luck or fate? _____
D. Is getting ahead for you mostly a matter of getting the right breaks? _____
E. For the most part, do you think that your success depends largely on the help of powerful people?
F. In general, would you say that everything that happens to people happens for a reason? _____
G. In general do you believe that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get? _____

Thank you for your participation.

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