

NICOLA GAVEY

ROUTLEDGE

# JUST SEX?

THE CULTURAL SCAFFOLDING OF RAPE

SECOND EDITION



WOMEN AND PSYCHOLOGY

# JUST SEX?

In the award-winning *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape*, Nicola Gavey provides an extensive commentary on the existing literature on rape, analysing recent research to examine the psychological and cultural conditions of possibility for contemporary sexual violence. *Just Sex?* argues that feminist theory on sexual victimization has gone both too far and not far enough. It presents the reader with a challenging and original perspective on the issues of rape, sex and the body, incorporating new material on sexism, misogyny and digital culture, as well as debates over gendered analyses of sexual violence.

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# JUST SEX?

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Second edition

*Nicola Gavey*

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*To Rosa*

forever my perfect antidote to all this

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# PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In the original edition of *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape* I argued that western cultures have a deep ambivalence about rape. While it ranks alongside murder as one of the most abhorrent crimes imaginable, the very same acts, intentions and effects are sometimes met with indifference if not disbelief or encouragement. I placed the blame for this strange ambivalence and its dangerous effects on the binary norms of gender – those normatively opposite forms of masculine and feminine identity, embodiment and sexuality, which, I argued, provide fertile conditions of possibility for rape and sexual coercion. And which provide a normative framework for minimization, denial, and justification of sexual violence.

In this revised edition, I situate the original book within a contemporary context. At times, this has felt like a mission impossible. Setting out, I knew that the socio-cultural and political landscape had changed enormously in the decade and a half since I wrote *Just Sex?* Rape has become re-politicized within a resurgent feminist movement that I could never have imagined in 2005. And the provocative concept of “rape culture” – which resonates with my notion of a “cultural scaffolding of rape” – has entered popular vernacular. Digital technology and social media have played an important role in this re-emergent prominence of anti-rape politics, and in facilitating new forms of protest. In chicken and egg fashion, new technologies have arguably also been responsible for ramping up, and showing up, rape culture as an object in urgent need of overthrow. From the mundane circulation of rape jokes and sexist slurs to the digitally-enabled harms of “revenge porn,” new digital media has helped lay bare the myth of gender equality and exposed the taken-for-grantedness of cultural patterns that normalize male sexual dominance and inferiorize girls and women. These things I knew when I started on this revisitation.

What I didn't expect, was the rollercoaster trajectory that was about to hit full speed. I have tackled this project over two southern hemisphere summers. My first stint was in the immediate aftermath of Donald Trump's election, and subsequent

inauguration, as president of the United States of America. Like many others, my mood soured in the miserable shadow of this news and all it stood for. It was hardly believable; and it further ground down my already faltering hope for significant progress toward stopping sexual violence – and toward a world in which the value of people was not systematically ranked according to race, gender, sexuality, wealth, and so on. I looked back, with some despair, at the incipient optimism I read in the pages of *Just Sex?* Then, another summer, another shock. But this time, an exhilarating one, watching the rhizomic effects of the #MeToo movement reigniting my sense of hope, as it radically, collectively, and unexpectedly draws the dots between gender inequality, other forms of structural power and inequality, sexual harassment, and sexual violence.

Writing the second edition of a book is no doubt deceptively difficult at any time. It holds challenging expectations hand in hand with tight constraints. But writing a position in this rapidly changing context has been extra tricky. It is too soon to know how these particular seismic moments will settle, and if and how they will reinforce and/or dismantle the cultural scaffolding of rape. I haven't attempted to tidy up my writing done across different points over this period of intense flux and unpredictability, in a pretence of knowing what is going on and how it will end – so there might be some jarring glitches in my narrative. Another compromise I have had to make lies in my relation to the scholarly landscape. Since I wrote *Just Sex?* I have been working mostly around the margins of the field of sexual violence. I have had to dive deeply and widely into “the literature,” on a crash course of catching up. *So much* research has been done, so much theory has been written – new works across the disciplines I've drawn on must number in the many thousands. Of course, I have not been able to read everything, but I have read a lot and talked with a lot of people, ingesting information and ideas, confirmation and challenge, as well as inspiration – so much more than I can properly do justice to within the limited words of a new edition. In thinking about how to tackle this, I've made three strategic choices – relating to this edition's form, scope and focus.

I consider the main contribution of *Just Sex?* to be an (empirically-informed) argument about the way rape and (hetero)sexual coercion are made possible through normative gendered patterns, practices and cultural arrangements. The shape and the detail of this argument are situated in a particular historical moment. Only a few decades before *Just Sex?* was published, feminist activism and what I referred to at the time as the “new research” on sexual victimization, had turned dominant conceptions of rape on their head. By the time I was writing the book, we had already witnessed backlash against the uptake of new understandings about the nature and scale of the problem of sexual violence. Attempting to inject contemporary concerns into this temporally-situated narrative, I decided, would not only be difficult to do, but it would be messy and potentially confusing. To preserve this view of the issues in context, in a way that the layers of time are obvious, I opted to leave the original text largely intact. Beyond some minor changes of wording I have not altered my original framing or argument. Instead, this edition exists in conversation with the original edition. My substantive new contribution is a new chapter as well as several new end-of-chapter notes – some quite lengthy.

Many of the new notes signal relatively specific updates. These addendums are selective, guided by the need to describe new conditions or speak to the lack of change, elaborate a point or provide an important new twist. Recently, Charlene Senn and I wrote a lengthy handbook chapter arguing the need to understand sexuality and sexual violence in relation to each other (Gavey and Senn 2014). We reviewed key research that attested to the “persistent murky gray area between consensual sex and sexual violence” (p. 369), particularly in a heterosexual context. So as not to repeat that kind of updating review here, I have mostly not referenced research in the interim that doesn’t alter my original argument (partly because the scale of that task would be unwieldy). Given the volume and pace of academic publishing these days, I know this means I will have missed works that could have sharpened my perspective and enriched my argument. Other new notes do more new work toward laying the groundwork for my expanded formulation of the cultural scaffolding of rape that I introduce in Chapter 9. They provide brief commentaries on some of my key interests as they relate to the new form of my argument. For example, points related to pornography, and the still-difficult issue of how to speak about gender in relation to sexual violence.

In the final, new, chapter, I wanted to take the opportunity to extend my thinking in relation to two significant changes and challenges since 2005. One of these is the intensified visibility of everyday sexism and misogyny. Another is the challenge that persists (and in some ways, has become heightened) in advocating for a “gendered” analysis of rape. These are the two issues that have most troubled me in recent years. On the surface they seem quite separate sorts of concerns (ones that are connected only paradoxically). However, in grappling with both, I find they meet in a way that helps to elucidate what I now see as an important missing link in my original analysis of the cultural scaffolding of rape. It is less a rethinking of the whole approach (which I think, by and large, still holds – at least in relation to sexual violence by men against women), but more of a significant shift in emphasis when it comes to what I see as “the problem” in a nutshell. In this chapter, I discuss my thinking around the role of the “myth of masculinity” in keeping the cultural scaffolding of rape so firmly anchored in place. Reorienting my focus from the gendered binary of heterosexuality to this more specific psychosociocultural dimension underpinning, and exceeding, it helps to explain, I suggest, the persistence of misogyny, male sexual dominance, and sexual violence. It also, I suggest, specifically helps to explain sexual violence beyond the matrix of heterosexuality. It further provides us with a conceptual tool for approaching the issue of sexual violence against men in general, which can help us recognize and understand the reality of such victimization in a way that doesn’t draw false equivalences and misrepresent the nature and extent of the problem. While in this second edition I can only sketch the beginnings of a theory around the role of the myth of masculinity, I suggest that shifting our analysis in this direction will necessitate some radical rethinking of how we approach the task of stopping sexual violence.

*April 2018*

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## **2<sup>nd</sup> Edition**

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# INTRODUCTION

On the eve of the so-called sexual revolution, everyone knew that sex was different for men and women. Men wanted it, and women gave it. As Dr John Eichenlaub advised in his 1961 marriage manual: “a woman should never turn down her husband on appropriate occasions simply because she has no yearning of her own for sex or because she is tired or sleepy, or indeed for any reason short of a genuine disability.” Desire and pleasure, it would seem, were an optional part of the sexual script for women.<sup>1</sup>

Much has changed since then. New birth-control technologies loosened the link between sex and reproduction. A new era of sexual permissiveness relaxed the relationship between sex and commitment. Women, supposedly, gained a new sexual freedom. With this new freedom has come more talk of women’s sexual rights and pleasures. Many now agree that what was previously just ordinary sex was not always fair and just for women.

On a different, but ultimately related, front there has also been a dramatic shift in how we understand rape. Once, “rape” evoked the image of a violent and dangerous man grabbing a woman in a dark street, or breaking into her home at night. This paradigmatic “real” rape nearly always involved a stranger. Experts considered it to be rare, and the kinds of official statistics that were available confirmed this. But in the early 1980s some striking changes were afoot that would lead to a completely different understanding of rape. New terms began to enter the vocabulary, drawing attention to the possibilities of other forms of rape: acquaintance rape, marital rape, date rape. Attention to the problem of date rape had grown to such an extent by the 1990s that it had replaced stranger rape as the main focus for rape prevention. Date rape has always been a contested and highly controversial concept. But, it has weathered the controversy to become an unquestioned part of what we now mean by rape. The divide between rape and what was once “just sex” has well and truly begun to crumble. Rape is no longer rare. It is almost ordinary. The implications of this simultaneous remaking of sex and rethinking of rape are profound.

## 2 Introduction

At the same time as we've been confronted with news about the extent of coercion and abuse that takes place within heterosexual relationships, we are faced with a somewhat confusing and contradictory picture of what's actually going on in the heterosexual bedroom. On the surface, we have an enlightened and shared rejection of some of the worst patriarchal concepts of heterosexuality in which sex was a husband's right, and something a wife endured as her duty – perhaps unpleasant enough that she'd need to distract herself and dissociate by “lying back and thinking of England.” Brash notions about men's sexual rights and expectations that women would not get and nor should they expect (as of right) pleasure from sex would now be widely laughed aside as unfortunate relics of an antiquated Victorian sensibility. Popular culture ostensibly screams out with images and messages of women actively and keenly pursuing sex and sexual pleasure. Women are no longer (only) sexual objects, but also sexual agents. But how much of the story do these public impressions tell? At the same time as we've had Madonna and *Sex and the City* giving us moments of bold female sexuality, we've also had campaigners for sexual abstinence promoting a return to “traditional” values like chastity, which rely on women acting as the asexual gatekeepers of male desire. Even enthusiastic promoters of heterosexual sex, such as John Gray in his “Mars and Venus” series, launch a model of sexual difference that is only more subtle in its restrictive prescriptions for women. While he doesn't explicitly advocate to women that they should suppress their own desires and interests entirely for men, he does spin a form of pop sexology that reinstates highly gendered patterns of sexuality and relationship. When we unravel the details of this kind of cultural analysis and advice, as Annie Potts (1998) has done so brilliantly with Gray's *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom*, we see how his whole model is based on assumptions of a particularly androcentric kind of heterosexuality.

In this book I argue that these everyday taken-for-granted normative forms of heterosexuality work as a cultural scaffolding for rape. This is not to say that these normative forms of sex *are* rape or that they are the same as rape. And it is certainly not to say that all, or much, of everyday sex between men and women is rape-like. Even the most gender-stereotypically conformist patterns of sex might have nothing in common – for the particular woman and particular man involved – with the experience of rape. Although it may be true that “most women can generally and with relative ease distinguish between acts of rape and consensual, mutually desired heterosexual sex,” as Ann Cahill (2001: 3) claims, this distinction overlooks a whole realm of sexual experience that falls uncomfortably into the cracks between these two possibilities. Unfortunately, I think the evidence suggests that this distinction is all too often not at all clear cut. The problem, as feminists in the 1970s began to argue, lies in the way that normative heterosex is patterned or scripted in ways that permit far too much ambiguity over distinctions between what is rape and what is *just sex*.

Support for this observation comes not only from feminist camps, but also from the defenders of a more old-fashioned sexuality. A rich source of such views can be found among the conservative proponents of a marital exemption within rape laws. One clear illustration comes from an Australian-made *60 Minutes* documentary, “A Licence to Rape” (Sinclair and Munro 1990). In response to a question about

whether he had ever persisted in a sexual advance toward his wife when she had conveyed she wasn't interested, former British Conservative MP Tony Marlow fumbled: "I'm saying how do you know? What is the gradation? How do you know what the signals are all the time? It's very difficult to tell. What *is* rape? How do you define rape in those circumstances?"

I would have to agree with Tony Marlow that the line between something that is just sex and rape can be quite blurred once we move beyond thinking of only strangers as rapists. But Marlow's observation is offered in support of an argument against changing the law in England to make it illegal for a man to rape his wife. The claim of Tony Marlow, and other opponents like him, is that it would be unfair on men to bring a criminal definition to what is simply part and parcel of the ambiguities inherent in normal marital sexuality. Where my position deviates sharply from this kind of conservative standpoint is in my refusal to therefore treat what is taken as sex-just-the-way-things-are as a warrant for "getting real" and accepting this way of the world. Instead, from a broadly social constructionist starting point, I want to problematize that whole domain of sexual taken-for-granted that allow this kind of confusion. I do this from a position that first rejects any assumptions that our current behaviors and experiences are the products of biological and/or cultural imperatives which are unmalleable; and secondly, from a position that suspects that normative practices are less universal and more contested than might appear to be the case on the cultural surface.

In the wake of Ian Hacking's (1999) witty critique of the over-used notion of "social construction," it is perhaps wise to justify my use of this term and explain what I mean by it. In this book, I develop a two-pronged argument about sex and sexual coercion that is about social construction in two quite distinct senses. First, as I have already discussed, I am interested in unpacking what could be called the cultural scaffolding of rape, that is the discourses of sex and gender that produce forms of heterosex that set up the preconditions for rape – women's passive, acquiescing (a)sexuality and men's forthright, urgent pursuit of sexual "release." These script a relational dynamic that arguably authorizes sexual encounters that are not always clearly distinguishable from rape. In this sense, it is about the construction of cultural norms and practices that support rape. Secondly, I am interested in looking at the construction of a broader framework of sexual victimization iconographically represented perhaps by "date rape" (but really including the broader phenomena of rape and sexual coercion in all forms of heterosexual relationships). On this note, I want to applaud the feminist and social science work that has brought attention to forms of sexual injustice that have for too long gone unseen. At the same time, however, I want to ask questions of that work, and to suggest that our solutions to date rape (and other forms of heterosexual rape and coercion<sup>2</sup>) need to be carefully theorized in an ongoing reflexive way so that the responses we craft don't end up inadvertently reinforcing the cultural conditions that facilitate it. In particular, we need to be wary of reproducing the very patterns of gender relations – women as passive victims and men as sex-craving aggressors – that make room for rape to be confused with sex

#### 4 Introduction

in the first place. We must attempt this, however, without retreating into some lofty refuge from the concrete day-to-day “realities” of women’s lives.

★ ★ ★

This is a book concerned with culture and subjectivity. In the tradition of post-structuralist modes of critical feminist psychology, it is about the ways in which subjectivity is always-already social or cultural; about how the notion of atomistic rational individuals is so misleading for understanding social behavior. However, writing as a Pākehā New Zealander, living in New Zealand, for a U.K.- and U.S.-based publisher and an international English-speaking readership, it is in many ways inherently awkward attempting to locate my cultural bearings. If I were to restrict my analyses to “Pākehā New Zealand” culture (as if this was monolithic, in any case), it would suggest I have taken careful account of the unique cultural specificities of this group, and the social and economic circumstances in which they live. It would also imply that the observations, analyses, and arguments I make are zparticular to this group of people. However, I’m neither paying such close attention to the precise social conditions for one particular population group in this specific geographical location, nor am I eschewing the insights and information from research on sexuality and rape in several other countries – especially the United States and the United Kingdom. This leaves me with the admittedly problematic need to refer to a generic “our culture,” which is unsatisfyingly vague for someone working in traditions that disdain false universalizing in research and prefer instead analyses rooted in the local and the particular! A few words, then, on what I am referring to when I speak of culture in this generalizing move.

My emphasis in this book is certainly more on what I perceive to be shared cultural patterns, rather than on the more local and particular instantiations or rejections of these. Through so many avenues some kind of dominant hybrid global Western (English speaking) culture is produced – the news and popular media, literature, dominant religions, modes of education, and so on.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt that crucially important differences exist among peoples exposed to, producing, and “consuming” these cultural products. But from my own particular vantage point – which is simultaneously situated on multiple axes of privilege (economics, language, race, and relative social conditions), yet peripheral to the cultural centers (the United States, and also the United Kingdom to some extent) that anchor intellectual and social authority within the English-speaking Western world – it seems that there is also considerable “savoir” that is shared. I hope, therefore, that it is possible to be able to speak of “our culture” with regard to discourses and practices of heterosexuality in a way that is at least recognizable from many vantage points, if not always fully cognizant of geographical and various cultural (including and as well as ethnic, racial, religious, socioeconomic) differences. This level of analysis necessarily means sacrificing some attention to nuances in relation to cultural specificities, and I acknowledge this limitation of the project at the outset.

★ ★ ★

The book is in three parts.<sup>4</sup> In the first part, I review the dramatic changes that took place in our understandings of rape from the 1970s to the turn of the century. In Chapter 1, I trace the relatively recent changes in public understandings of rape that were ignited within the women's movement in the 1970s. Barely four decades ago, rape and sexual abuse were portrayed in victim-blaming ways that ensured the public silence of most women who were raped. Sexological notions about the naturalness of male sexual force and female sexual passivity conspired with psychoanalytic notions of women's sexual masochism to promote a model of heterosexuality in which a woman's consent could always be in question. They provided, therefore, a perfect cover story for rape: it was just sex. But the women's movement provided a space in which women could begin to share their own stories in a context that was sympathetic rather than blaming. Such was the magnitude of these personal revelations that those in the women's movement came to argue that the true extent of rape and sexual violence was shrouded in a cultural secrecy born of shame and silence. In putting forth a "woman's eye" point of view, feminists emphasized the violence of rape. It was not sexy, as popular twentieth-century masculinist constructions had often implied it was. Radical feminists in particular also began to theorize rape both as a practice that was intimately connected to everyday forms of heterosexuality, and as something that was fundamental to men's oppression of women. These ideas quickly filtered into the social sciences where studies showed the extent to which many people held false and unreasonable ideas (such as if girl "leads a boy on" it is her fault if he rapes her) about women, men, and rape.

Research on rape within the social sciences quickly escalated. Before the early 1980s rape was thought to be uncommon. Rape within intimate relationships, in particular, was given scarce attention in the social science literature. Chapter 2 traces the recent history of one particular branch of rape research that set out to investigate the prevalence of rape. I focus mainly on reviewing key early work by sociologist Diana Russell and psychologist Mary Koss. Their work produced stunning figures on the scope of rape. Previously, the statistics on rape prevalence suggested it was extremely rare – and that the chances of a woman being raped in her lifetime were minimal. Now, it was being claimed that between a quarter and half of all women experience rape or attempted rape. In this chapter I explain the reasoning behind the methodologies that yielded the new statistics, and map some of the debate around documenting the scope of rape.

Two other important changes took hold over the 1980s: first, a "dimensional" view replaced a "typological" view of understanding rape. That is, within social science research rape came to be measured and talked about in ways that suggested it was related to other, less extreme forms of sexual assault and even more subtle forms of sexual coercion. Rape, then, was seen not as some aberrant act of a deranged man, but as existing on a continuum with other, more normal behaviors.

Secondly, it was discovered that most rapes are perpetrated by men who are known to the women they rape. Far from being psychopathic strangers terrorizing women on the streets, it was found that most rapes are committed by women's own boyfriends, dates, and husbands. This new information totally changed the

way we understand paradigmatic rape. Together these two factors came to represent a serious challenge to normative heterosexuality. This challenge was not new. It had already been anticipated in the earlier feminist critiques of heterosexuality and marriage. But this time it was launched in the name of science. While the researchers themselves didn't push home this point, its implication was clear. The reaction from some media and academic observers was swift. As though fueled by an attack on their very being, some critics wrote in outrage at what they saw as an unreasonable strike against the very foundations of everyday sexual relations between men and women.

Recognition about the extent of rape within intimate relationships became focused in particular around the apparently new phenomenon of date rape. This "new problem" has never been uncontested, and during the 1990s there was a flurry of critical reaction. Post-feminist combatant Camille Paglia joined forces with Berkeley professor Neil Gilbert to lament just how silly things had got in all the talk about date rape. Katie Roiphe wrote her youthfully optimistic views about men, women, and sex into a book-length tirade against the myths of date rape. It was a best-seller. In Chapter 2 I appraise the reaction of these critics and argue against some of their most fundamental criticisms of the rape research. I suggest their arguments are often scientifically flawed and that they exaggerate and misconstrue the feminist agenda that can be seen to permeate the research. While it is true that there are methodological limitations of the rape research, I point out (later, in Chapter 6) how they are not peculiar to this work, but rather are characteristic of all scientific psychology paradigms. Once this point is acknowledged, the supposed political motivations of the rape researchers can't be so easily deployed to discredit their results.

Despite the ideological blind spots of the backlash critics, some of their points do deserve consideration. For example, at times the research and rhetoric against rape has reproduced stereotypes of women as passive sexual objects and as ready-made victims. It's also possibly true that some of the research data relating to the more subtle end of the continuum of sexual victimization are more reflective of the everyday struggles within social life than they are of sexual *assault*. That is, they might be part of what many people might still accept as just ordinary sex (and certainly not rape). These are points that I take up more carefully in Part 3 of the book. Where I strongly depart from these backlash critics is in my refusal to accept that all normative heterosexual sex is beyond reproach. Just because it might be normal for a man to repeatedly sexually pressure a woman, and for a woman to agree to have sex in the absence of her own positive desire, this does not mean we should sit by and cheer it on!

In Part 2 of the book I move on to put heterosexuality under the microscope, to look at the ways in which power operates through contemporary cultural norms to render not all choices equal.<sup>5</sup> First, in Chapter 3, I take a sideways step to introduce an analysis of sexuality (and subjectivity and the body) derived from Michel Foucault's work on discourse, power, and sexuality. Foucault's work is relevant to this book because of the ways it shows how sexuality is shaped by culture. Ideas about the social construction of sexuality are widely employed, but are not always well understood.

Social constructionism is sometimes read as a counter-position to biological understandings of humans as material beings. It is taken to suggest that sexuality is culturally rather than biologically determined. The binary form of this distinction often leads to oversimplified claims that are not always helpful. While it is not this particular use of a social constructionist approach that I want to emphasize here, I will briefly address the distinction in light of controversies around evolutionary psychology claims about gender, sexuality and rape.

What is more interesting, from my point of view, is how Foucault's approach can help us to think beyond reductive individualistic ways of understanding human behavior. Instead, it illuminates how culturally saturated our own conceptions of ourselves are; how culturally shared patterns of meaning and normative practices limit us in various ways – not through repression of more authentic natural ways of being, but through the installation of frameworks of meaning and practice that guide us on how to be normal members of our cultures. This different way of thinking about people-in-culture is important because it allows us to de-naturalize some of our taken-for-granted assumptions about everyday life. It allows us to appreciate, for instance, the rich logic of some choices that might seem on the surface irrational and self-defeating – by providing a way of understanding how individual rationality must always operate alongside compelling cultural scripts or guidelines that impose other considerations for us, as *social* beings, to continually navigate our way through. In opening doors to new ways of seeing, the theory provides liberating insights into our own cultural formation and possibilities for transformation.

Chapter 4 goes on to map out the terrain of heterosexual sex from the viewpoint of this kind of social constructionism influenced by Foucauldian discourse theory. It examines the commonsense ways in which we understand men's and women's sexuality within a heterosexual matrix. One perennial theme is the idea that men are always eager and ready for sex – referred to by psychologists and sociologists of gender as the “male sexual drive discourse.” Popular culture is thoroughly infused with these kinds of images of men's proclivity to sex. It appears everywhere from media portrayals of male sexuality, to jokes, and serious explanations for everything from sexual harassment to the need for Viagra. The advantage of referring to this shared way of seeing as a “discourse” is two-fold. It helps us to see these sets of assumptions as just that: assumptions rather than absolute truths. They are cultural patterns of meaning. Whether or not they *really* are true – when cleaved from the story that gives them their truth value – is open to debate. There is another point to thinking of these sets of assumptions as discourses. Built in to this concept is the idea that these shared cultural patterns hold some productive social power. That is, the idea that the male sexual drive discourse – irrespective of any biological imperative that may or may not accompany it – exists (also) as a social/cultural force. At that level it is capable of helping to shape our experiences and understandings of ourselves, and the ways that we act in the world.

Gender scholars have described many such discourses that affect our sexuality. In Chapter 4 I describe some of the most potent discourses of heterosexuality, and show how they shape possibilities for identity, choice, and sexual practices. Work

on the history of sexuality supports a social constructionist understanding of sexuality, as it shows how some of the basic fundamental assumptions about sexuality that we take for granted today are not universally true, but rather are specific to our particular historical (and, by implication, cultural) location. For example, historians have traced the shift away from nineteenth-century ideas about sex as procreation to twentieth-century norms in which sex is legitimately associated with aspirations for pleasure and intimacy.

With a so-called sexual revolution getting underway in the 1960s, women's sexual desires and pleasures gradually came to be widely promoted as equally important as men's. Yet the gains for women through these changes were double-edged and have been hotly contested within feminism. For instance, what rights women had had to refuse unwanted sex were eroded. One of the main problems with the critics of the research on date rape, I argue, is their refusal to cast a critical eye over normative heterosexuality itself. In Chapter 4 I look at normative heterosexual sex to see how the pulses of power continue to operate in a more liberated economy of sex. New imperatives or old imperatives in a different dressing still operate. For instance, a coital imperative still plays out to limit any radical reformulations of what heterosexual sex might look like. Heterosexual men and women routinely conflate sex with intercourse – to the extent, as witnessed by Bill Clinton's testimony over his affair with Monica Lewinsky, that it is possible for people to imagine all forms of sex as *not sex* when intercourse is not involved. As my own research with Kathryn McPhillips and Virginia Braun shows, Clinton is not idiosyncratic in this way.

To the contrary, for those who do think of themselves as “having sex,” how possible is it for intercourse to be an optional item on the (hetero)sexual menu? This chapter will describe the limits on our freedom to choose not to have intercourse as part of mature heterosexual sex. My interest here is in highlighting how dominant discourses of heterosexuality operate to reinforce gendered relations of power through which women's (and men's) choices and control in heterosex are potentially compromised. In the case of the coital imperative, I will be proposing that it is clearly problematic. Questions about the place of intercourse are likely to be highly provocative. Because they cut deep into the cherished centerpiece of sex between men and women, they no doubt give cause for personal reflection by most heterosexual women and men. Beyond this, the lack of desire for intercourse can even be claimed, within the ever-increasing circle of sexual pathology, as a psychological or medical problem. Another testimony to the power of the coital imperative is the conflation within drug company promotion for Viagra of “making love” and “having sex” with the specific act of penile penetration of the vagina. Men who are unable to get erections that are sufficiently firm, and of sufficient duration, for this particular activity are reminded that they have a problem for which they should not delay in seeking treatment.

It might be difficult for some to understand why there is any need to problematize the taken-for-grantedness of intercourse as the defining act of heterosexual sex. To spell out why I think it is necessary I discuss some remarkable examples of grim, risky coitus that some people enter into, not always with great desire or pleasure; and the

severe consequences that can result. Given the high potential costs of intercourse in some circumstances, it is in many ways surprising that its inclusion is not more open to active choice on each and every heterosexual occasion.

Although not everyone agrees, many scholars have pointed to the existence of a gray area between rape or sexual coercion and mutually consenting sex. In Chapter 4 I attempt to illuminate this ambiguous zone in more detail, drawing on analyses of interviews with women talking about their experiences of heterosexual sex. How can we understand, for instance, the kinds of circumstances in which a woman might have sex she doesn't want in the absence of direct force? In this chapter I illustrate and attempt to explain a range of such experiences. Sometimes this might be because a man applies pressure directly. And the pressure can be sour or bittersweet, as in Lee's case, when her boyfriend nagged and pleaded with his big brown puppy dog eyes, with such endurance that she ended up having sex so she could get some sleep. Less innocently, we all know about a man who accuses his partner of frigidity or threatens to leave when she declines his sexual advances.

Sometimes a woman might have unwanted sex even when her partner has applied no direct pressure. A woman's identity might be constructed within a relationship in such a fashion that it is impossible for her to say no to sex without undermining her positive sense of who she is, as in Sarah's case. She saw herself as a very sexual woman, so that "to leave an erect cock unappeased" was unthinkable. Pat would never say no to sex with the man with whom she had had a 12-year affair. Their whole relationship was built around the idea that she, in contrast to his wife, would never turn him down sexually. This meant that, even during times when their relationship was ended, he could call around for sex that she felt unable to refuse. While sometimes the problem might be that a woman simply finds it difficult to say no, or it becomes unsustainable for her to have to keep re-establishing her lack of interest, at other times the line between just sex and rape gets blurred to the point where a woman might give up resisting unwanted sex for fear of being raped if she didn't – as in Ann's and Pat's stories.

These experiences go beyond the kinds of sex that partners might have because they want to, even when they have no *sexual* interest of their own. I am not talking here about forms of reciprocity and giving that don't compromise strong desires in the other direction (not to have sex). Rather, I am concerned about times when women don't feel that they have a choice; when the sense of obligation and pressure is too strong and/or the costs are too high. Such examples run from the relatively harmless to the dangerous. All, though, raise questions about how we understand sexual choice, freedom, and consent; and how subtle forms of sexual pressure and sexual coercion may be fostered through the invisible networks of power that operate in heterosexual sex. From this point of view, violence can be thought of as a technique to enforce one person's will only when other, more subtle forms of persuasion (coercion) are not successful.

In the third part of this book, I move to a more reflexive stance in reconsidering the potential implications of the massive recent shift that has taken place in our conceptualizations of rape. It is in this part of the book that I attempt to cast a sympathetic yet critical eye over our own feminist social science moves toward

getting rape in all its forms taken seriously. Persuaded by poststructuralist arguments about the constitutive power of discourse leads not only to a way of understanding how sexual coercion and rape are culturally enabled, but this also leads me to ask about the impacts of our own ways of theorizing rape and the broader realm of sexual victimization. If we hope for our theory and research to be influential in social initiatives to prevent rape and its ill-effects, then it is important to consider how this influence might unfold.

Obvious questions arise about the effects of gender-based analyses reiterating portrayals of women as passive and victim-prone and men as active and aggressive. While at some level this seems to narrate a truth of sexual violence, questions can be asked about the productive power of such discourse to enable and constrain various possibilities for gendered ways of being and acting that either challenge rape on the one hand, or support it on the other.

One area that is worth scrutinizing in more detail concerns what counts as rape and what it might variously mean from a woman's point of view. For instance, if a woman describes an experience of forced unwanted sexual intercourse, but says that she wasn't "raped," how are we to make sense of this? Do we privilege an imposed scientifically precise definition or her own personal definition of her experience? The contemporary rape research generates statistics showing that a large proportion of women have experienced rape. But in doing so, it tends to classify women who have had an experience consistent with a legal (or other narrow) definition of rape as rape victims even when they don't describe themselves as such. Controversially, these women are referred to in the research as "unacknowledged rape victims." In Chapter 6 I explain the reasons for this methodological decision, and show how it is consistent with what are considered good research procedures for measuring all sorts of psychological constructs – from depression to memory. For better or worse, the science of psychology vigorously defends the need to operationalize the phenomena it studies, and rarely are people's own frameworks of understanding relied upon. While I explain and defend this research strategy – in this scientific context – I also question its implications.

Further theorization of the specifically gendered nature of rape is another area in need of ongoing critical feminist reflection. The evidence suggests that rape is almost exclusively done *by* men, usually (but not exclusively) *to* women. Feminist understandings of rape have tended to rest on the recognition of this social fact – the specific gendered mechanics of rape. Rapists are men; rape victims are women.<sup>6</sup> So ingrained is this way of understanding rape that legal definitions of "rape" in many jurisdictions are not gender-neutral – that is, men cannot legally be *raped* (although they can be sexually assaulted in ways that might be regarded as equally serious).<sup>7</sup> The centrality of gender, both to the phenomenon and to the analysis, is what has rendered rape as a paradigmatic form of sexual oppression from a feminist point of view. There continues to be so little documentation of women sexually assaulting men in such extreme forceful ways that it might look anything like rape (in the narrow sense of the word), that any such reports operate as if exceptions to prove the rule.<sup>8</sup>

Moving away from a strictly typological way of thinking about rape, toward a more dimensional approach of seeing rape on a continuum with other forms of sexual victimization, however, opens up a new vista for considering the specifically gendered nature of sexual coercion. While it is difficult to imagine a woman forcing a man to have sex through the use of physical force or the threat of force, for example, it might not be so implausible to imagine a woman pressuring a man to have sex through verbal coercion. In the past decade a group of psychologists instigated an interesting extension or reversal of the more commonplace research on men's sexual aggression against women. Arguing that the original research was set up in a biased fashion, by only asking men about being aggressive and women about being aggressed against, they asked both women and men about their experiences of being both aggressive and victimized. On the face of it, the results vindicated their concerns. Men also reported having had sex when they didn't want to – with women. However, there were some important differences in the ways that women and men described the impact of sexual coercion. In Chapter 7 I critically discuss this move to research women's sexual aggression and their male victims. I argue that it is fundamentally flawed to assume that heterosexual aggression is the same for women and men. Paradoxically, perhaps, I also suggest that work addressing these questions has radical potential for a feminist analysis of rape and sexual coercion. Part of the reason for this suggestion is what I argue to be the need for making room for representations of women and men that disrupt the traditional gendered binary which holds men as the active sexual agents and women as passive, relatively asexual persons whose sexual agency is limited to responding to men's initiatives.

The question of female desire is one issue at stake here. Just how does our society deal with women's sexual desire and with women's active and enthusiastic pursuit of sex? The image of a woman actively seeking sex is still, perhaps, regarded as something almost desperate or dangerous.<sup>9</sup> In the new research on women's sexual aggression toward men, it is telling that some of the researchers consistently use the phrase "women sexual aggressors and initiators." The arguments developed by these researchers are actually based on some slippery conflation of these two possibilities. It is as if they are unconsciously suggesting that the woman who initiates sex is a sexual aggressor! This hints at a dreary and confusing scenario for women who want to be sexual. They can go for what they want, but they mustn't be seen to be wearing the pants. Research on teenage girls' sexuality, as I discuss in Chapter 4, shows that the gap between their desires and their experiences can be wide. The problem with this, I argue, is that if we don't provide a cultural context which clearly spells out that sexual relationships should be built around women's sexual desires just as much as men's, then heterosex is doomed to be a site conducive to coercion of women.

My central argument in Part 3 of the book, which I take up directly in Chapter 8, is about the need to unsettle rigid gendered binaries around both active, desiring sexuality and physical aggression, as well as around the possibilities for victimization. This is not to advocate cavalier countercultural acts by individual women and men,

in the absence of social change. Rather, it is to promote a transformation of the cultural conditions of possibility for gendered ways of being sexual and “aggressive.” Social change in these directions is, I believe, essential for the possibilities of eliminating rape. Yet taking this path requires a careful engagement with the contemporary material effects of those very binaries, lest we invoke the fallacy, as Susan Bordo (1997) has warned, of thinking that we can get beyond these dualisms simply because we can destabilize them in theory. That is why, for instance, I maintain the usual framework throughout the book of writing of rape as something that is done by men to women. While I believe that it is essential to complicate that narrative – by, for example, recognizing possibilities of sexual violence done by women to men, by men to men, and by women to women – any attempt to do this must not dislocate an attempt to understand the rape of women by men enabled by contemporary Western normative patterns of heterosexuality.

Given the profound changes that have taken place in our thinking about sex and about sexual victimization, I suggest that we need to revamp our thinking about rape. This takes me into territory that requires a “both/and” logic in relation to the standard form of the feminist revolution of meanings around rape. While acknowledging the limitations of practically any strategy we might recommend for stopping rape, I discuss a number of strategies for continuing, supplementing, and revising ongoing work toward ending rape.

## Notes

- 1 This truncated historical observation is not meant to imply a linear progressive narrative of heterosexual sex, which is especially troubled by the consideration of a broader historical context. For instance, historians write of a “sexual revolution” of sorts in the eighteenth century, prior to which heterosexual sex was less phallogentric and women’s sexuality more “aggressive” (Hitchcock 1997, 2002). Indeed prior to this time, women’s sexual pleasure (and orgasm in particular) was regarded as essential for conception (Laqueur 1990).
- 2 When I started using the phrases “heterosexual rape” and “heterosexual coercion,” I had in mind acts of rape and/or sexual coercion that take place within actual or potential heterosexual relationships of some kind. In my mind, this would exclude stranger rape, but include acquaintance rape when the context is one in which there is at least the potential to imagine an appropriate heterosexual encounter, liaison, or relationship taking place. Although I’ve retained use of these terms, I’m no longer sure this distinction is always necessary and/or valid.
- 3 The technologies and cultural prominence of social media may be modifying how this works, as the massive volume and immediacy of digital media, including user-created content, arguably shapes more fractured silos of culture.
- 4 With a fourth part added for the second edition.
- 5 In this analysis of heterosexuality I draw both loosely and directly on research I have done and supervised over the past 15 years. This includes a study on women’s experiences of sexual coercion, in which I interviewed 12 women, as well as conducting group interviews; a study on women’s experiences of and views about condoms (with Kathryn McPhillips) in which I interviewed 14 women; a study based on interviews with 15 women and 15 men about their experiences of and views about intercourse in relation to other heterosexual practices (with Kathryn McPhillips and Ginny Braun); interviews with five men about their experiences of sexual coercion (a study that never quite got off the ground!); a study (with Annie Potts, Victoria Grace, and Tiina Vares) involving

interviews with 27 men and 33 women about their experiences and views in relation to Viagra. I also draw loosely on insights gained in the course of supervising numerous student research projects in which interviews and focus-groups have been used to explore related issues, for example: women's sexual desires; safer sex; sexuality and cervical cancer prevention policy; the coital imperative; popular cultural representations of women's (hetero)sexuality; people's views about so-called false rape allegations; people's views of public gender harassment; teenage girls' and boys' accounts of heterosexual; sex therapists' accounts of sex therapy; and views and experiences relating to rape and sexual coercion among gay and bisexual men. My perspective is also informed indirectly by collaborative research with Alison Towns and Peter Adams involving interviews with 18 men who were at the point of entering a stopping violence program because of having used violence against their women partners.

- 6 In practice, the picture is more complicated. Gay and bisexual men also report having unwanted sex with men, as well as experiencing sexual assault (e.g., Fenaughty *et al.* 2006). Lori Girshick's (2002) research shows that lesbian and bisexual women also report experiencing sexual violence at the hands of other women.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:* There has been a growing body of research in this area (see for example Rothman, Exner, and Baughman 2011). The research community has also increasingly recognized that transgender people experience high rates of sexual assault (e.g., James *et al.* 2016; see also Cantor *et al.* 2017).

- 7 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:* This connection has been unsettled in many jurisdictions that have introduced gender neutral laws. Sometimes this occurred as part of a reform package that included changes to terminology – where “rape” was dropped from statutes in favour of terms like “sexual assault” (such as in Canada and some Australian states) (e.g., Boxall, Tomison and Hulme 2014; Gotell 2010). However, legal definitions of rape remain explicitly gendered in some places. In England and Wales, for example, the law allows that both women and men can be raped, but specifies the act be committed by a “person” with a penis (Sexual Offences Act 2003). In New Zealand law, the crime of rape can only be perpetrated by a person with a penis who penetrates another person's genitalia (which, as McDonald, Byrne, and Dickson 2017, point out, is an awkward and problematic compromise in response to debates about the gendering of the crime). There seems to be a steady move toward ongoing institutionalization of gender neutral approaches to sexual violence. In 2013, for instance, the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States introduced a gender neutral definition of rape for the collection of data on “sex offenses” (see Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting n.d.). I have found surprisingly little recent scholarly debate about the gendered – or gender neutral – formulation of legal definitions of rape (although see du Toit 2012; Rumney 2007; Russell 2013; Novotny 2002; see also Regan and Kelly 2003).

- 8 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:* A counter discourse has emerged in recent years that would dispute this claim. I discuss this further in Chapter 9.

- 9 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:* It is difficult to know if and how the image of a woman actively seeking sex has changed since the turn of the twenty-first century. As has been the case for some decades, I suspect women remain caught within contradictory imperatives and moral codes. On the one hand, women's agentic pursuit of sex is superficially celebrated – and social technologies, like Tinder, help create the conditions for putting it into practice. Yet, “slut-shaming” has not gone away, and women's agentic sexuality is still policed ways that men's, in general, is not. As Charlene Senn and I found in reviewing research on casual sex or “hooking up,” for example, the field of play is one in which women still risk the prospect of disrespect and judgment (Gavey and Senn 2014).

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## **PART 1**

# Rape in a different light

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# 1

## RAPE AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

And the rape story is turned into a story of everyday folk in everyday life . . .

*(Ken Plummer 1995: 73)*

Not too long ago rape was regarded very differently from how it is understood today. Despite long-standing recognition of the sparse existence of heinous rape as a serious crime, rapes were more often silenced, denied, minimized or condoned. Crucially, public discourse on rape was sorely missing a woman's point of view. Since the early 1970s, there has been a marked transformation in Western representations of rape – in psychology, law, media and popular culture. Rape is in many ways still tolerated in our society, but no longer without fierce contestation on multiple fronts. In this chapter I will sketch some of the key elements of this recent history as they relate to my interest in exposing the cultural scaffolding of rape.<sup>1</sup>

Rape, in the mind of seventeenth-century English Chief Justice Sir Matthew Hale, was “a most detestable crime,” that ought to be “severely and impartially . . . punished with death” (Hale 1736; quoted in Taylor 1987: 75). Yet, he cautioned, “it is an accusation easily to be made and hard to be proved, and harder to be defended by the party accused, tho [*sic*] never so innocent” (*ibid.*). This overriding concern for the wrongs of falsely accusing a man of rape, over and above the wrongs of rape itself has, according to Brownmiller (1975), been a constant feature of rape's place in the Western imaginary (and is, perhaps, more universal). Hale's pithy edict has had long-lasting influence on legal thinking about rape within systems based on English common law. Echoing the spirit of his concerns, judges were for many years required to explicitly warn juries to be wary of women's claims of rape (Burt 1991; Estrich 1987). This was necessary, argued influential British legal scholar Glanville Williams (1962: 662), “because sexual cases are particularly subject to the danger of deliberately false charges, resulting from sexual neurosis, phantasy, jealousy, spite, or simply a girl's refusal to admit that she

consented to an act of which she is now ashamed.” So, juries were given formal advice like the following standard jury instructions for California in the 1970s: “A charge such as that made against the defendant in this case is one which is easily made and, once made, difficult to defend against, even if the person accused is innocent. Therefore, the law requires that you examine the testimony of the female person named in the information with caution” (Le Grand 1973: 932).<sup>2</sup> Women were just not to be believed about rape – or, even if they were, they were just as likely to be blamed for the whole event.

Hale’s influence persisted in spite of strong evidence about the inaccuracy of his claims that rape is easy to report and that it is difficult to defend against (Brown-miller 1975; Le Grand 1973). While the dynamics of who is believed about rape and who is persecuted for rape are thoroughly patterned by race and ethnicity, statistical estimates of the (small) proportion of rapes that lead to convictions hardly support the general notion that rape is difficult to defend against (e.g., see Lees 1997; Mack 1998; Stubbs 2003).<sup>3</sup> For instance, one study of all rapes ( $n=861$ ) reported to a U.S. police department over a one-year period found that only 12 per cent resulted in convictions and only 7 per cent resulted in prison sentences (Frazier and Haney 1996).<sup>4</sup>

Not all rape, however, has been routinely minimized and condoned. Definitions of rape have historically been carefully policed and deployed in ways that allowed strict societal condemnation for certain kinds of rapes (violent attacks by strangers) committed on certain kinds of women (white, “respectable,” and sexually chaste) by certain kinds of men (Black,<sup>5</sup> working-class, deviant) (see LaFree 1989). Reports of rapes that fell outside these parameters were more vulnerable to being dismissed by police and others as instances of sex rather than rape, or as simply untrue. For much of the twentieth century rapes by fathers or other authority figures were readily explained away by psychoanalysis as pure fantasy – in what is arguably the painful legacy of Freud’s apparent capitulation of his seduction theory (see Masson 1985).<sup>6</sup> In the early 1970s, Kurt Weis and Sandra Borges (1973: 71) noted that although the legal definition of rape is “clear and simple,” prejudice and stereotype led to a “much narrower ‘working’ definition of rape among the public and police” (see also Estrich 1987; Pateman 1980; Scutt 1976). They claimed that “It is deemed a rape only if the assailant is a violent stranger, if the victim reports the rape immediately after it occurred, and if she can provide evidence of the attack and of her active resistance” (Weis and Borges 1973: 71–2). Even women who were raped in ways that conformed to this narrow stereotype of rape were still vulnerable to being disbelieved or, more probably, blamed for some indiscretion of dress or independence. The relative exception, where racism enters, is in how the rape of white women has been treated when the accused rapist is a Black, brown or indigenous man. In such cases, there is strong evidence that women’s testimonies have in general been treated as more credible. Black men accused of raping white women have been more likely to face more serious charges, and they have received harsher punishments than other groups of men charged with rape (e.g., LaFree 1980, 1989; see also Cermak 2001; Dorr 2001; Estrich 1987; Moorti 2002).

A common reaction to the allegation of rape right up until the mid- to late twentieth century was: “It was not a real rape but a seduction, and if it *was* rape then the woman was already morally inferior” (Weis and Borges 1973: 77). Underlying this response to rape seems to be a complex array of factors, including not only a general sexism and ideas about women as male property, but also a set contradictory of ideas about women’s sexuality. For instance, while women were portrayed as sexually passive in relation to men, they were also imbued with a dangerous lurking sexuality that could be invoked in all sorts of ways to explain and justify rape. This underlying magnetically beckoning sexuality ties in with the notion of female sexual provocation that has been crucially invoked to diminish male agency in rape and to minimize the harm that rape might do to women.<sup>7</sup> This is the idea that women are really responsible for rape by crossing some invisible boundary of sexual chastity to turn on men’s (naturally) rampant sexuality.

Also significant in the male-eye view of rape is the notion that women could have “an unconscious ‘rape wish’”(Weis and Borges 1973: 79), set up in part by the tension between women’s seething underlying sexuality and the social parameters which required it be unleashed by force in order for their feminine virtue to be protected. This way of thinking about rape could take hold in a period when there was no open outlet for the voices of women who had experienced rape, so that women’s own stories of what rape was like remained unspoken and/or denigrated in the public arena. In this context, rape could be represented as merely a form of sex with no recognition of its hurtful and humiliating elements. The task of defining the truth of sex, rape, and women’s psychology was left in the hands of scientific and medical experts. Psychoanalysis, with its notion of female masochism (Albin 1977; Edwards 1981), and sexology, with its promotion of forced sex as natural and normal, both neatly played to a cultural tendency to ignore, minimize, or justify rape.

Havelock Ellis, perhaps the most influential sexologist of the early twentieth century, provided an extremely gender-differentiated model of heterosexuality marked by male “aggressiveness” and female “coyness” (Ellis 1948). “Rooted in the sexual instinct” of women, according to Ellis (1948: 95), “we find a delight in roughness, violence, pain and danger.” Naturally, “the masculine tendency” is “to delight in domination” (ibid.: 32). Male force in this equation was naturalized by recourse to the logic of evolution, as Ellis (1948: 32) observed in citing A. Marro’s explanation for “why it is that among savages courtship becomes so often a matter in which persuasion takes the form of force”:

Force is the foundation of virility, and its psychic manifestation is courage. In the struggle for life violence is the first virtue. The modesty of women – in its primordial form consisting in physical resistance, active or passive, to the assaults of the male – aided selection by putting to the test man’s most important quality, force.

These elements of Ellis’s ideas were carried to a wider audience through Theodoor Hendrik van de Velde’s (1930) highly influential book, *Ideal*

*Marriage*, which was apparently regarded as the “Bible’ of sex manuals” up until the 1970s (Jackson 1994: 146):

What both man and woman, driven by obscure primitive urges, wish to feel in the sexual act, is the essential force of *maleness*, which expresses itself in a sort of violent and absolute *possession* of the woman. And so both of them can and do exult in a certain degree of male aggression and dominance – whether actual or apparent – which proclaims this essential force.

(*van de Velde 1930: 159*)

Such force was no doubt required because women’s sexual “needs” were generally represented at the time, not as necessarily lesser than men’s, but in need of “awakening” by the man (Gordon 1971). Ellis did admonish men to ensure that their wives were sexually aroused before intercourse; otherwise “if the man is sufficiently ignorant or sufficiently coarse-grained to be satisfied with the woman’s submission, he may easily become to her, in all innocence, a cause of torture” (Ellis 1998: 114; see also Stopes 1926). Van de Velde (1930: 148) echoed this sentiment:

For the man who neglects the love-play is guilty not only of coarseness, but of positive brutality; and his omission can not only offend and disgust a woman, but also injure her on the purely physical plane. And this sin of omission is unpardonably *stupid*.

However, the unavoidable difficulty with this particular model of heterosexual sex is the question of how to distinguish female reluctance that is genuine disinterest or revulsion from female reluctance that is a normal and proper part of the “game” of “courtship”:

in the proper playing of her part she has to appear to shun the male, to flee from his approaches – to even actually repel them.

...

The seeming reluctance of the female is not intended to inhibit sexual activity either in the male or in herself, but to increase it in both. The passivity of the female, therefore, is not a real, but only an apparent, passivity, and this holds true of our own species as much as of the lower animals.

(*Ellis 1948: 229*)

The problem with Ellis’s sexology is that it allows no room for women’s voice or agency in heterosexual sex. Any determination about the occurrence, timing, or course of sex is left to the man’s discretion and goodwill.<sup>8</sup> While Ellis (1948: 101) did explain that it is “only within limits that a woman really enjoys the pain, discomfort, or subjection to which she submits,” the impossible challenge remained: who gets to say how much aggression and pain is too much? Clearly this framework has dangerous implications for acknowledging the reality of rape, on the basis of women’s accounts, as seen when these ideas are invoked in a legal context to minimize rape. Henry Weihofen (1959: 210), for instance, argued that

rape accusations “are very frequently made by women who are caught in the act of fornication, or who are seeking compensation, marriage or revenge”:

Even the woman who is quite sane, but who is possessed of strong guilt feelings, may convince herself in retrospect that her own conduct was really blameless and that she was forced. This conviction is the more easily arrived at because it is quite likely that her conscious response at the time could not accurately be labeled either as consent or non-consent. There may have been an ambivalent and confused mixture of desire and fear, neither of which was clearly dominant. Most women want their lovers to be at least somewhat aggressive and dominating. Some consciously or unconsciously want to be forced.<sup>9</sup> Their erotic pleasure is stimulated by preliminary love-play involving physical struggle, slapping, scratching, pinching and biting. The struggle also saves face for the girl who fears she would be considered “loose” if she yielded without due maidenly resistance; it also relieves the guilt feeling that might exist if she could tell herself that “he made me do it.” Many of the wrestling matches in parked cars come within this category.<sup>10</sup>

When female sexuality is portrayed like this, as present and strong, yet shackled by the constraints of a socially required femininity, the man who is sexually forceful is not a rapist but some kind of romantic hero.<sup>11</sup> The woman who is forced can never be a rape victim, because she was “asking for it” in the indirect way that women must. Alternatively she was an active and willing participant, who later changed her mind, out of shame. As sex researcher Alfred Kinsey is reported to have said, “the difference between a good time and rape often depends largely upon whether the girl’s parents happened to be awake when she returned home” (see Forrester 1986: 253 n). Within this model of heterosexuality, many acts of rape could conceivably pass under the guise of normal sex. This representational possibility was not necessarily restricted to rapes that took place within a heterosexual relationship. Even those that made it to court could be minimized and rendered not-rape through this kind of logic. Susan Edwards (1981: 50) has noted that within the rape trial itself, “it is invariably the case that a model of female sexuality as *agent provocateur*, temptress or seductress is set in motion.” It is a familiar Western way of thinking about female and male sexuality, linking as it does to the Biblical story of Eve (Bland 1981: 64; see also Smart 1989, 1995).

The other strong possibility that women faced in disclosing or reporting a rape was a response of disbelief – that is, that anything at all happened. Not only was it thought that women might “cry rape” in a vindictive act of revenge, but it was considered entirely possible that women might generate the idea that they had been raped through neurotic fantasy. In the second half of the nineteenth century these kinds of “sexual delusions of rape” were considered to be the outcome of gynecological pathology (Edwards 1981). By the early twentieth century, however, psychoanalysis held that “elements of sexual fantasy and masochism [were] essential characteristic features of femininity” (Edwards 1981). Helene Deutsch’s work in

particular provided the chilling proposition that “women secretly desire to be raped and violated” (Edwards 1981: 103; see also Albin 1977; Brownmiller 1975). These “rape fantasies,” she reckoned, were “variants of the seduction fantasies so familiar to us in the lying accounts of hysterical women patients” (Deutsch 1944: 256; quoted in Edwards 1981: 106):

Rape fantasies often have such irresistible verisimilitude that even the most experienced judges are misled in trials of innocent men accused of rape by hysterical women. My own experience of accounts by white women of rape by Negroes (who are often subjected to terrible penalties as a result of these accusations) has convinced me that many fantastic stories are produced by the masochistic yearnings of these women.

(Deutsch 1944: 254; quoted in Brownmiller 1975: 229–30)<sup>12</sup>

These views of women’s masochism and the inherent untrustworthiness of a woman’s allegation of rape have been recycled in public debate against legislative changes, as well as in the courtroom (Edwards 1981; Estrich 1987). In his influential 1978 *Textbook of Criminal Law*, Williams explicitly drew on Deutsch’s theories to claim: “That some women enjoy fantasies of being raped is well authenticated, and they may welcome a masterful advance while putting up a token resistance” (quoted in Forrester 1986: 65; see also Williams 1962). This discursive construction of female sexuality allows woman’s sexual passivity, or even her resistance, to be seen as a faux front that masks her real underlying desires. From this point of view, women’s consent is always up for question. These notions of female precipitation (be it active or completely passive) formed a vocabulary of justification that could readily be deployed in everyday talk as part of the ongoing formation of a culture that silences rape survivors. They could also be drawn on by men to successfully defend against rape charges where the issue in dispute was the woman’s consent. Hostility to the woman who dares name forced sex as rape is evident in the archetypal retort, “She was asking for it” (see Kanin and Parcell 1977). Anything from her dress, her alcohol use, or her sexuality could be invoked to invite such a diminishing and blaming response.

It is certainly possible to exaggerate the progress that has been made on changing societal responses to rape (e.g., see Campbell et al. 1999; Frazier and Haney 1996; Gavey and Gow 2001; Koss 2000; Koss, Bachar, and Hopkins 2003; Lees 1993, 1996, 1997; Schulhofer 1998). All too often, for instance, we continue to hear about members of the criminal justice system – including judges – who are comfortable with almost limitless notions of consent. For example, as one Australian judge<sup>13</sup> explained to a jury, consent need not be a very contented act:

Consent may be words, may be by actions or even inaction . . . that is knowing what is about to happen and allowing it to happen or a combination of these. It may be hesitant, it may be reluctant, it may be grudging, it may even be tearful, but if the complainant in this case consciously permitted the

act of sexual intercourse that you find occurred, if you do, provided her permission or consent is not obtained by terror, force or fear, it is still consent.

*(Quoted in van de Zandt 1998: 138)*

Likewise, a U.K. judge said in summing up to a jury in a 1990 rape case: “As the gentlemen of the jury will understand, when a woman says ‘No’ she doesn’t always mean ‘No’” (quoted in Lees 1993: 20). The defendant in this case, a London property consultant, was cleared of rape. In a 1996 New Zealand case a judge told the jury in his summing up that “if every man stopped the first time a woman said ‘No,’ the world would be a much less exciting place to live,” after which the jury took 45 minutes to acquit the accused man of rape charges (Quaintance 1996).

Yet despite the persistence of such intrusions from “the old game of consent” within the law (Leader-Elliott and Naffine 2000), there has definitely been a dramatic move since the 1970s away from the deeply masculinist representations of rape that previously completely dominated public discourse. This is not to deny that strong currents of such rape-supportive discourses don’t still exist. But they are now routinely challenged through new discourses that tell a very different truth about rape. For instance, the New Zealand judge cited above received “a barrage of criticism” for his comments – not only from predictable sources like a women lawyers association but, in what was noted at the time as a very rare move, from the Chief Justice of New Zealand. There is no doubt that rape has become widely seen as a serious social problem. It would now be highly improbable to find publicly displayed the kind of poster I remember seeing in my local newsagent’s when I was a teenager in the 1970s. Its text (which I’m sure is also highly offensive on cultural and religious grounds) read something like: “Confucius says rape impossible: Woman with skirt up run faster than man with pants down.” While the meanings of rape remain contested, they certainly have changed since this time. The “humor” of this poster could no longer be assumed. The place of such rape jokes would no longer be so public, and it would be widely recognized that slogans such as this would evoke raw emotional responses and political sensitivities that even the most obscene misogynists might recognize the need to curtail.<sup>14</sup>

Alongside this change to the general milieu in which rape is understood, official responses toward women who have been raped have also changed immensely in many Western countries, and are continuing to be debated and improved.<sup>15</sup> These shifts have arisen out of a widespread recognition within legal circles, according to New Zealand criminologist Warren Young (1996: 10),

that the criminal justice system was heavily and unfairly weighted against rape complainants and in favour of accused and that this was due largely to the fact that there were a whole range of false assumptions and myths which underpinned not only social attitudes about sexual violence but also the response of the criminal justice system itself.

As Carol Smart (1995) has argued, women's bodies have been treated within the law as inherently problematic, as by nature inviting trouble. So, within a rape trial the constant scrutiny has been on the woman and her body; it was she and her body that must be interrogated in order to see whether she invited that trouble – the rape – upon herself. Thus, even for those women “fortunate” enough to be believed by police, and whose rapists were brought to trial, the experience of appearing as a witness in the court case has itself been likened to a “second rape” (Madigan and Gamble 1991; see also Lees 1993, 1996, 1997; Jordan 2001; NZLC 1997; Matoesian 1993; van de Zandt 1998; Winkler 2002); and rape trials have been described as “a man's trial, but a woman's tribulation” (Young 1996: 10; Berger 1977).

In many Western countries substantial reforms had been instituted by the mid-1980s to improve the ways that rape is dealt with by the criminal justice system. Among these changes in New Zealand were improvements to police training and the conduct of post-rape medical examinations, as well as provision for independent crisis support and counseling. Also included were an extended legal definition of sexual violation, the removal of spousal immunity, and modified courtroom practices and procedures. Crucial among these has been the introduction of a number of measures designed to protect the rights of the woman giving evidence of rape. For example, the provision of a closed courtroom, suppression of her name, rules restricting the degree to which she can be questioned about her past sexual behavior (so-called rape shield laws), and the removal of the requirement for judges to warn juries about the dangers of convicting in the absence of corroborative evidence (that is, on the raped woman's testimony alone).<sup>16</sup> A review of women's experiences of reporting rape, however, suggested that while progress had been made after the 1985 reforms in the way New Zealand police responded to rape victims, a considerable lack of consistency meant that whether or not a woman could expect to be believed depended on “the luck of the draw on the day” (Jordan, 1996: 34). In light of this study, a national police policy on adult sexual assault investigations was instigated in 1998, in which it was emphasized that victims' safety was “paramount” (Doone 1998).<sup>17</sup>

So, in New Zealand as in many other places, women who report a rape are much less likely to be treated with derision, suspicion, and disbelief than they once were. Although in practice the attention she gets from police may still be patchy (Campbell et al. 1999; Jordan 2001; see also Gavey and Gow 2001) and her treatment as a witness within a criminal trial may still be chillingly awful (e.g., Lees 1993, 1996, 1997; van de Zandt 1998; see also Frazier and Haney 1996), she now enters a cultural space in which it is more likely to be accepted by policy makers, many in the criminal justice system, and the like that she *should* be treated seriously and with respect (e.g., Doone 1998; L'Heureux-Dubé 2003; Perry 2003).

Apart from these ongoing moves to improve the criminal justice response to rape (and rape victims in particular), services now exist in most Western countries that are designed to support and assist women and children (and to some extent, men) who have been raped or sexually assaulted. Increased public awareness of the issues of violence and sexual assault also means that a woman who has been raped will be more likely to find support and understanding from her friends and family

(although it is still not to be taken for granted). It is certainly not yet time for celebration or complacency. In many places, services for rape survivors are limited and inadequate, and rape crisis centers have continued to fight for funding.<sup>18</sup> Also, as I've already discussed, the criminal justice system appears to be unreliable in giving women who have been raped a fair deal. Such are its inherent problems, Mary Koss (2000: 1339) has argued, that "we, as practitioners of psychological science and practice, can no longer passively support justice responses that the tools of our profession have revealed to be psychologically damaging and ineffective." She and her colleagues have instead moved to promote alternatives like restorative justice (e.g., Koss 2000; Koss, Bachar, and Hopkins 2003).

Significant pockets of victim-blaming and minimizing discourses of rape still exist, and the social structures for preventing rape and responding effectively to women who have been raped are still inadequate. It is nevertheless fair to say, however, that the whole ground on which our understandings of rape are based has shifted in some spectacular ways.<sup>19</sup> In the rest of this chapter I will chart some of the key feminist and social science contributions to this reformulation of rape.

The new social scientific gaze on rape, as well as the legislative changes around rape, have to be seen against a backdrop of feminist activism. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century feminists campaigned for women's sexual rights and against "crimes against women." This kind of activism within the United States and the United Kingdom has been well documented (e.g., Bacchi 1988; Bevacqua 2000; Bland 1983; D'Emilio and Freedman 1988; Giddings 1985; Gordon 1976; Jackson 1983, 1994; Jeffreys 1982; Gordon and DuBois 1983; Smith-Rosenberg 1986; Pleck 1983; Walkowitz 1982). But it was the grassroots praxis emerging from the second wave of the women's movement that most recently delivered rape onto the public agenda (to borrow Maria Bevacqua's phrase) and onto the research agenda. It is surprising to learn that rape was only claimed as an issue for the women's movement in the United States in 1970 (Bevacqua 2000). Before this time, there had been no sustained feminist analysis of the place of rape and sexual assault in women's lives. To illustrate the immensity of this shift in feminist conscientization around rape, it is extraordinary to read that Susan Brownmiller – well-known writer of the classic anti-rape text *Against Our Will* (1975) – recalls that prior to a consciousness-raising (CR) meeting in which three other women shared their experiences of rape or attempted rape, she "had held the 'typical liberal-left position: that rape was a false accusation by a white woman against a black man down South . . . The perpetrator was always somehow a white woman'" (quoted in Bevacqua 2000: 32).<sup>20</sup>

It has been well noted that the switch Brownmiller alludes to here – from a politics of race to a politics of gender in thinking about rape – was associated with what many believe became a blindness to the significance of race in these (white) feminist analyses. The largely white feminist anti-rape movement has frequently been criticized for ignoring the racial politics that saturate societal responses to rape (e.g., see Davis 1978, 1990; Hall 1983; Moorti 2002). Black feminists in the United States have argued that the politics of sexual violence or violence against women

more generally are more complicated than white radical feminist theories suggest. Angela Davis (1978, 1990), Patricia Hill Collins (1991), and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993, 1994), for instance, have emphasized the necessity of understanding rape within a broader weave of race, gender, and class oppression (see also hooks 1990; Smith 1994).<sup>21</sup> Without an appreciation of the impact of race or ethnicity in understanding rape, the particular experiences of Black and other minority and/or disadvantaged women can easily be overlooked – within both local and wider communities. In New Zealand, Mereana Pitman (1996: 46), who works in traditional ways with Māori in her own iwi (tribe) and hapu (sub-tribe), says she does not encourage her clients or her own whanau (extended family) to report rapes to the police because: “I personally have no faith in a process that is from the outset about the agenda of others, is male dominated, and does not see any other way but the pākehā law.” According to Pitman (1996: 47): “Māori perceive the process of law as nothing short of institutional rape.” In a U.S. study of women who had experienced rape or attempted rape, Gail Wyatt (1992) found that African American women were less likely than white American women to disclose the experience – including to the police. She suggested that one reason for this could be their lower expectations of receiving support, given the historical roots of tolerance for sexual exploitation of Black women during and after slavery.

While such racialized patterns of justice are no doubt true in any multicultural society, they have particular salience in the United States given the racially charged historical deployment of rape “as a political weapon of terror” against Black women by white men (Davis 1990: 44).<sup>22</sup> Black women activists in the late nineteenth century, like anti-lynching campaigner Ida B. Wells, highlighted the bitter hypocrisy that allowed the lynching of Black men to be justified as punishment for rape of white women (in many cases, as she documented, in the absence of any actual rape complaint), while at the same time the rape and sexual violation of Black women by white men was routine (e.g., Giddings 1985).

Aaronette White (1999) has discussed the particular challenges for Black women in confronting sexual violence in the United States, where the history of public discourse on rape has been thoroughly enmeshed with the legacy of slavery and ongoing racism in how rape has been dealt with (see also Crenshaw 1993; Davis 1978, 1990; Williams 1974). In particular, reports of rapes by Black men against white women frequently led to lynching or harsh criminal justice system responses to men who were sometimes innocent (as in the famous *Scottsboro* case) (Davis 1990). Between 1930 and the late 1960s, 455 men were legally executed for rape in the United States; 405 of them were Black men and almost all the complainants were white (Berger 1977; Davis 1978; LaFree 1989). By contrast no man was ever executed in the United States for the rape of a Black woman (White 1999).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in Gary LaFree’s (1980) study of criminal justice system responses to 881 sexual assault cases in a large United States city, he found that while Black men who assaulted white women were no more likely than other men to be arrested or found guilty of rape, they were more likely to receive more serious sanctions (on a number of dimensions) than other men.<sup>24</sup> In this context of endemic racism that

has so clearly demonized Black men relative to white men, the feminist trope of rape and the anti-racist trope of lynching have frequently been pitted against each other, as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) argues in her analysis of the *Clarence Thomas v. Anita Hill* hearings. Prominent anti-racist activists have portrayed men like Thomas and Mike Tyson “as high-profile Black martyrs persecuted for behavior that white men get away with on a daily basis” (White 1999: 82). In anti-racist circles, Black feminists have noted, the race politics of rape have often superseded the gender politics of rape (see Crenshaw 1994). Black feminists have had to work carefully to design anti-rape activism in ways that can bring gender back into the equation, without sacrificing the racial politics of rape and being seen to be simply colluding with racism (White 1999).

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To return to the point when sexual violence began to enter the popular imagination in a different way, Maria Bevacqua credits radical feminist groups with first identifying rape as a serious social issue for women in the United States.<sup>25</sup> In particular, she suggests CR groups played a key role in propelling rape onto the feminist agenda. In the context of these groups where women met to share their personal experiences and theorize the political roots of those experiences, women shared previously untold stories of rape. Confronted by the extent to which rape had touched women’s lives, those involved came to appreciate how the radical feminist notion that “the personal is political” was classically embodied by the phenomenon of rape. No longer was rape seen as just a personal misfortune, but instead as an instrument of oppression (see, for example, the 1971 “New York Radical Feminists Manifesto” by Manhart and Rush, in *New York Radical Feminists* 1974).

Before long a dedicated anti-rape movement developed within the U.S. women’s movement (Bevacqua 2000). Concerted grassroots community action sprang up across the United States, to educate the public with a new consciousness about rape and to lobby for legislative change. Similar patterns of action followed in a number of other countries. One of the key shifts of this feminist revisioning of rape was to thoroughly challenge the traditional victim-blaming views about women who had experienced rape and to mobilize instead a pro-woman stance. Central to the anti-rape movement’s activities was the establishment of rape crisis centers, to provide direct support to women survivors. The first center in the United States was set up in Washington DC in 1972 (Bevacqua 2000). During the mid-1970s centers began to be established in several other countries, including Australia (Worth 2003), New Zealand (National Collective of Rape Crisis and Related Groups of Aotearoa Inc. 1997), South Africa (Pithey 2003), and the U.K. (Roberts 1989). The spirit of support offered through these centers was squarely within the politicized values of the women’s movement – rejecting hierarchical professionalized models in favor of more egalitarian relationships between women. As the small collective of women who set up the first London rape crisis center in 1976 realized, “there were no experts on rape,

only women who needed support and those of us who could pool our skills in giving it – recognizing always that we could be both” (Roberts 1989: 47).

Before feminism called public attention to the issue of rape as a social problem, the social sciences had largely been quiet about the subject. Not surprisingly, the few prominent early social researchers working in the area mirrored wider community approaches to rape in some undesirable ways. Two of the early figures, Menachim Amir and Eugene Kanin, showed little apparent concern not to pathologize rape victims or blame women for their role in supposedly provoking rape. Amir, in particular, has been widely criticized for his victim-blaming (and inaccurate) portrayals of rape. He is notorious for his ideas on “victim precipitation.” Kanin’s work has more often been cited favorably for its pioneering findings on the extent of male sexual aggression in “dating-courtship” relationships (i.e., Kanin 1957; Kanin and Parcell 1977; Kirkpatrick and Kanin 1957). He was one of the first people to draw attention to widespread sexual coercion within heterosexual relationships. Both, however, tended at times to portray rape as a dance of two parties: “with respect to sex aggression, it seems reasonable to suspect that some of the offended women played sexually receptive and provocative roles which helped precipitate the aggressive episode” (Kanin 1975: 65), and “If the victim is not solely responsible for what becomes the unfortunate event, at least she is often a complementary partner” (Amir 1967: 493).<sup>26</sup> In significant ways then, this early research reinforced popular conceptions of rape.

Marking a distinct break from this trajectory was a major upheaval during the 1970s in the ways that rape was approached by scholars and researchers. As early as 1970, a new voice was beginning to be heard in the medical and psychological literatures that closely paralleled the new feminist-driven community interest in rape. A steady stream of writers began to call the attention of mental health experts to the experiences and needs of women who are raped. Before this time, there had been very little apparent interest within the medical and psychological professions in the experiences of rape victims (as was the case in the social science research field). What scant attention they had received was most often unsympathetic. As authors of the time noted, “The victim’s adjustment following sexual assault has received little attention in the literature. Specific references to the young woman most frequently discuss the possibility of her conscious or unconscious participation in the incident” (Sutherland and Scherl 1970: 503).

Already by 1974 Ann Burgess and Lynda Holmstrom had published their groundbreaking study on “Rape trauma syndrome” in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*. Based on research at a hospital emergency ward with women who had been victims of “forcible rape,” they identified a pattern of “behavioral, somatic, and psychological reactions,” which they explained as “an acute stress reaction to a life-threatening situation” (Burgess and Holmstrom 1974: 982). Others were already beginning to notice the strange absence of prior research attention to the potentially damaging effects of rape on women. Weis and Borges (1973) noted with irony that “a leading study” on rape (by Amir) only discussed the concept of trauma in relation to its role in causing rapists’ behavior. Weis and Borges went on

to report that in research interviews that one of them was doing with “female suicide attempters” they were finding accounts of the physical and psychological trauma of rape. Significantly, it was only around this time that rape came to be widely identified as an inherently traumatic kind of experience (see also Plummer 1995; Vigarello 2001).

At the same time as we saw this increasing sensitivity to the well-being of rape victims, the whole notion of what rape was and its context within wider society was beginning to be seriously questioned. A radical critique of patriarchal society was formulated within the feminist movement of the 1970s. Susan Griffin’s (1977) seminal article, “Rape: The All-American Crime,” is widely regarded as having laid out the conceptual foundations for a new understanding of rape around which the anti-rape movement in the U.S. was organized (e.g., Medea and Thompson 1974). In this work, first published in 1971, Griffin (1977: 66) declared that: “rape is not an isolated act that can be rooted out from patriarchy without ending patriarchy itself.” As part of the picture, normative gender relations were argued to be thoroughly implicated in the maintenance and support of rape. As the New York Radical Feminists Manifesto, written in 1971, argued, “The act of rape is the logical expression of the essential relationship now existing between men and women” (Manhart and Rush 1974: xvi). These feminist writers detailed the ways in which Western society actively tolerated rape, at the same time as formally condemning it. Its criminal status, some argued, was at least in part a reflection of the ways in which rape violated male property rights through one man’s transgression of another man’s ownership of his woman (e.g., Griffin 1977). North American and other Anglo-Western societies were declared to be “rape cultures.” Susan Brownmiller controversially argued that rape was “nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear” (1975: 15; emphasis in original). This kind of analysis led, or at least fed in, to ongoing and embittered debates about the merit of political slogans like “all men are potential rapists” or “all men benefit from rape” (see Geis 1977 for some of the published reaction to Brownmiller’s book at the time). Almost overnight, it seems in retrospect, rape was politicized and became the target of revolutionary change.<sup>27</sup> Within radical feminism it came to be seen not simply as an outcome of individual male deviancy, but as an act of gender terrorism.

Before long, even popular conceptions of rape were transformed in fundamental ways. Critical to this new understanding of rape was the move toward seeing rape from a woman’s point of view. Necessary to achieving this shift was an emphasis on the violence of rape. As Susan Griffin (1977: 66) wrote, “Rape is an act of aggression in which the victim is denied her self-determination. It is an act of violence.” The re-formulation of rape as “violence, not sex” is one of the key shifts in the meaning attributed to second-wave feminist activism against rape. But this new angle is only part of the story. It is complicated by the parallel development of feminist analyses that emphasized the continuity between rape and sex.

Subsequently there has been ongoing debate – both within and outside of feminism – over whether rape is about sex or whether it is about violence and

power. This question raises a host of interesting and complex considerations, but more often than not the points become entangled in arguments that cause more confusion than clarification of the issues. For example, it is not always clear in these debates whether sex, power or violence are being invoked as motivations, means, or in some cases effects of rape. Too often participants lose sight of the social context in which the early feminist analysis of rape was developing. This analysis did not arise as an abstract philosophical treatise, but as a practical theory directed to the social conditions for women at the time. As I have been discussing in this chapter, the standard story of rape in the mid-twentieth century was one that encompassed a notion of rape as a romanticized “crime of passion.” Unless rape was committed by a stranger using extreme physical violence it was something that was easily accommodated within the dominant discourses of heterosexual sex – that is, as just sex and certainly not as rape.<sup>28</sup> When rape was seen to be motivated by men’s sexual needs and desires – that is, to obtain sexual gratification when “normal” means were frustrated (e.g., see Kanin 1967) – inferred qualities of women’s sexuality could be invoked to render her an equally responsible party (as in Amir’s work, for example). It could readily be argued that she (her body, her sexuality) provoked the man, so that she was really to blame. Or, it could be argued that the woman actually consented to sex despite evidence to suggest that she made every effort to repel the man raping her (see Estrich 1987). Some of the flavor of this milieu is captured by Griffin’s (1977: 51) account:

Still, the male psyche persists in believing that, protestations and struggles to the contrary, deep inside her mysterious feminine soul, the female victim has wished for her own fate. A young woman who was raped by the husband of a friend said that days after the incident the man returned to her home, pounded on the door, and screamed to her, “Jane, Jane. You loved it. You know you loved it.”

Diana Russell (1975: 13) noted that when she consulted the literature on rape before setting out to study the subject, she was “appalled” to discover how common it was for clinicians and researchers to assume that women enjoy being raped. At the time she was writing *The Politics of Rape*, she received a letter from an associate consulting editor of *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality* asking if she could answer the following question sent to the journal by a physician: “In cases of forcible rape what percent of the victims experience orgasm?” Or, as Marge Piercy (1985) put it in her famous “Rape poem”:

There is no difference between being raped  
and being run over by a truck  
except that afterward men ask if you enjoyed it.

Portrayals of rape as sexy were (and evidently still are<sup>29</sup>) standard within pornography. Don Smith’s (1976) analysis of the content of 428 “adults only” books available between 1968 and 1974 found that almost one third of the sex acts

involved some degree of force. One of the most common narrative themes in this genre involved a “cool, restrained” beautiful young white woman, whose sexual desire was dormant “until Superstud arrives, who despite her initial resistance and piteous pleas for mercy, rather quickly and relentlessly unlocks her real sexual passion to take her to hitherto totally unimagined heights, leaving her begging for his continued ministrations” (Smith 1976: 23). The message in this narrative, as Scully and Marolla (1993: 29; see also Scully 1990) noted about Smith’s findings, is the promotion of the idea that “women desire and enjoy rape.”

Against this wider backdrop a feminist insistence that rape is violence is hardly surprising. This assertion was an essential remedy to the minimizing and victim-blaming assumptions about rape that were common at the time. It worked as a strategy for confronting people with a different reality of rape: as something to be taken seriously and as something requiring sympathy and understanding for the victim. An emphasis on the violence of rape drew attention to the *harm* it caused, and enabled legitimization of a rape victim’s distress as an understandable and normal response to the frightening and potentially traumatizing experience of rape.

To a large extent, however, the attribution of a “rape as violence, not sex” stance as *the* feminist stance on rape has been overstated. Susan Brownmiller later clarified this frequently misunderstood position, in the context of a radio debate with the evolutionary biologist Randy Thornhill:

I never said that rape was not involved with sex. Obviously, it uses the sex organs. What the women’s movement did say, starting in the 1970s, was that rape was not *sexy*, you see. The men, up to that point, had romanticized rape and always presented scenarios of beautiful but slightly unwilling, but really teasing victims. And the act was constructed as sort of a Robin Hood act of machismo. When women started to speak up about their own experiences of rape, the first thing they said was, “No, there’s nothing sexy about this. This was pure power humiliation, degradation.” And that’s where the feminist theory came from, out of listening to the experiences of women.

*(Brownmiller 2000; quoted in Lloyd 2001: 1553)*

As Brownmiller’s comments make clear here, this whole question of whether rape is to do with sex or with violence arises from a fixation on the masculine point of view. Coexisting with this strategy of emphasizing the violence of rape has always been an equally potent feminist insistence on seeing rape in close relation to normative heterosexuality. These arguments go beyond the point that Brownmiller was making here, to argue that not only is rape not sexy, but also much of what counts for sex is not sexy either (from a woman’s point of view). Feminist theorists who emphasize the sexual dimension of rape do so from an entirely different angle from that of the proponents of the traditional “sexual frustration” explanations. Rather than saying that rape arises out of men’s over-powering and unfulfilled sexual needs, they contend that heterosexuality is imbued with a dominance–submission dynamic, and that power is enacted

through sexual relations as well as in other arenas of gender relations. They also pointed out that rape and sexual intercourse are not always automatically distinguishable from the point of view of women or the law (e.g., Jackson 1978; MacKinnon 1983). This does not mean that rape is no big deal; to the contrary, it implies that regrettably violence and coercion are not inherently absent from sex. Central to the feminist anti-rape agenda, as I've already noted, was bringing a woman's point of view to public understandings of rape that had previously been determined solely from the point of view of men. Distinguishing rape from sex has been one question over which these different points of view often deviated. In bringing a woman's perspective to the fore, and pressing this more radical analysis of rape, influential feminist legal scholar, Catharine MacKinnon (1987b: 86–7), argued in 1981:

What women experience does not so clearly distinguish the normal, everyday things from those abuses from which they have been defined by distinction. Not just "Now we're going to take what *you* say is rape and call it violence"; . . . We have a deeper critique of what has been done to women's sexuality and who controls access to it. What we are saying is that sexuality in exactly these normal forms often *does* violate us. So long as we say that those things are abuses of violence, not sex, we fail to criticize what has been made of *sex*, what has been done to us *through sex*, because we leave the line between rape and intercourse . . . right where it is.

*(Emphasis in original)*

In historical context, these kinds of radical feminist analyses of rape were a brave and revolutionary attack on the masculinist discourses of sex and rape that had worked for so long to support rape. The idea was to speak back to the defenders of rape-supportive discourses (and practices) of sex and gender relations with the message: if you tell us that women's accounts of rape are really just accounts of sex, then there is something very wrong with this model of sex. In doing so, they also called into question the politics and morality of everyday heterosexual sex – including those forms that no one was calling rape.

Radical and lesbian feminist critiques of heterosexuality – both as an institution and as a sexual arrangement – flourished. Within this environment some highly provocative redefinitions of rape were proposed. In the bold political style of the time, Robin Morgan (1978: 165) suggested "that rape exists any time sexual intercourse occurs when it has not been initiated by the woman, out of her own genuine affection and desire"; and Germaine Greer (1975: 378) contended that "we must insist that only evidence of positive desire dignifies sexual intercourse and makes it joyful. From a proud and passionate woman's point of view, anything less is rape." These arguments, presented with all the color and zeal of the early second wave of the women's movement, dramatically punctuated the received views on sex and rape. Stripped of some of their rhetorical excess, however, these writers are illuminating elements of the very same cultural scaffolding of rape that my own

argument is grappling with. No longer was rape the deviant other to normal sex between a man and a woman; but something conceived as an always-possible potential within the very building blocks of ordinary sex.

While stopping just short perhaps of the provocative claims of Morgan and Greer, many social scientists and other writers quickly came to agree that rape was simply the endpoint on a continuum of heterosexual interactions where male aggression and female passivity are integral to the socially constructed roles, and where forms of coercion are normative (e.g., Berger and Searles 1985; Burt 1980; Clark and Lewis 1977; Jackson 1978; Kelly 1987, 1988a, 1988b; MacKinnon 1983, 1987b, 1989; Medea and Thompson 1974; Russell 1975, 1982, 1984; Weis and Borges 1973).<sup>30</sup>

Some feminists, however, argued that there are disadvantages to viewing rape as an extension or form of normal heterosexual practice. For example, Susan Estrich (1987: 82) stressed that focusing on the violent aspect of rape avoids the problem of being seen as “trying to prohibit all sex,” and conveys that sex should be inconsistent with violence. Although referring more specifically to particular radical feminist assertions and implications that all women have been sexually assaulted, Lynne Segal (1987: 36–7) wrote: “it is insulting to women who have been raped to imply all women have been raped; it diminishes rather than clarifies rape’s hideous reality and prevalence.” These sentiments reflect the concerns of some feminists who suggested that by emphasizing the normality of rape and sexual violence, the trauma experienced by victims of “real,” violent, rapes is diluted and downplayed. Some feminists were also cautious to avoid what could be seen as a blanket condemnation of heterosexual sex. This debate is particularly pertinent to the whole area of rape and sexual coercion within heterosexual relationships, because the idea of rape by a sexual partner was for years regarded by many as an oxymoron (Burkhart and Stanton 1988). Those concerned with wife rape, for instance, documented horrifically violent rapes of women by their husbands, which are never reported to the police. In an attempt to convey the horror of some of these hidden crimes they were careful to counter what Finkelhor and Yllö (1985) termed the “sanitary stereotype” of wife rape as romantic lovers’ quarrels (see also Pagelow 1986, 1988). These concerns are extremely important. However, ultimately, the destabilization of any easy opposition between rape and sex is only problematic if we are unable to forgo a “sanitary stereotype” of *sex*. As MacKinnon (1983: 646) argued:

The point of defining rape as “violence not sex” or “violence against women” has been to separate sexuality from gender in order to affirm sex (heterosexuality) while rejecting violence (rape). The problem remains what it has always been: telling the difference.

Monique Plaza (1981: 33) argued a similar position:

Rape must not be cast into an Elsewhere, in “another area” than that of sexuality, that is, of the relationships of power as they are established in a very everyday way between men and women. What should be done, on the

contrary, is to bring contemporary heterosexuality to a position very close to rape, and to take great care not to dissociate them.

(*Emphasis in original*)

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By the 1980s feminist analyses of rape culture had made their way into mainstream social psychology. In a landmark article, published in the bastion of mainstream U.S. experimental social psychology, the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Martha Burt (1980: 217) reported findings from her research on rape myths. She used this phrase to refer to “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists.” For example, “a woman who goes to the home or the apartment of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex,” and “if a woman gets drunk at a party and has intercourse with a man she’s just met there, she should be considered ‘fair game’ to other males at the party who want to have sex with her too, whether she wants to or not” (Burt 1980: 223). Burt explicitly set out to operationalize and test what she referred to as “some of the tenets of feminist analysis of rape” (ibid.: 217), as expressed by the likes of Brownmiller, Griffin, and Clark and Lewis. Her own and other research on attitudes toward rape showed a shockingly high tolerance of such “rape-supportive” views at this time. For example, 40 per cent of her random representative sample of nearly 600 Minnesota residents believed that “if a girl engages in necking or petting and she lets things get out of hand, it is her own fault if her partner forces sex on her.” One third of those surveyed believed that “A woman who gets raped while hitchhiking gets what she deserves.” And 69 per cent agreed with the statement, “‘In the majority of rapes, the victim was promiscuous or had a bad reputation’ (and therefore brought it on herself)” (Burt 1978; cited in Burt and Estep 1981b: 24).<sup>31</sup>

Early on there were discernible differences in the ways that the people surveyed in such research responded to portrayals of rapes that were committed by strangers compared to those committed by men known to the women they raped. In the 1970s and early 1980s forced sex described in date rape and acquaintance rape scenarios was judged to be *not rape* by approximately one third to one half of all participants in a number of studies (Feild and Bienen 1980; Klemmack and Klemmack 1976; Shotland and Goodstein 1983). One study conducted in 1978 with over 400 Los Angeles 14–18-year-old teenagers asked them, “Under what circumstances is it OK for a guy to hold a girl down and force her to have sexual intercourse?” (Goodchilds and Zellman 1984). While 72 per cent initially said it would be unacceptable under any circumstances, the researchers then presented them with a series of hypothetical “what ifs” to contextualize their judgment. At this point, in response to possibilities like “he’s so turned on he can’t stop” or “she’s led him on,” only 21 per cent of the teenagers refused to justify sexual assault (Goodchilds and Zellman 1984: 241; see also Zellman and Goodchilds 1983). A little later, between 13 per cent and 20 per cent of male undergraduate students were willing to condone or justify rape when a woman initiates a date or

goes to the man's apartment (Muehlenhard, Friedman, and Thomas 1985). Rape within dating and intimate contexts also tended to be judged as less serious than rape by a stranger (L'Armand and Pepitone 1982). These lay understandings of rape were consistent with how "simple rapes" had been treated in the courts, where, as Estrich (1987) has shown, women were required to do more than say "no" to prove nonconsent (see also Pateman 1980).

By the late 1980s to early 1990s people taking part in these social psychology studies were much more likely to regard forced intercourse described in hypothetical scenarios as rape (e.g., Bridges 1991). The vast majority of Cook's (1995) participants, for instance, regarded it as unacceptable for a man to force intercourse on a woman in a dating situation, under any circumstances. However, there remained a tendency expressed in some studies for participants to less strongly characterize forced intercourse by a dating partner as rape, compared to intercourse forced by a stranger (Bridges 1991), to see it as less serious (Quackenbush 1989), to regard victims of date and acquaintance rape as more responsible for the rape than victims of stranger rape (Bridges and McGrail 1989; Johnson and Russ 1989), more likely to have enjoyed the rape (Johnson and Russ 1989), and less likely to be psychologically damaged as a result of the incident (Bridges 1991).

Drawing on feminist analyses of rape Burt (1980; Burt and Albin 1981) argued that rape myths play an important part in those of our cultures that tolerate high rape prevalence, by creating a social climate that is hostile to rape victims and by denying the reality of many rapes. In particular, she argued that rape myths serve to actively support rape by providing mechanisms through which rapists can be excused for rape, women can be blamed for rape, and rape by intimates can be called something other than rape (Burt 1991). In this sense, they can be thought of as the building blocks of what radical feminists called a "rape culture." These ideas were consistent with Weis and Borges's (1973: 72) earlier argument about the broader processes of victimization that render the raped woman "a 'legitimate' or 'safe' victim who will not be dangerous to the rapist, since she is unable to relate her experience to others or to effectively direct blame and accusation against the person who raped her."

Within a positivist social psychology tradition, the notion of "rape myth acceptance" has been taken up in an individualized way as a property of individuals' minds. A whole trajectory of this kind of research has investigated the relationships between rape myth acceptance by individual people and all kinds of other personal characteristics and tendencies. It was shown, for instance, that men who adhere to rape myths or "rape-supportive" attitudes are more likely to report higher levels of sexual aggression or coercion (Koss, Leonard, Beezley, and Oros 1985; Malamuth 1988; Muehlenhard and Linton 1987; Murphy, Coleman, and Haynes 1986) (although Rapaport and Burkhart 1984 did not find such a relationship); predict a higher likelihood of themselves raping a woman (Check and Malamuth 1985; Demare, Briere, and Lips 1988; Hamilton and Yee 1990; Quackenbush 1989); hold victims responsible for being raped (Check and Malamuth 1985; Jenkins and Dambrot 1987; Krahe 1988); believe that "women's secret desire to be raped" is

important in causing rape; perceive a rape victim's experience in a pornographic depiction as positive (Check and Malamuth 1985); and be aggressive toward women under laboratory conditions (Malamuth 1983). Also, both men and women who adhere to rape myths are more likely to accept only narrow definitions of what actually constitutes rape (Burt and Albin 1981). It should be noted, however, that holding rape-supportive attitudes was not found to render particular individual women more vulnerable to sexual victimization (Koss and Dinero 1989); although Muehlenhard and MacNaughton (1988) did find that the women in their study who believed that "leading a man on" justifies force were more likely to have experienced verbally coerced sex than women who did not believe this. These beliefs were unrelated to whether or not the women had ever experienced physically forced sex.

A clear picture to emerge from this social psychology research was that portrayals of a woman's experience of forced sex were much less likely to be regarded as rape if the man was not a stranger to her. As Klemmack and Klemmack (1976: 142) noted early on of their findings on people's definitions of rape: "the most striking aspect of the data was that the likelihood that a given situation will be defined as rape varied inversely as a function of the degree of interpersonal relationship between the attacker and victim." That is, forced sex or rape taking place within what could be perceived to be "potentially appropriate" (Estrich 1987) heterosexual relationships was sometimes condoned, or the woman was considered to be at least partly responsible, and it was often not considered as abuse or victimization. Within the terms of Martha Burt's framework, these findings attested to the widespread acceptance of some very powerful rape myths – for example, women can't be raped by men they know, women don't mean it when they say no, forced sex is not rape unless it is accompanied by physical violence, and rape is justifiable in some circumstances. As Cann, Calhoun, Selby, and King (1981: 1) suggested, "in a male oriented society, rape seems to occupy a position somewhere between accepted practice and unacceptable crime"; or, according to Catharine MacKinnon (1983: 651), "Rape, from a woman's point of view, is not prohibited; it is regulated."

Nothing illustrates this better than the "marital rape exemptions" that existed within rape legislation in many English-speaking countries. Through explicit wording, these exclusions made rape a legal impossibility when committed by a man on his wife. Such marital immunity provisions, as Susan Estrich (1987: 73) has called them, meant that a man could not be charged with raping the woman he was married to. The logic underpinning this legal caveat is often traced back to Sir Matthew Hale's seventeenth-century edict that "the husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband, which she cannot retract" (Hale 1971, cited in Estrich 1987: 72); although, as Freeman (1981) pointed out, it is not entirely clear whether Hale was simply stating the law as it had generally been understood for centuries or whether he actually created the marital exemption rule. According to Susan Estrich (1987), while many jurisdictions were reforming their rape laws during the 1970s, removing a man's right to rape his wife proved particularly difficult. Legal protection for husbands

remained in many U.S. states throughout the 1970s (Estrich 1987; Russell 1982) and in some states through to the 1990s (Whatley 1993), in New Zealand until the mid-1980s, in England until the early 1990s (Lees 1997), and in Australian states from the mid-1980s through until the early 1990s (Easteal 1998). A few U.S. states also included “voluntary social companion” exemptions, whereby if a woman had previously had consenting sexual relations with a man, he was partially exempt or immune from charges of rape. In one state this exemption extended to “voluntary social companions” who had not had any previous voluntary sexual relations (Russell 1982; Schulman 1980). While the criminalization of marital rape now exists in all U.S. states, there are still several states that have partial exemptions, under which men cannot be charged with raping their wives under certain circumstances (Anderson 2016; Bergen 2016; Jackson 2015).<sup>32</sup> Despite these legislative improvements, Kersti Yllö (1999: 1062; emphasis in original), one of the pioneers of research on marital rape, argued that there has been continued and disproportionate neglect of this problem; that wife rape “remains a *private trouble* rather than a *public issue*.”<sup>33</sup>

According to Jill Hasday (2000) public controversy surrounded husbands’ so-called “conjugal rights” in the United States since the time of the first women’s rights movement in the nineteenth century. More recent public debate over moves to remove the marital rape exemptions produced some revealing displays of the kinds of views that critics have identified as rape-supportive. For a much-cited example, one California State Senator reportedly said, in addressing a group of women lobbyists in 1979, “but if you can’t rape your wife, who can you rape?” (Schulman 1980: 539; see also Estrich 1987; Freeman 1981; Russell 1982). This statement, although notable for its pithy misogyny, was apparently not atypical of the mood of responses to legislative changes (Russell 1982). Another U.S. Senator, arguing against the proposal for marital rape to become a crime, told Congress, “Dammit, when you get married, you’ve got to expect a little sex” (X 1999: 1070). That public figures could so blatantly trivialize rape in these ways is revealing of the level of cultural tolerance of rape at the time. Other public reactions to the emergent issue of wife rape, documented by Mildred Pagelow (1986), show how masculinist discourses about heterosexuality could be used to deny the possibility of certain legitimated rapes (in this example, also within the context of marriage). For instance one Catholic prelate wrote in his *Philadelphia Daily News* column:

Rape in marriage! When I first heard the phrase some years ago I laughed – not because it was funny, but because it struck me as being goofy. How could a husband rape his own wife? Did he not have a right to sexual intercourse with her as a result of the marriage bond? . . . Wasn’t he merely helping her to perform her wifely duties? I remember being taught . . . that when two people got married they surrendered themselves to each other. It was a mutual giving and taking so that a wife’s body (sexually speaking) was no longer her own to do with as she pleased, nor was the husband’s body his own. Because it was mutual it always struck me as fair.

(Adamo 1984; quoted in Pagelow 1986: 2)

In another example provided by Pagelow, we see how men's anxieties surfaced in relation to this challenge to their existing sexual privileges. Sidney Siller, who was President of the New York Criminal and Civil Courts Bar Association, wrote an article for *Penthouse* called "'Wife rape' – who really gets screwed":

Angry and apparently desperate for new issues following the crushing defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment, women's libbers, in their search for power under the guise of equality, are now focusing their attention on what they term "wife rape." . . . this means that your wife can accuse you of rape at any time during your marriage . . . [and] that charge can lead to your arrest, prosecution, and incarceration. Your protection against this conjugal lie is absolutely nil. It's her word against yours.

(Siller 1982; quoted in Pagelow 1986: 3)

The same concerns were raised by legal scholars, such as Ralph Slovenko (1979: 181), who noted that the problem is "not the case where there truly was a forcible rape," but rather "those cases where an allegation of marital rape would be a spiteful part of a domestic quarrel." In trusting the wisdom of Hale's centuries-old edict, Slovenko (1979: 181) concluded his opinion piece with the warning: "Lord Hale, noting that the allegation was 'easily made,' appreciated the likelihood that angry wives would recognize that as well." Such concerns have been persistent. In the debate over marital rape in England in the early 1990s, the public was warned that making marital rape an offense would be damaging to the sanctity of the family (Lees 1997). The influential Glanville Williams cautioned that the accusation of rape "is too powerful . . . a weapon to put into the wife's hands" (1991; quoted in Lees 1997: 119).

The first scholarly article on wife rape was published only five years before Diana Russell's (1982) major contribution to this field – her book *Rape in Marriage*. While Russell suggested that Richard Gelles (1977) should be given credit for first drawing attention to the problem, she clearly pointed to the limitations of his work at that time, which appeared to be insufficiently questioning of the dominant cultural milieu in which he was writing:

For example, he writes that "labeling sexual intercourse forced on a wife by a husband 'marital rape' implies a major value judgment by the labeler concerning appropriate interpersonal relations between family members." Clearly, however, *not* labeling such an act marital rape implies a major value judgment, too.

(Russell 1982: 5; *emphasis in original*)

While these kinds of views might now be regarded as extreme and/or old-fashioned, they haven't disappeared completely. It was only in the 1990s that English law changed to recognize rape within marriage as a crime (Lees 1997). A splendid Australian documentary backgrounding that legislative change exposed some truly shocking and antiquated views on gender and sexuality among some of the public opponents of the proposed legislation (Sinclair and Munro 1990: "A Licence to

Rape”). Consider the following exchange between the Australian Channel Nine journalist Mike Munro, and the Conservative British MP Tony Marlow. In an attempt to make his point about the problem of recognizing marital rape, Marlow asked Munro to reflect on his own experiences of marital sex, which led to an amazing exposé of Marlow’s own acceptance of the absolute sexual prerogatives of husbands:

TONY MARLOW: Are you married?

MIKE MUNRO: Yes I am.

TONY MARLOW: Has your wife ever been reluctant when you’ve advanced her, advanced towards her?

MIKE MUNRO: Certainly.

TONY MARLOW: Have you ever persisted?

MIKE MUNRO: No.

TONY MARLOW: You look me straight in the eye and you say you haven’t persisted

MIKE MUNRO: Absolutely/I can’t believe/

TONY MARLOW: /You’re a-/

MIKE MUNRO: /I can’t believe-/

TONY MARLOW: /You’re a paragon,/you’re a, you’re a man in a million

MIKE MUNRO: So you’re saying you *have* insisted with your wife

TONY MARLOW: I’m not saying I’ve done anything, but I’m I’m saying-

MIKE MUNRO: well you asked me, hold on Mr Marlow, you asked me, let me ask you. Now I say in all honesty, I have *never*, the thought repulses me. It sounds as if you have.

TONY MARLOW: I’ve, I’ve, I, I’m not saying that at all. I I’m I’m saying how do you know? What is the gradation? How do you know what the signals are all the time? It’s very difficult to tell. What is rape? How do you define rape in those circumstances?

MIKE MUNRO: The law says that the husband cannot be guilty of rape because in marriage she has given that right up. Do you agree with that?

TONY MARLOW: I’m not ahh, ahh,

MIKE MUNRO: Do you agree with that?

TONY MARLOW: It dep- Again we go to the sort of-/ we go to the-/

MIKE MUNRO: /Mr Marlow/do you agree with that? That’s the law you, you are now defending. Do you agree with it?

TONY MARLOW: I ag-I I I’m not even sure that is what the law says-

MIKE MUNRO: That is what the law says Mr Marlow. Do you agree with it?

TONY MARLOW: If, if that’s what the law says, um, then I agree basically with what the law is at the moment.<sup>34</sup>

(Sinclair and Munro 1990)

As Ruth Herschberger (1970: 16) presciently asked in 1948: “How is rape distinguished from a marriage in which the sex act is forced upon an unwilling

woman?" From the perspective of Marlow, former British Member of Parliament, the idea that a man would *not* persist in trying to have sex with his reluctant wife is almost unimaginable. It is something so uncharacteristic of the kind of masculine sexuality he knows that Marlow suggests that his interviewer, Mike Munro (who says he finds the idea repulsive), must be a "man in a million." What is so nice about this exchange is the way it so perfectly illustrates the sharp intersection between old and new ways of thinking about men's entitlement to sex (legitimized through marriage in this instance).

\* \* \*

Other areas of research that highlight the slippery entanglement of sex and violence can be found in the psychological literature on normal (i.e., not identified rapists) men's self-reported so-called "rape proclivity" and their sexual arousal (as measured by penile tumescence and self-report) to depictions of rape.<sup>35</sup> In one genre of studies, conducted mainly in the early 1980s, men were asked how likely it was that they would personally rape or use sexual force if they could be guaranteed not getting caught and punished. Although there is some variability across studies, an average of 35 per cent of all men in such studies indicated some likelihood of personally raping (that is, 2 or above on a 5-point scale ranging from *not at all likely* [1] to *very likely* [5]). About 20 per cent of all men in these studies indicated an even higher likelihood (that is, 3 or above). (For reviews of this work, see Malamuth 1981b, 1984; Check and Malamuth 1985.) Some data suggest that men report a higher likelihood of committing acquaintance rape compared to stranger rape (Johnson and Russ 1989). When a more general category of "sexual force" was looked at, around 60 per cent of men in these studies reported some likelihood of raping or using sexual force (Briere and Malamuth 1983). Tieger (1981: 156) found that those 20 per cent of men in his sample who were classified as having a "high likelihood of raping," "believe that their own sexual aggression toward women would be well received and a normal response to the perceived seductive behavior on the part of the victim." It has also been reported that this kind of self-reported "likelihood of raping" is associated with having "more stereotyped sex role beliefs" in general (Check and Malamuth 1983), less accurate knowledge about rape trauma (Hamilton and Yee 1990), and a belief that rape would be sexually arousing (Malamuth 1981b). Indeed men who were classified as having a high likelihood of raping were found to become at least as, or more, sexually aroused (as measured by both self-report and penile tumescence) in response to depictions of rape than to depictions of mutually consenting heterosexual sex – as do, to a certain extent, men with a low likelihood of raping (Malamuth 1981b; see Darke 1990).

Self-reported so-called rape proclivity does not automatically translate into sexually aggressive behavior of course (e.g., Malamuth 1988; for comment see Dupre 1992), but an association has been shown between self-reported likelihood of raping and reports of having personally used force against women in sexual relationships (Malamuth 1982, and Malamuth and Check 1981, both cited in

Malamuth 1984; Murphy, Coleman, and Haynes 1986; Petty and Dawson 1989), although Malamuth (1988) found these factors to be not strongly correlated. Nevertheless, the research on self-reported rape proclivity is interesting to some extent irrespective of whether or not it actually predicts rape or aggressive sexual behavior. Even if the gap between imagining being able to rape and actually raping is a big one, the fact that so many men are willing to report that they could imagine themselves raping does at the very least endorse feminist arguments that the building blocks of rape exist within or alongside normative heterosexuality, rather than being the preserve of only an isolated deviant few.

In addition to looking at men's self-reported rape proclivity, researchers also studied men's sexual arousal in response to rape depictions (for discussion of some of the ethical issues involved in this kind of research see Sherif 1980, and Malamuth, Feshbach, and Heim 1980).<sup>36</sup> Although particular characteristics of the individuals involved, and the features of the portrayal (for example, the women's depicted reaction to the rape) are importantly related to reactions (Malamuth and Check 1980, 1983), many "normal" men in these studies did become sexually aroused in response to rape depictions (Malamuth and Check 1980, 1983; Malamuth, Check, and Briere 1986; Malamuth 1981a, 1981b; Malamuth, Heim, and Feshbach 1980), and such arousal has been found to be associated with higher reported levels of past sexual aggression (Malamuth 1988) and to the belief that they might engage in sexually coercive acts in the future (Malamuth et al. 1986).<sup>37</sup> In general, though, these studies found that men who are identified as nonrapists may become sexually aroused by rape portrayals in which the victim is depicted as becoming involuntarily sexually aroused, but show relatively little sexual arousal when the victim's abhorrence is emphasized (Malamuth 1981b). In studies that have attempted to compare the sexual arousal to rape cues of rapists with "normal men," any differences found have tended to not be statistically significant (e.g., Barbaree and Marshall 1991; see also Hall, Shondrick, and Hirschman 1993). Proulx, Aubut, McKibben, and Côté (1994) found that "less physically violent" rapists were not distinguishable from the other men in their study in penile response to rape stimuli (which included physical violence), except when the rape was portrayed as specifically humiliating to the woman, in which case rapists showed greater arousal. And Bill Marshall and his colleagues found that "32 per cent of rapists and 28 per cent of carefully screened non offenders showed arousal to coercive sexual scenes that was either equal to or greater than their arousal to consenting sex scenes."<sup>38</sup>

There is now an extensive experimental social psychology literature on attitudes toward rape, perceptions of rape victims, attributions of responsibility for rape and so on (e.g., see Anderson, Cooper, and Okamura 1997; Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994; Ward 1995). As noted earlier, numerous studies have investigated the extent to which rape myths are endorsed by study participants. A major focus in this ongoing line of research is on the demographic, personality, attitudinal, and behavioral correlates of rape-supportive attitudes and views. By the end of the 1990s, research in this paradigm was finding that people were less likely to endorse rape myths in a research context than they were when this kind of research first got

started (e.g., Hinck and Thomas 1999). Given the changing social context of rape, this is not surprising. However, other research has emphasized that a significant proportion of research participants still do agree with ideas that could be used to justify rape (e.g., Johnson, Kuck, and Schander 1997). Because the minutiae of this individualistic focus do not bear directly on central theses in this book, I won't provide any systematic review here. However, it is interesting to note the findings from one study at the turn of the century which found that participants both endorsed rape myths and said they agreed with statements about rape's harmfulness (Buddie and Miller 2001). In reporting these findings the authors speculated about the possibility that people either did genuinely (and correctly, in their view) believe that rape negatively impacts on women, or that prescriptive ideas about how rape should affect women have just become one more rape myth. Of course this is not necessarily an either/or equation, and it is possible that with increasing recognition of the trauma of rape new orthodoxies get created, that ultimately become limiting and restrictive to some extent (see Chapters 6 and 8).

The implications of these research trajectories for a more critical (social constructionist) feminist approach are uncertain. On the one hand, if methodological and epistemological differences can be put aside for a moment, findings from this kind of mainstream social psychology research can be seen to offer some kind of (provisional) evidence for the widespread acceptance of rape-supportive discourse, thus supporting radical feminist analyses of rape. Yet, on the other hand, this research paradigm presents difficulties for critical feminist psychologists, who are likely to be wary of the reductive, individualistic, cognitivist understandings of social behavior that are embodied in "attitude research" (see also Potter and Wetherell 1987). It contributes to an implicit, if not always explicit diagnosis of the problem as located within people's minds rather than in the cultural fabric itself. The site for change, in this model, is individual psychologies, with rape-prevention initiatives designed to promote changes in attitudes that support rape and behaviors that contribute to risk. While a deconstructive perspective would caution against any simplistic division between the social and the individual, that reifies instead the social as the necessary arena for change, there are nevertheless some problems to be expected from an approach that focuses directly at the individual level. For one thing, in the absence of concomitant wider social changes, modifying individual attitudes is likely to be of only limited success, as it requires people to embody new values and codes of acceptable behavior in a social environment that is likely to resist and complicate their efforts to promote change. The other problem with individualistic models for rape prevention is the pernicious potential for locating the responsibility for preventing rape in the hands of individuals – and most often individual women, with the risk of slipping back into a new, more subtle form of victim-blaming.

★ ★ ★

At around the same time as feminists and social psychologists were questioning those taken-for-granted aspects of our culture that (perhaps unwittingly) can be

seen to support rape, other researchers were set on a path that was to eventually explode some of the widely accepted myths about rape, in particular the notions that rape was rare and that it was perpetrated by strangers. In the next chapter, I will look in detail at this controversial new research.

## Notes

- 1 There is a growing literature addressing a longer history of rape, but I restrict my discussion largely to the changing representations of, and practices surrounding, rape during the twentieth century.
- 2 The common law requirement that juries be warned about the dangers of convicting on uncorroborated evidence has been gradually overturned in most Western jurisdictions based on English common law (New Zealand Law Commission 1997; Mack 1998). Nevertheless, judges have retained the authority to comment on such issues in giving their instructions to juries, and it is still common in at least some places for judges to inform juries that it is dangerous to convict on the basis of the woman's evidence (Mack 1998; see also Myers and LaFree 1982). In the recent Australian Heroines of Fortitude study of 92 sexual assault trials in the state of New South Wales, there were only 14 cases in which no such warning was given to juries. In 59 per cent of cases juries were told to scrutinize the complainant's evidence with great care, and in 40 per cent of cases juries were explicitly told, "it is dangerous to convict on complainant's evidence alone" (Department for Women 1997; quoted in Mack 1998: 64; see also Ellis 1996).
- 3 Harry Kalvin and Hans Zeisel's classic study of jury trials, notably conducted before rape really hit the public agenda (1966; cited in Brownmiller 1975 and Estrich 1987), also provides a compelling illustration of how difficult it was to obtain convictions for rape. They found that juries' judgments about whether a man was guilty of rape were likely to be influenced by factors beyond the strict requirements of the law, in favor of men on trial for rape. In particular, juries were very unlikely to convict in cases of "simple" rape (as opposed to cases of "aggravated" rape, which were characterized by "extrinsic violence," multiple defendants, and no prior relationship between the victim and the defendant). Kalvin and Zeisel asked judges whether they agreed with the juries' verdicts. Of the 42 trials for simple rape that they studied, the judges said they would have convicted in 22 of the cases; the jury actually convicted in only three of the cases. As the researchers concluded, the jury "closely, and often harshly, scrutinizes the female complainant and is moved to be lenient with the defendant whenever there are suggestions of contributory behavior on her part" (Kalvin and Zeisel 1966; quoted in Brownmiller 1975: 374).
- 4 Notably, these data were collected in 1991, *after* the time of many criminal justice system reforms for responding to rape.
 

*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:* Conviction rates for rape remain low. Despite law reform, they have been static or declining in many jurisdictions, with high rates of attrition after initial reports to the police (e.g., Lovett and Kelly 2009; Temkin and Krahé 2008; Larcombe 2011; Daly and Bouhours 2010; Lonsway and Archambault 2012; Triggs, Mossman, Jordan, and Kingi 2009). Such is the extent of this ongoing "justice gap," some scholars say it could be argued that sexual violence is effectively decriminalized in practice (Hohl and Stanko 2015, speaking about England and Wales; Sheehy and Gilbert, 2017, speaking about Canada). Larcombe (2011) has cautioned, however, that it would be a mistake to focus on convictions as the only measure of law reform success as they can be manipulated by actions that work against the interests of complainants and of justice more broadly (see also Lonsway and Archambault 2012; McDonald 2014).
- 5 While I refer to the social category "Black" here, for the reason that most of the literature on rape and race discusses data relating to Black and white men and women in the United States, rape discourse is "raced" in more ways than this simple "Black-white" dichotomy might imply. For example, in New Zealand, it is indigenous Māori and also Pacific Island

men who have been stereotypically and prejudicially cast as more likely rapists than other, particularly Pakeha, men. (Following MacKinnon 1987b: 238 [see also Crenshaw 1994 and Hurtado 2003], I capitalize Black, but not white, in recognition of the meaning of Black as a specific cultural group defined, in part, through the “politically self-conscious struggle against racism.”)

- 6 In 1896 Freud publicly presented his “seduction theory,” in which he proposed a radical new theory for the origins of neurosis – that is, sexual abuse, rape and trauma in childhood (shortly after, published in his essay, “The aetiology of hysteria”). His views were met with hostility by the psychoanalytic establishment, leading Freud to feel isolated and abandoned by his colleagues (see Masson 1985). Within a few years, Freud retracted his theory. In a complete about-face he dismissed his patients’ reports of their childhood experiences of sexual abuse as instead simply made-up fantasies (Masson 1985). At that time, it seems, this view was more palatable to psychoanalysts than acknowledging the possibility that child rape and sexual abuse were real (see also Masson 1990).
- 7 Such representations of women’s sexuality are also racially inscribed, with some groups of women depicted as more “lascivious” than others. For instance, in the United States, Black women since the time of slavery have been stereotypically portrayed as unchaste with excessive sexual appetites, and at least one consequence of this was to justify white men’s rape of Black women (e.g., Collins 1991; Crenshaw 1993; Hall 1983; Giddings 1985):

White men have said over and over – and we have believed them because it was repeated so often – that not only was there no such thing as a chaste Negro woman – but that a Negro woman could not be assaulted, that it was never against her will.

*(Jessie Daniel Ames 1936; quoted in Hall 1983: 331)*

Māori women in New Zealand have historically also been stereotypically portrayed as “sexually promiscuous and wanton” (Johnston 1998: 31; Johnston and Pihama 1994).

- 8 See Jackson (1994) for a fuller feminist critique of how Ellis’s work legitimates male sexual violence. Van de Velde (1930: 172) repeatedly emphasized the equal and reciprocal roles for men and women in “the sexual union,” and strongly asserted the necessity of equal rights in relation to consent and pleasure: “Therefore in Ideal Marriage, the man does not perform the act on a passive woman, but they both together achieve sexual communion.” He was perhaps somewhat more open than Ellis to variations on the usual form of the heterosexual script: “Then a certain feminine initiative and aggression brings a refreshing variety. Let her be the wooer sometimes, not always the wooed” (van de Velde 1930: 171). However, as Margaret Jackson (1994) has argued, there were limitations to his vision of equality. For instance, in discussing different bodily positions for intercourse, van de Velde (1930: 224) noted that the “astride attitude” (with the man lying on his back) generated “the summit in both excitement and response . . . to both man and woman.” Yet he strongly cautioned against it becoming “a normal habit in sexual intercourse” because “the complete passivity of the man and the exclusive activity of his partner” were “directly contrary to the natural relationship of the sexes.”
- 9 In a footnote, Weihofen (1959: 210) referred to Freud in support of this point.
- 10 Susan Estrich (1987: 121) noted that similar ideas were included in the American Law Institutes’ *Model Penal Code and Commentaries* from the 1950s through to the 1980s, as part of arguments against placing too much emphasis on nonconsent. The argument, quoted from the code by Estrich, was that “the deceptively simple notion of consent may obscure a tangled mesh of psychological complexity, ambiguous communication, and unconscious restructuring of the event by participants” (see also Schulhofer 1998).
- 11 Clearly, this model of sexuality is highly problematic. The fact that some women do reportedly fantasize about a forceful, masterful lover and eroticize their own passivity is not the full story. Within the Mills and Boon and Harlequin genre of romantic fantasy, a woman’s desire and eventual consent are at least implicit, if not explicitly scripted into,

- the seduction narrative. Her resistance melts away. But, in real life this won't always happen in quite the same pleasing way. Such desires where they exist must be considered alongside women's accounts of what real (rather than imaginary) force feels like; force acted out by a man who is not at the mercy of a woman's own imaginative powers of reconstruction, who does not transmute into the sensitive, loving, and beholden character that might be part of her own personal script; force at the hands of men who do not seem to care about anything but their own satisfaction, and who generate humiliation rather than affection. But this women's side of the story was not, until recently, part of the official discourse on rape. (See Segal 1983 for an insightful analysis of how these types of fantasy might actually involve a sense of power for women.)
- 12 Deutsch's comments in this context can be read as sympathetic to anti-racist attempts to redress the injustice done to Black men persecuted through lynching in the U.S. (e.g., Giddings 1985). However, as Crenshaw (1993, 1994) has pointed out, when race and gender politics meet over rape and don't consider the importance of sexism and racism, respectively, the interests of both causes ultimately lose out.
  - 13 According to the author of this study, this example was "one of the more common descriptions" of consent given by judges (van de Zandt 1998: 137).
  - 14 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Rape jokes are back with a public prominence I could never have imagined in the early 2000s. Widely seen as acceptable fodder for professional comedians (e.g., Pérez and Greene 2016), they have also become commonplace in social media feeds, and almost unremarkable in young people's everyday interactions (e.g., Calder-Dawe and Gavey 2016; Kumar 2014). Despite the defense that rape jokes are ironic, and not intended to harm, most reveal rather than subvert a dominant androcentric logic that underpins rape culture (e.g., Cox 2015; Pérez and Greene 2016). Thanks to a revitalized feminist movement, there has been active resistance to this re-normalization of, and desensitization to, rape jokes. Some scholars offer notes of hope. Discussing the controversy over U.S. comedian Daniel Tosh's infamous rape joke at the Laugh Factory comedy club in 2012, Cox (2015: 980) observes that the heckler who challenged him, and was in turn made the butt of another impromptu rape joke, "demonstrated that irony can be powerfully reappropriated." In this case, exposing and critiquing what happened lead to wide debate and some critical questioning and about-turns over rape humor. Yet it is too early to tell how influential the feminist push-back will be. Pérez and Greene (2016), for instance, found that American college students interviewed in 2013–2014 tended to draw on discursive tools that supported Tosh's sexist humor. Even when participants were ambivalent about it, most had difficulty accessing effective critical tools. Critique – of rape culture more generally – can also be hindered by the anxious response of institutions worried about the implications that critical exposure might have for their reputations. High school journalist, Tanvi Kumar (2014) wrote a powerful critique of rape culture for her school magazine, which resulted in the school administration intervening with measures to contain such speech (see Niccolini 2016).
  - 15 In an overview of U.S. legislative responses to sexual violence, Eric Janus (2003) argued that reforms during the 1990s – particularly "Sexually Violent Predator Laws" – actually undercut the earlier reforms sparked by feminist analyses of sexual violence. By focusing attention (and money) on small numbers of the "'most dangerous' sex offenders," (ibid.: 258) attention is diverted away from "preventing the 'most danger'" (ibid.: 259). "The new paradigm," he argued, "paints sexual violence as a small and exceptional aberration" (ibid.: 258), which is inconsistent with a feminist view of sexual violence as "widespread and domesticated" (ibid.).
  - 16 The changes that have been made in different countries and legal jurisdictions vary on several grounds, although the gist of these changes is very similar. It is beyond the scope of my discussion to more thoroughly review them; they are well described in the legal and criminological literature.
  - 17 It is no doubt significant that the term "victim" was used in this context rather than "complainant," given it presumes she is telling the truth. Notably, however, the follow-through on these measures has been patchy, with the ongoing practice of these policies

- seemingly dependent on the goodwill and effort of individual senior members of the New Zealand Police, and the lobbying activities of rape crisis workers and others – even in recent years.
- 18 For example, in the early 2000s the London Rape Crisis Centre closed down due, in part, to a lack of funding (Charmaine Baines, personal communication, email April 28, 2003), and the Massachusetts Rape Crisis Centers were fighting against closure due to severe budget cuts (*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: my original janedoe.org link is no longer active, for similar information, see: [http://boston.rainn.org/the\\_cause.htm](http://boston.rainn.org/the_cause.htm) [accessed April 7, 2018]). My local community agency working with survivors of rape and sexual abuse, Auckland Sexual Abuse HELP (as it was called at the time), was engaged in a constant struggle for adequate funding. In 2004 funding levels reached crisis point; staff were made redundant, and the agency (which had at the time been operating for over 20 years) faced closure or a drastic cut in services (Kathryn McPhillips, personal communication, email March 11, 2004).
  - 19 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: It is almost painful to read some of the claims in the preceding sections of this chapter that reflect on the contemporary state of how rape was regarded and treated as a social problem when *Just Sex?* was written – just a few decades after the beginning of significant sociocultural and legal shifts toward taking rape more seriously. My analysis was imbued with a tone of cautious optimism, as if it was certain we were on the cusp of ongoing progressive changes (sociocultural, political and legal) toward a culture of intolerance for rape. Nearly a decade and a half later, rates of sexual violence are still high. Feminist scholars have been widely critical of the ongoing failure of rape law reform to make a substantive difference toward justice (e.g., Hohl and Stanko 2015; Johnson 2012; Jordan 2011; Larcombe 2011; McDonald 2014; McGlynn 2010; Powell, Henry and Flynn 2015). And in the realm of everyday culture, there is glaring evidence of how fraught and partial any progress has been – a theme I will discuss in Chapter 9.
  - 20 See also Brownmiller’s (1975) “personal statement” which prefaces *Against Our Will*, and Geis (1977).
  - 21 The necessity of taking race and ethnicity as a foundational issue in discussions about rape was a dominant theme at a 2003 conference in Sydney, Australia (“Practice and Prevention: Contemporary issues in adult sexual assault in New South Wales conference,” February 12–14). Many conference speakers and audience members drew attention to the particular difficulties faced by some groups of women – for example, the high levels of sexual violence faced by aboriginal women in Australia, and their relatively more difficult road within the criminal justice system (see Greer 2003; van de Zandt 1998). Another common point of discussion was a high-profile gang rape case in Sydney, which had resulted in successful prosecutions with record sentences. Concern appeared to be widespread, although not universal, among the predominantly white conference participants about the ways in which the serious and sympathetic media attention that the case brought to the issue of rape was achieved at the cost of trading on racist representations of the rapists’ (Lebanese Australian) ethnicity that served to other them from mainstream (white) Australia. Davis (1990) has discussed similar situations in the U.S. in the 1970s, when the almost exclusively white anti-rape movement did not apparently notice the way societal responses to rape co-opted their support for measures that ultimately had racist effects.
  - 22 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: See Freedman (2013) for a more recent detailed analysis of the centrality of race to understanding the history of rape in the United States.
  - 23 The death penalty for rape in the United States is now prohibited (Estrich 1987).
  - 24 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Such racialized patterns are not only old news. A London study of all rape allegations to the Metropolitan Police Service over a two month period in 2012 (n=587 cases with female complainants) found that both suspect and victim ethnicity were strongly related to police decisions to classify the report as “no crime.” Hohl and Stanko (2015: 334) found that a “white suspect has twice the odds [relative to a non-white suspect] of no-criming if his victim is white and 11 times higher odds if the victim is non-white.”

- 25 In Bevacqua's detailed description of the U.S. women's movement's success in getting rape on the public agenda in the 1970s, she described how liberal feminists and women of color also subsequently took up the issue of rape during this period.
- 26 See also Amir (1975). For early critical discussions of these kinds of victim-blaming analyses see Albin (1977), Mark (1972), and Weis and Borges (1973).
- 27 Although, of course, the analysis insisted that rape had always been political.
- 28 Although, as Scully and Marolla (1984) found in their interviews with convicted rapists, even men who had used weapons and/or raped a woman who was unknown to them sometimes attempted to justify the rape on these terms – claiming, for instance, that the woman seduced them, that she really meant yes when she said no, or that she eventually relaxed and enjoyed it.
- 29 Jane Ussher (1997: 195) subsequently found that much of the “hard-core pornography” she viewed for her research conflated “rape with seduction – the woman taken against her will, who quickly learns that she enjoys being forcibly fucked.”

*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:* Debates about pornography have heated up again since *Just Sex?* was first published, stimulating a new wave of empirical research. Yet it is difficult to assert up-to-date, research-based pronouncements on the nature of pornography. In part, this is because digital technology has dramatically changed the landscape for its production, distribution and consumption. The genre has proliferated beyond anything I could have imagined a decade and a half ago, trends in content can change rapidly, and it is difficult to know how much confidence we can have that research sampling techniques match the content viewers are watching. Beyond these practical challenges in analysing the content of contemporary pornography, research is shaped by differences in epistemology, methodology, and gender and sexual politics. And this affects how researchers define and theorize such key concepts as aggression, agency and pleasure, for example. Even so, it has been widely observed across the spectrums of methodological and political approaches that the kind of “everyday pornography” (Boyle 2010) presumptively targeted to heterosexual men is characterized by male sexual dominance and female sexual submission (see Antevska and Gavey 2015). While explicit rape scripts are not common in contemporary mainstream pornography, sexually aggressive acts are – although they are often portrayed as consensual.

Bridges *et al.*'s (2010) content analysis of popular U.S. pornographic videos from 2004–2005 found that physical aggression occurred in 88 per cent of scenes, and verbal aggression occurred in 49 per cent of scenes. Only 10 per cent of scenes they looked at contained no aggression at all. Ninety-four per cent of all acts of aggression were directed against women. Although this study is already dated, and the figures are higher than found in some other studies, the gendered *pattern* holds in other recent findings. For example, in analyses of online mainstream pornography, Fritz and Paul (2017) found 36 per cent of scenes from videos accessed in 2013 contained physical aggression against women (relative to 1 per cent against men), and Klaassen and Peter (2015) found 37 per cent of scenes from videos accessed in 2013 contained “violent acts toward” women (relative to 2.8 per cent toward men). Fritz and Paul (2017) also noted various acts performed on (or against) women, that were not (or could not be) performed on men – including gaping (“excessive stretching of the rectum or vagina” [ibid.: 644]), double penetration, and “external cumshots” (ejaculation on the woman's face, mouth, breasts or chest). They categorized such acts as “objectification” – a concept operationalized and measured in studies like these, but which I think underplays the masculine dominance and, in some cases, misogyny signified by such acts (see Cahill 2009, 2011 for a discussion of why objectification might not be the best conceptual lens for understanding what is going on here). Fritz and Paul's observations fit with findings from an Australian survey that asked heterosexual young people (15–29 years) in 2016 how frequently they had seen various behaviors in pornography they had viewed over the previous 12 months (Davis, Carrotte, Hellard, and Lim 2018). Over two thirds (68%) had frequently (“about half the time” or more) seen “men being portrayed as dominant” (16.4 per cent said they had frequently seen women portrayed as dominant – notably more men

reporting this than women). Nearly a third or more of respondents reported having frequently seen a woman “being gagged while giving oral sex,” (29.8 per cent [2.7 per cent for seeing this done to a man]), “being called names or slurs,” (34.3 per cent [6.5 per cent for seeing this done to a man]), being the target of aggression “that appears consensual,” (33.9 per cent [1.4 per cent for seeing this done to a man]) and being ejaculated on the face (47 per cent [3.9 per cent for seeing this done to a man]) (Davis *et al.* 2018: 315; figures taken from Table 2).

Researchers have hotly debated whether or not this gendered pattern of sexual acts in mainstream pornography constitutes the eroticization of men’s sexual violence against women. Some argue that we shouldn’t define aggressive acts as *aggression* if the target appears to be consenting or enjoying them (e.g., McKee 2015; see also Klaassen and Peter 2015). McKee (2015), who is one of the leading advocates of this argument, is motivated in part by what he sees as the risks of heteronormative policing of “positive” and “healthy” sexual behaviors if observers cannot rely on consent as the marker for “healthy sexuality.” He seems to be concerned that labeling acts as aggression or violence, or critiquing acts like “ass to mouth” and double penetration risks “pathologizing minority sexual groups such as gay men, lesbians, swingers, and sadomasochism practitioners who make the consensual decision to partake in such activities” (*ibid.*: 83).

The motivation underlying McKee’s concerns is important, but he takes a series of conceptual missteps in response. Firstly, he sidesteps the issue that it is women (as a category) who are repetitively shown as the supposedly welcoming targets of aggressive sexual acts within “heterosexual” pornography. As Fritz and Paul (2017: 648) noted of the patterns they observed in online pornography accessed in 2014, “the sexual script provided by pornography consistently defines the woman as target of often male aggression in a systematic way.” Fixating on the appearance of consent as a way of un-defining aggression as *aggression* in this context seems strangely decontextualized. Ironically, perhaps, feminist and queer scholars point to important differences in the way consent is practiced within “real” BDSM communities (as distinguished from mainstream heterosexual pornographic fantasies). It is often noted that in these relationships and communities, consent is more likely to be more explicitly valued and negotiated than in heteronormative spaces – but even so, it is likely to be recognized as complex rather than straightforward (see for example, Barker 2013; Bauer 2014; Beres and MacDonald 2015). Furthermore, as discussed in *Just Sex?* (pp. 205–6), consent as a marker of ethical and egalitarian sex has been widely problematized by feminist scholars, as a concept that is underwritten by the presumption of structural inequality (see Pateman 1980). The concept continues to be strongly criticized for the ways in which it can be used to help paper over such inequalities (e.g., Alcoff 2009; Cahill 2016; MacKinnon 2016) – rendering it banal to suggest, as McKee does, that consent could (be enough to) satisfactorily “distinguish between healthy and unhealthy practices” (*ibid.*: 83) in a context where those practices are routinely scripted around male sexual dominance over women.

While I share McKee’s concern to ward against pathologizing people who consensually engage in minority sexual practices, we must equally be careful not to do this through a semantic twist that risks contributing to the normalization of sexual violence against women. If we were in any doubt about the material importance of this, it is worth noting that Maria Gurevich and colleagues’ (2016: 19) interviews with young Canadian women suggested “that young women are developing a sexual syntax derived from a pornographic lexicon to describe sexual desire, pleasure and agency.” Similarly, men interviewed by Sun, Ezzell, and Kendall (2017) talked about the pornographic practice of men ejaculating on women’s faces, and how integral it was to their viewing pleasure. While they initially had difficulty explaining its appeal (see also Antevska and Gavey 2015), they soon decoded its meaning in terms of “male domination and female degradation” (*ibid.*: 16); and several of the men spoke of their desire to try it. Not “with any girl that I care about. I would never do that,” said one participant (*ibid.*: 14); another said he would only do it with a “scumbag” because it would be “demeaning” or “degrading” (*ibid.*: 15). Another man spoke of how pornography had influenced his desires and sexual practices with his girlfriend:

“I was afraid if I didn’t make her mine in that sexual sense then I was like being too much of a pansy. Cumming on her face or doing anal sex or pulling her hair, it was almost as if I had to dehumanize her, objectify her sexually so she would feel a bit subservient to me or attached to me.”

(Sun et al. 2017: 13)

- 30 This idea of a continuum of coercive sexuality or male violence against women was not entirely new. Feminists writing over 100 years ago made the same connections with regard to male violence toward women in response to public reactions to Jack the Ripper in 1888 (Walkowitz 1982). The argument that sexual coercion is normative does not automatically imply that all heterosexual sex is coercive or that it is inherently coercive – although the rhetoric used by some radical and lesbian feminist writers can appear to argue that this is the case (e.g., Dworkin 1987; Jeffreys 1990; MacKinnon 1987a).
- 31 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: See Edwards et al. (2011) for a more recent discussion of the ongoing relevance of rape myths.
- 32 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Sources I originally drew on in support of these claims are no longer easily accessible. Instead, see Anderson (2016), Bergen (2016), and Jackson (2015).
- 33 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Globally, marital rape continues to affect many women (Yllö and Torres 2016), and is not a criminal offense in many countries (Anderson 2016).
- 34 The forward slashes in this exchange indicate where the speech overlaps.
- 35 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: See Gavey and Senn (2014) for a brief discussion that references more recent research.
- 36 Of course it has to be considered possible that men who volunteer to have their sexual arousal “measured” in an experiment by a penile plethysmograph may differ in significant ways from other men.
- 37 Data showing “normal” men’s sexual interest in rape depictions or their self-reported attraction to rape (in fantasy) can be marshaled in support of evolutionary analyses of sexuality and rape. Neil Malamuth, for instance, has himself since employed an evolutionary model of sexual coercion (e.g., Malamuth 1998a, 1998b). Yet such data do not inherently provide any stronger support for evolutionary models than they do for feminist cultural models of rape.
- 38 Bill Marshall, personal communication, email November 28, 2002.  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: A more recent U.K. study by Horvath, Hegarty, Tyler and Mansfield (2012) shines light from a different angle on the question of if and how we should regard identified rapists as a special class of people who are fundamentally different from other men. While convicted rapists’ talk contains victim-blaming justifications for their actions (e.g., Scully and Marolla 1984), it is striking that Horvath et al.’s research participants had difficulty distinguishing whether quotes that were derogatory about women had come from interviews with convicted rapists or from mainstream men’s magazines (“lad’s mags”). Moreover, on average they ranked quotes from these magazines as more degrading to women than the quotes from convicted rapists. This study shows how men who are convicted of rape are discursively resourced by a wider sexist culture.

# 2

## THE DISCOVERY OF A RAPE EPIDEMIC

These findings transform rape from a heinous but rare event into a common experience in women's lives.

*(Mary P. Koss and Mary R. Harvey 1991: 29)*

By the 1980s another major new<sup>1</sup> body of social science research had added significant fuel to radical feminist arguments about rape's continuity with normative sexual relations between men and women in Western cultures. This research set out to scientifically investigate how many women had experienced rape and other forms of sexual victimization. Scholarly orthodoxy at the time held that rape was rare (e.g., Deming and Eppy 1981). Edward Shorter (1977: 481), for instance, claimed that "the average woman's chances of actually being raped in her lifetime are still minimal." However, armed with new sensitivities to the social context of rape, some researchers were beginning to take seriously the possibility that rape myths might affect women's willingness to disclose experiences of rape. They faced this methodological challenge of overcoming women's reluctance to report rape by designing studies in ways that would counter the weight of rape myths. This careful approach paid off, with the research producing stunning new data on the scope of rape. Within a decade, the social scientific picture of rape moved from portraying it as rare to something that is relatively common.

Two of the key figures in this pioneering research were Diana Russell, a San Francisco sociologist, and Mary Koss, a psychologist who at the time was based at Kent State University in Ohio. Propelling the new research direction were big questions about the validity of traditional estimates of rape prevalence.<sup>2</sup> In a detailed analysis of the complex methodological issues involved in measuring the scope of rape, Koss (1993a) has noted that there are two main potential threats to the validity of prevalence estimates: fabrication and nondisclosure. That is, the possibility that women report made-up rapes that did not really happen (fabrication) or, that women do not

reveal actual experiences of rape to the researcher (nondisclosure). According to those who work extensively in this area, there is no evidence to suggest that the possibility of fabrication is a threat to the validity of rape prevalence estimates (e.g., Koss 1993a). Conversely, they argue that nondisclosure of rape and sexual assault is a much more common problem in reaching valid estimates of rape prevalence (Koss 1992b, 1993a; Russell 1982, 1984)<sup>3</sup> – for reasons I will discuss later.

In her groundbreaking book, *Rape in Marriage*, Diana Russell (1982: 28) laid out a case for combining “the most rigorous, scientifically sound methodology with a deep knowledge of, and sensitivity to, the issue of rape.” Prior to the women’s movement calling public attention to the issue, Russell observed that there had been little research at all on rape. Since that time, she noted, almost all the research had been done with nonrandom convenience samples – such as victims admitted to a hospital, readers of a particular publication, students attending particular courses, or victims who reported to the police or sought counseling, and so on. Russell argued, from a scientific position familiar to most psychologists, that this was problematic because it meant that such research findings were not generalizable to the wider population. That is, within the tenets of scientific reasoning, truth claims can’t be made about the frequency of rape, or its effects, for example, when the research is based on a nonrandom sample of the population. The reason for this is that there are potentially confounding explanations for any observed effects, according to the specific characteristics of that particular group of women. For example, women who report a rape to the police may be more likely than those who do not to have experienced a different kind of rape. In Susan Estrich’s (1987) terms, they may have been more likely to have experienced a “real rape” (that is, a rape that conforms to stereotypical patterns of violent rape by a stranger) than a “simple rape” (where a woman is raped by a man known to her, who did not use physical violence or threaten her with a weapon). Evidence at the time was beginning to suggest that this was indeed the case. For example, Linda Williams (1984) found in a study of women contacting a rape crisis center that women were more likely to report to the police if the circumstances in which they had been raped matched what she called a “classic rape” (i.e., violent attack by a stranger).<sup>4</sup> Russell (1984) found the same pattern. Women who reported to the police were significantly more likely to have been raped by strangers, threatened physically or with a weapon, and to have been violently physically assaulted (see also Byers and Eastman 1979; Feldman-Summers and Norris 1984; Skelton and Burkhart 1980). As Williams (1984: 464) concluded, if a woman is raped in such circumstances, she is provided with the evidence she needs to persuade herself and others that “she was indeed a true rape victim.”

The decision to report a rape to the police is also likely to be nonrandomly related both to a woman’s own, and the perpetrator’s, race or ethnicity (see Chapter 1). Given racist stereotypes about Black men’s greater propensity to rape, and Black women’s sexual excessiveness and their strength (which can serve to render her a less credible rape victim), white women may in general be more likely than Black women to report rapes, particularly when the man who has raped them

is not white (see Wyatt 1992 for relevant research findings). There are also likely to be broader contextual factors – related to both poverty and cultural specificities – which affect the meaning of rape within a woman’s life in ways that affect her likelihood of reporting rape to the police. For a woman surviving in economic hardship in a neighborhood where violence is nothing out of the ordinary, and where police cannot be relied on for protection, it is not surprising that a woman wouldn’t report a rape (see, for example, Fine 1983–4 and Williams 1974 for discussion of these points). These kinds of systematic differences between cases that are and are not included for study, clearly limit the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn on the basis of research with such selective samples.

Russell (1982) argued that while research using nonrandom samples of rape victims was still important for generating hypotheses, and providing an exploratory picture, random sampling procedures were necessary to actually test hypotheses. Some prior research on the scope of rape had been done using random sampling techniques. In particular, the National Crime Surveys (NCS) instituted in the early 1970s by the United States federal government, investigated experiences of criminal victimization in the general population. These surveys sought to uncover a truer incidence of rape (among other crimes), over and above the number of rapes reported to the police, as it was recognized even then by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (for whom the research was being carried out at the time) that:

rape is not only a traumatic experience for the victim, but also the only crime for which the victim can be socially stigmatized. More so than for any other crime, there are strong pressures on the victim not to report the incident to a complete stranger.

*(Law Enforcement Assistance Administration 1974: 12; quoted in Russell 1984: 33)*

Nevertheless, despite this official acknowledgment that estimates based on reports of rape to the police as well as other strangers are likely to seriously underestimate its scope, Russell (1984) pointed out that the National Crime Surveys repeatedly concluded that “rape is clearly an infrequent crime” (quoted in Russell 1984: 33). However, according to Russell and others (e.g., Koss 1992b), the severe methodological inadequacies of that research prevented it from being able to accurately detect the true magnitude of the problem of rape. For example, in the NCS screening questions people were not asked directly about rape or sexual assault. Following three questions addressing general experiences of physical violence or threatened physical violence was one other general question that Russell suspected was “specifically designed to elicit a revelation of this apparently unmentionable crime” (1984: 34). The question was: “Did anyone TRY to attack you in some other way?” (Russell 1982: 28; Russell 1984: 34). It is only after answering yes to the screening question that anyone would be asked specifically about rape (Block and Block 1984). As Russell suggested, it may not even occur to rape victims that this, or any of the questions, was actually asking about their experience of rape – they are far too vague and nonspecific (see also Block and Block 1984). Moreover,

as Koss (1992b) argued, in the context of a survey which is specifically about personal experiences of *crime*, women are probably less likely to make the connection between the question and any experiences they may have had that don't fit the stereotype of "real rapes" (Estrich 1987) – in particular, rapes by men well known to them, especially heterosexual partners or former partners (dates, boyfriends, lovers, husbands, and so on).<sup>5</sup>

Another important observation made by Russell is that the interviewers in this research were not given training to sensitize them to cultural misunderstandings about rape. Given the existence of widely held rape myths at the time – which tended to blame women for rape, and denigrate the character of women who were raped – she argued that it was not surprising that interviewers without any specialist sensitivity training would elicit little information about women respondents' experiences of rape. Women, at the time, commonly reported shame and guilt associated with the experience of rape – feelings that ensured the silence of many women who had been raped (e.g., Bevacqua 2000). Given this, it has been suggested, it is hardly surprising that women taking part in criminal victimization studies would be reluctant or unwilling to disclose a rape experience to an interviewer who, on the basis of probability, could be expected to be unsympathetic.

As it became clear, any serious attempt to investigate how widespread rape is must attend to its sociocultural meanings and be sensitive to the reasons why a woman might be reluctant to disclose an experience of rape. To provide a research context that would make space available for disclosures, researchers had to actively find ways of refusing to perpetuate the victim-blaming cultural norms of the era. The new social science research by people like Diana Russell and Mary Koss was specifically designed to overcome these limitations of previous estimates of rape prevalence. In doing so it introduced important methodological points of departure from all of the previous attempts to measure the scope of rape.

In 1977, Diana Russell (1982, 1984) embarked on a project of monumental scale to identify the prevalence, effects, and other characteristics of rape and other forms of sexual exploitation of women. With funding from the National Institute of Mental Health, Russell's team interviewed 930 women. All were San Francisco residents aged 18 years and over, selected through a random sampling of households.<sup>6</sup>

One key difference between Russell's study and the previous attempts to measure the scope of rape was that women were interviewed in their own homes by highly trained interviewers. The interviewers were selected for both their empathy toward rape victims and their interviewing skills. These women were given intensive training, which included: "'consciousness raising' about rape and incestuous abuse" (Russell 1982: 31) as well as attention to desensitizing sexual terminology to enhance their comfort in the interviews. Where possible, the race and ethnicity of the interviewer and interviewee were matched. The interviews themselves were detailed, lasting on average 1 hour and 20 minutes. Another feature of the research that was no doubt important in generating such high rates of disclosure was the carefully devised process that was used to ask women about experiences of rape. Of 38 questions in the interview relating to sexual assault and abuse, only one used the

#### 54 Rape in a different light

word rape. Instead, several more open-ended questions were used to ask women about specific behaviorally defined experiences with different categories of men (for example, strangers, friends and acquaintances, and dates, lovers or ex-lovers). For example:

Did a stranger (etc.) ever physically force you, or try to force you, to have any kind of sexual intercourse (besides anyone you've already mentioned)?

*(Russell 1984: 37)*

To find out about potential experiences of rape by husbands, an even more careful approach was adopted, that explicitly recognized the cultural milieu in which wife rape was routinely minimized. Women were asked:

*Because so few people think of husbands when they think of sexual assault, I want to ask you a question about that. Did you ever have any kind of unwanted sexual experience with your husband(s) or ex-husband(s)?* If the respondent answered in the affirmative she was asked: *Tell me briefly about that experience (each of those experiences).* It was the task of the interviewer then to probe for experiences that would meet our definition of rape or attempted rape.

*(Russell 1982: 41; emphasis in original)*

This approach of using multiple, specific questions about different kinds of experiences of sexual assault has also been identified as a good way of avoiding underdisclosure of childhood sexual abuse (Peters, Wyatt, and Finkelhor 1986). Specific behaviorally defined questions are preferable to general questions because research participants may not think of their experiences in terms of labels such as "abuse" or "rape." The advantage of multiple questions is that they provide a series of important cues which enable respondents to recall their experiences and match them to the questions the researcher is asking (Peters et al. 1986).

Consistent with the legal definition of rape in California at the time, Russell's survey only counted as "rape" experiences of forced intercourse or intercourse obtained through threat of force or intercourse obtained when a woman was unable to consent because she was drugged, unconscious, asleep, or otherwise totally helpless.<sup>7</sup> It is important to remember, then, that for any experience of unwanted or forced sex reported by a woman, she was asked further questions so that the researchers gained a sufficiently detailed understanding of the event that they were able to decide whether it was consistent with this legally influenced definition of rape. Even if a woman answered yes to the direct question "At any time in your life, have you ever been the victim of a rape or attempted rape?" (to which 22 per cent answered yes), the researchers made an independent decision as to whether to record that experience as rape in their data. Russell (1984: 37) noted that a few women went on to describe an experience that was based on a broader definition of rape than the researchers themselves were using – for example "*feeling* forced rather than *being* forced, or having intercourse because of a threat that was

not a threat of physical force or bodily harm.” In these few cases, those experiences were not recorded as rapes or attempted rapes. It is worth emphasizing this point in light of subsequent controversy over these findings. That is, despite the methodological sensitivity of her study, Russell’s data on the prevalence of rape and attempted rape cannot be dismissed as being inflated due to an expanded feminist understanding of what rape might be (such as any unwanted sex). Women’s experiences of sexual coercion were *not* included in her calculation of rape prevalence.

As Martha Burt and others have shown, lay definitions of rape are actually often considerably narrower than legal definitions, being influenced as they are by legally irrelevant factors including the rapist’s relationship to the woman.<sup>8</sup> It had frequently been shown that many participants in attitude surveys tended only to apply a definition of rape to forced intercourse that occurred in stereotypical circumstances – typically involving a stranger and the use of a weapon and/or other forms of physical violence in addition to the rape itself (see Chapter 1). The methodological approach used by Russell, of providing sufficient room for women to discuss experiences of forced or unwanted sex generally, rather than only those that they may have already coded as “rape,” was apparently successful in overcoming the power of rape myths to restrict the full range of experiences that women might potentially disclose.

With these tailor-made methodological refinements, designed at least partly to overcome women’s reluctance to report rape, Russell’s study produced a shocking picture of the magnitude of rape. She found that 24 per cent of the women interviewed had experienced rape and that 44 per cent of the total sample had experienced either rape or attempted rape at some time in their lives. While this lifetime prevalence of rape is considerably higher than has been found in other studies reported since, numerous studies have also reported finding that the prevalence of rape is far higher than any of the official sources previously suggested.

There are a number of possible reasons why so many more women in Russell’s study reported experiences of rape, including the possibility that the method of recruiting participants led to a final sample weighted toward women who had experienced rape. However, it is impossible to know this, and equally plausible that women who had been raped might have declined to participate because of a reluctance to discuss such personal and sensitive experiences with a stranger.<sup>9</sup> Another possible reason for the high prevalence rates obtained by Russell is that the extra steps that she was able to build into the methodology – in particular, interviewing women in their own homes by sensitive, trained interviewers – may have been more likely to have triggered higher levels of remembering and disclosure than more impersonal methods of data collection (such as telephone interviews and self-administered questionnaires).

Consistent with the suggestion that methodological factors importantly relate to the figures produced, it is interesting to look at Mary Koss’s well-known research on rape prevalence (Koss and Oros 1982; Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski 1987). Sharing with Russell the use of multiple specific questions about coercive and forced experiences, Koss’s survey approach was designed to be administered through a relatively short self-report questionnaire, the “Sexual Experiences

Survey” (SES; Koss and Oros 1982). This meant that many more women could participate in surveys of convenience samples,<sup>10</sup> without the high financial cost of the kind of research Russell carried out (which, realistically, means it is unlikely to be replicated widely, or even at all). Because of this practical advantage, Koss’s approach has been used many times over.

The bare bones of the original SES are ten items that ask about experiences of ten different kinds of unwanted sex – ranging from pressured “sex play” to forced intercourse.<sup>11</sup> In Koss and her colleagues’ work women were given a form of the instrument that asked about their experiences of having unwanted sex that was coerced or forced by a man. Men were given a form of the instrument that asked about their experiences of coercing or forcing women to have sex.

In their landmark paper published in 1987, Koss and her colleagues reported on the prevalence of “sexual aggression” since the age of 14, and the incidence of rape during the previous year, in a huge sample of 6159 U.S. women and men who were college students.<sup>12</sup> In this survey, the SES was presented to participants in the context of a much larger questionnaire, which also asked additional questions in relation to any experiences that participants identified in the SES (for example, about their age at the time and about the perpetrator). The exact wordings of the SES items used in this study were (for women):

- 1 Have you given in to sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn’t want to because you were overwhelmed by a man’s continual arguments and pressure?
- 2 Have you had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn’t want to because a man used his position of authority (boss, teacher, camp counselor, supervisor) to make you?
- 3 Have you had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn’t want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?
- 4 Have you had a man attempt sexual intercourse (get on top of you, attempt to insert his penis) when you didn’t want to by threatening or using some degree of force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.), but intercourse *did not* occur?
- 5 Have you had a man attempt sexual intercourse (get on top of you, attempt to insert his penis) when you didn’t want to by giving you alcohol or drugs, but intercourse *did not* occur?
- 6 Have you given in to sexual intercourse when you didn’t want to because you were overwhelmed by a man’s continual arguments and pressure?
- 7 Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn’t want to because a man used his position of authority (boss, teacher, camp counselor, supervisor) to make you?
- 8 Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn’t want to because a man gave you alcohol or drugs?

- 9 Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?
- 10 Have you had sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?

*Note.* Sexual intercourse was defined as penetration of a woman's vagina, no matter how slight, by a man's penis. Ejaculation was not required.

*(Koss et al. 1987: 167)*

Participants were classified according to the most severe form of sexual victimization or aggression they reported. A woman was considered to have experienced rape if she responded yes to item 8, 9, or 10; and attempted rape if she answered yes to item 4 or 5. These items were constructed to be consistent with the legal definition of rape in the state of Ohio at the time. If a woman responded yes to question 6 or 7, she was considered to have experienced "sexual coercion" – that is, a form of unwanted sex that did not involve force or threat of force, or the use of alcohol or drugs. She was considered to have experienced a form of sexual victimization that involved "sexual contact" if she answered yes to item 1, 2, or 3. Koss et al. (1987) reported that 53.7 per cent of women had experienced some form of sexual victimization in this large multi-campus survey. An experience matching a legal definition of rape was reported by 15.4 per cent of women; and 27.5 per cent were reported to have experienced either rape or attempted rape.

Koss and her colleagues' study has been widely replicated around the world, and the findings are consistently in the same ball park. For example, in a comparatively small study of 347 New Zealand university student women conducted in 1987, I found that 51.6 per cent answered yes to at least one of the SES questions, that 14.1 per cent reported an experience consistent with rape, and 25.3 per cent reported an experience consistent with rape or attempted rape (Gavey 1991a, 1991b). When asked directly in my study, "have you ever been sexually abused by a man?" 20 per cent of women said yes; and 7 per cent answered yes to the question "have you ever been raped?" (Gavey 1990, 1991a, 1991b). Although this research used a convenience sample of university students (meaning it was limited in how well it represented the wider population), one advantage from a methodological point of view was the high response rate (89.9 per cent of women and men students present in the lecture theaters handed in completed questionnaires).

One aspect of the Sexual Experiences Survey that has been questioned even by other researchers in the area is the validity of the item related to alcohol. That is, item 8, which categorizes unwanted intercourse after a man has given a woman alcohol or drugs as rape (see Layman, Gidycz, and Lynn 1996; Muehlenhard, Powch, Phelps, and Giusti 1992; Muehlenhard 1994). While this item was designed to tap those encounters where a man has intentionally forced sex on a woman when she has been unable to consent because of a state of intoxication or altered consciousness, the

wording of the question is too ambiguous for it to be certain that it only applies to such cases (see Schwartz and Leggett 1999 for a counter-argument).<sup>13</sup> However, if we omit that item from the calculations, it seems unlikely to transform the prevalence rate for rape into a figure that is dramatically less shocking – 9 per cent of the women in Koss's study replied yes to item 9 and 6 per cent to item 10 (Koss et al. 1987).<sup>14</sup> In my New Zealand study, 6 per cent of women answered yes to item 9 and 5 per cent answered yes to item 10 (Gavey 1991a).

In a comprehensive analysis of the methods used in rape prevalence research Koss argued that the lower of the rape estimates (those between 8 per cent and 14 per cent) “clearly reflect choices of methods that resulted in a relative lack of success in overcoming the forces that foster nondisclosure of rape” (Koss 1993a: 217). In addition to obvious necessities such as ensuring confidentiality and rapport with research participants, and addressing issues about how to define rape and how best to collect data, Koss has continually emphasized the importance of the ways in which research questions are put to women (Koss 1993a; Koss, Heise, and Russo 1994; see also Hamby and Koss 2003). “Much is already known,” she said a decade ago, “about the kinds of questions that result in underdetection of rape, including single omnibus abuse items, items expressed in professional terms such as sexual assault, and items that are vague for the purpose of avoiding offense. Successful detection of rape depends on the use of multiple questions expressed in the most concrete and behaviorally specific language possible” (Koss et al. 1994: 528).

A national survey of sexual victimization among U.S. college women (Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 2000) dramatically confirmed this claim. This large study, funded by the U.S. National Institute of Justice and the U.S. Bureau of Statistics, was designed to enable a direct comparison of these different kinds of methodological approach. In two separate study components the researchers conducted telephone interviews with two groups, each of over 4000 randomly selected women. In otherwise identical methodologies, the two components differed in the questions they asked women, as well as in the context in which women were approached (i.e., what they were told the study was about). In following what has become standard practice in studies specifically designed to measure the extent of sexual victimization, women in one component were asked behaviorally specific screen questions and then detailed follow-up questions for any reported incident. The study was introduced to these women as being concerned with “unwanted sexual experiences.” Consistent with the National Crime Victimization Survey methodological approach, the other group of women were introduced to the study as being about “criminal victimization,” and were presented with screen questions that were less detailed and less “graphically descriptive” (ibid.: 14). The percentage of women reporting an experience of rape was 11 times smaller in this group, compared to the group of women presented with the behaviorally specific screen and follow-up questions.

One of the significant, and subsequently controversial, findings from this type of research pioneered by Russell and Koss has been that not all women who report having had an experience consistent with a legal definition of rape identify as having experienced “rape.” That is, there are a number of women who answer yes

to a question asking if they have experienced forced intercourse against their will, but no to a question that asks directly if they have ever been raped. Such women have been referred to by Mary Koss and others as “unacknowledged rape victims” (Bondurant 2001; Kahn and Andreoli Mathie 2000; Kahn, Andreoli Mathie, and Torgler 1994; Koss 1985; Layman *et al.* 1996). In Koss’s prevalence study (Koss *et al.* 1987), only 27 per cent of the women who reported having had an experience consistent with the legal definition of rape labeled themselves as rape victims (Koss 1988b).<sup>15</sup> I discuss this issue in more detail in Chapter 6. But I want to point out here that no matter how this discrepancy between so-called “acknowledged” and “unacknowledged” rape victims is understood, it at the very least highlights a murky gray area between rape and what some may consider to be just sex.

I have focused in detail on the findings from Diana Russell’s work and Mary Koss and her colleagues’ work for a number of reasons – in part because their work exemplifies the turning point of research into rape prevalence; and also because they are well-designed and relatively large studies. But also because the wider controversy that has developed around questions about the extent of rape converges on this research. Koss’s study in particular has often been the target of critical reactions to claims about the problem of date rape. Nevertheless it is important to point out that there is a much larger body of social science research that has looked at the prevalence and incidence of rape, as well as the prevalence of a broader range of experiences of “unwanted sex.” Analyzing this body of research – and taking account of the methodological limitations associated with underdisclosure – Mary Koss and Patricia Rozee concluded that rape prevalence is “about 15 per cent of U.S. women” (Rozee and Koss 2001: 297). When attempted rape is included in the picture, studies from various Western countries indicate that between one in five and one in four “college-aged women” are affected (Koss *et al.* 1994).<sup>16</sup>

In the mid-1990s, a large survey of 8000 women and 8005 men was conducted in the United States under the auspices of the U.S. National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998). This National Violence Against Women Survey used some of the methodological refinements adopted by Russell and Koss (e.g., the use of multiple, behaviorally specific questions), with the practical compromise of telephone interviews. They found that 14.8 per cent of the women surveyed reported an experience of rape at some point in their lives – defined as forced vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse – and 17.6 per cent reported having experienced either attempted or completed rape. While this combined figure is lower than the estimates reached by Russell and Koss, it is still very high, particularly keeping in mind that telephone interviews allow neither the same degree of privacy as pencil-and-paper self-report questionnaires, nor the potential for compensatory rapport during a face-to-face interview.

★ ★ ★

The new research that was beginning to be published during the 1980s not only dramatically challenged and discredited the notion that rape was rare, but it also

consolidated two other important shifts in our understandings of rape. A dimensional view of rape and sexual victimization came to replace a typological approach, and our assumptions about the paradigmatic rape – as a stranger rape – came to be replaced by an understanding that rapes by known men are far more common. While Russell publicized disturbing findings on the extent of wife rape, Koss's work, in particular, was pivotal in the construction of "date rape" as a new icon that would in a very short time almost come to stand as the new paradigmatic form of rape in the public imagination.

While earlier feminist calls to expand the definition of rape may have laid the groundwork for looking at rape in relation to other forms of sexual abuse, the new prevalence research can be seen as an attempt by feminists working within the academy to use science in the service of proving that rape is an important social issue. Consistent with their scientific approach, the researchers were generally very careful about how rape was defined and measured in their surveys. In contrast to the expansive definitions of rape favored by some feminist activists, a reasonably narrow definition was generally used – one that was consistent with legal definitions of the acts involved. But it was also underpinned with a commitment to looking at rape in the context of other coercive sexual experiences in women's lives. Research using the SES, for instance, asked women about a range of other forced sexual acts and/or coerced and pressured forms of sex, besides rape. Implicitly, while rape is the extreme act, it could be seen as existing on a continuum with more subtle forms of coercion from an unwanted kiss to unwanted sexual intercourse submitted to as a result of continual verbal pressure. Research by Koss and others (myself included – Gavey 1991a, 1991b) found that over 50 per cent of women reported having had some experience on this continuum of sexual victimization.

Around the same time, U.K. social researcher, Liz Kelly (1987, 1988a, 1988b), was also developing a continuum-based understanding of women's experiences of violence. Working from a more explicit feminist research position, Kelly (1988b: 41) emphasized a broader range of abusive acts (including "physical, visual, verbal," as well as sexual) as part of her definition of sexual violence. Many researchers, and not only feminists, came to speculate that rape within intimate relationships might be "the tip of an iceberg which reveals a more extensive pattern of relating intimacy with forced sexual relations" (Gelles 1977: 342). David Finkelhor and Kersti Yllö (1983, 1985) and Diana Russell (1982) both drew attention to a continuum of sexual coercion within marriage. In addition to "physical coercion" and the "threat of physical force," Finkelhor and Yllö (1983, 1985) proposed categories of "interpersonal coercion" and "social coercion" for describing a fuller range of circumstances in which women feel pressured to have unwanted sex within marriage.<sup>17</sup> Russell (1982: 356) concluded her study on wife rape by claiming that:

Our study suggests that a considerable amount of marital sex is probably closer to the rape end of the continuum. Many men believe their wives do not have the right to refuse their sexual advances, and though many of these men may be unwilling to rape their wives, they are nevertheless willing to have

intercourse with them even when they know it is totally unwanted. And we see that many women feel obliged to accommodate their husbands' sexual wishes no matter how repelled they are by them.

Further evidence of the operation of this kind of male sexual entitlement was found from studies of sexual aggression within dating relationships. For example, Muehlenhard and Linton (1987: 190) found that 77.6 per cent of the 341 university student women they surveyed had experienced some form of sexual aggression; and 57.3 per cent of the 294 men they surveyed reported engaging in some form of sex with a woman when she had made it clear she did not want to. Sexual intercourse against the woman's will was reported to have been experienced by 14.7 per cent of the women; and 7.1 per cent of men reported having intercourse with a woman who had made it clear that she did not want to. By far the most common "method of sexual coercion" on dates involving sexual aggression was the man just going ahead even after the woman said no. This was reported by both men and women in their study. Similarly, in a study of 201 male university students, Rapaport and Burkhart (1984) found that 15 per cent of men reported that they had had intercourse with a woman "against her will" at least once or twice. Thirty-five per cent of men reported having engaged in some coercive sexual act through ignoring a woman's protests, and 12 per cent reported having used physical restraint of a woman.

Together, this kind of social science research, coming out in the 1980s on the scope of rape as well as on unwanted sex and sexual coercion, provided empirical support for the feminist analyses of rape that were generated during the 1970s. At the same time it contributed to a further theorization of a dimensional view of rape in which rape can be seen as simply an extreme act at one end of a continuum of heterosexual coercion.

The other important shift consolidated by this body of research was in how we understand the paradigmatic rape. Even when leaving in place the conventional narrow definition of rape as involving force or threat of physical force (or, more controversially, as involving an inability to consent due to alcohol or drug intoxication and so on), a picture was clearly emerging that challenged the stereotypical notion of the psychopathic stranger terrorizing women on the streets or breaking into their homes in the middle of the night. While such rapes clearly represent one particularly horrific and frightening form that rape does take, the shocking pattern to emerge from both Diana Russell's research and Mary Koss's research (as well as from others' studies) was that most rapes were committed by men who were known to the women they raped. In fact not only were many known as friends and acquaintances, but many were in some kind of heterosexual relationship with the women they raped (dates, boyfriends, lovers, and husbands). Of the total number of women in Diana Russell's sample, 29 per cent had been raped or experienced attempted rape by a boyfriend, date, lover, ex-lover, husband or ex-husband – all men with whom it could be assumed that the women had at least a nominal heterosexual relationship.<sup>18</sup> Twenty per cent of women in the sample had experienced rape or attempted rape by an acquaintance or friend. Eleven per cent of the women had experienced rape or attempted rape by a stranger. In my own study

of 347 university student women (Gavey 1991a), 61 per cent of the 64 rapes reported had been perpetrated by either boyfriends, lovers, dates, husbands, or de facto partners. Another 17 per cent were perpetrated by acquaintances. Only 9 per cent were committed by strangers. Data reported by Koss (1988b: 15) revealed that 84 per cent of rapes identified by women involved a man known to her, and 57 per cent of the men were dates. Research since this time has only confirmed this pattern, establishing that a high proportion of all rapes are committed by men known to the women they rape. This emerging picture provided further support for a feminist analysis of rape as related to more normative forms of heterosexual sex. It was becoming clear that the line between the domain of rape and the domain of just sex was not always clear; and that experiences of forced sex within heterosexual relationships were not rare.

Both Diana Russell's and Mary Koss's work also confirmed feminist suspicions about the hidden nature of sexual violence. In Russell's (1984) study, 9.5 per cent of rapes were reported to the police. Whereas, in their 1987 study, Koss and her colleagues found that only 5 per cent of the rapes identified by women were reported to the police, only 5 per cent were revealed to victim support services, and 42 per cent were never revealed to anyone (Koss et al. 1987; see also Koss 1985, 1988b).

Together these new findings – that rape was not rare, that it coexisted with a whole range of other forced sexual acts and other forms of coerced and pressured sex, and that most rapes and acts of sexual coercion were committed by men at least known to, and often in a heterosexual relationship with, the women they abused – transformed the ways in which we understand paradigmatic rape. At the same time they coalesced to present a serious challenge to normative heterosexuality. Of course, this challenge had already been expressed in the earlier feminist critiques of heterosexuality and marriage. But this time the message came in the form of scientific data, rather than “merely” political rhetoric. And this time it had the potential to be more potent because of its connection to what was by now a serious social issue – sexual victimization. By the time I had started research in this area in the mid-late 1980s – initially setting out to investigate the new domains of acquaintance and date rape – I was soon confronted by the implications of this shifting picture of what rape in general might be. Reluctantly (because I never would have set out to study “sex”<sup>19</sup>) I realized that it would be impossible to study acquaintance rape or, particularly, any form of rape within heterosexual relationships without also studying normative heterosexuality at the same time.

While the rape researchers themselves didn't always emphasize any repercussions beyond the domain of “sexual violence” into the ordinary and everyday sphere of sex, critics of the research eagerly seized upon such implications.<sup>20</sup> These critics – who include a contingent of what Chris Atmore (1999) has termed “media feminists” (Camille Paglia, Christina Hoff Summers, Katie Roiphe) as well as an assorted collection of academics and media and online commentators – angrily dismissed both the veracity of any of the claims from this new scientific research on (date) rape and vociferously rejected its implications for sexual politics. Their version of events – in which the problem becomes “date rape hysteria” rather than date rape itself – became the sexier topic in the media in the early 1990s (Kamen 1996: 141).<sup>21</sup>

Atmore (1999) cautions against using the “backlash” label to refer to the media feminists – because it unreasonably lumps together somewhat disparate reactions, ignores changes in the social context in which we are fighting against sexual violence, and it prejudices what they say, implying we have nothing to learn from their positions.<sup>22</sup> While this is no doubt true, the term backlash is apt for referring to the broader camp of critics (many of whom make no claim to feminist credentials). This is because they all share either a refusal to accept the possibility of date rape as a serious issue and/or refuse to imagine a world in which heterosex could be configured differently. While I am uncomfortable reproducing the binarized form of this debate, it seems useful to first address the arguments of these writers within the terms of the oppositional framework they have set up. Writers such as Gilbert (1994, 1997), Roiphe (1993), and Paglia (1992) themselves present a very black-and-white depiction of the issues around date rape, presenting feminist and other anti-rape positions in caricatured forms without acknowledgment of any of the nuances *within* these positions (see Chapter 6 for an attempt to move beyond this dichotomized consideration of the issues).

In their ugliest forms, the backlash responses appear not only to refuse the possibility of nonstranger rape but to see the male pursuit of an unwilling woman as part of what is desirable or exciting about heterosexual sex. As one newspaper columnist reportedly suggested, “to talk about rape as a woman being forced to have sex against her will was a feminist confusion and an attempt to undermine seduction.” In reporting this to a New Zealand rape conference, Rape Crisis national spokeswoman Toni Allwood went on to note: “He describes seduction in terms of verbal pressure and cajoling often with tears and protestations” (Allwood 1996: 131). This rather sweeping definition of consent is apparently also still at play in some courts of law, as I discussed in Chapter 1. In these ways, women’s attempts to resist rape can be captured and disregarded within the logic of normative heterosexual sex because forced sex is not-rape.

Sometimes backlash commentators readily acknowledge that coercive sex takes place, but they see it as part and parcel of normal life. Camille Paglia, for example, who is the doyenne of feminist libertarianism, was vociferous in her defense of a highly gendered and naturalized sexuality, in which male sexual aggressiveness is simply an inevitable fact of life that women need to adapt to. “The sexes” according to Paglia (1992: 74) “are at war,” and sex itself is “a dangerous sport” (ibid.: 68) or “combat” (ibid.: 74). In this vision of heterosexual sex, Paglia accuses feminism and date rape prevention initiatives of doing women a great disservice by implying to them that they can be the same as men, “do anything, go anywhere, say anything, wear anything. No they can’t. Women will always be in sexual danger” (ibid.: 50). It is a model of sexuality that shamelessly draws on a raw version of biological determinism<sup>23</sup> – “hunt, pursuit, and capture are biologically programmed into male sexuality” (ibid.: 51) – so it’s not surprising that it ends up looking quite similar to the “pop sociobiology” (see Vickers and Kitcher 2003) of those like David Buss and Randy Thornhill. Except that rather than simply prescribing a retreat into demure and cautious femininity (although she insists on

the need for “female self-awareness and self-control” as “the only solution to date rape” [ibid.: 53]) Paglia simultaneously encourages women to “*accept* the adventure of sex, *accept* the danger!” (ibid.: 71, emphasis in original), because it is all part of the “excitement and interest of sex” (ibid.: 65). In this highly contradictory analysis, Paglia asserts that rape is simply one of the risks a woman takes in “getting involved with men” (ibid.: 63), and to overemphasize this as a problem represents some kind of sexual prudery:

My sixties attitude is, yes, go for it, take the risk, take the challenge – if you get raped, if you get beat up in a dark alley in a street, it’s okay. That was part of the risk of freedom, that’s part of what we’ve demanded as women. Go with it. Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and go on. We cannot regulate male sexuality. The uncontrollable aspect of male sexuality is part of what makes sex interesting. And yes, it can lead to rape in some situations. What feminists are asking for is for men to be castrated, to make eunuchs out of them. The powerful, uncontrollable force of male sexuality has been censored out of white middle-class homes. But it’s still there in black culture, and in Spanish culture.<sup>24</sup>

*(Paglia 1992: 63)*

The echo of mid-twentieth-century male sex libbers, such as Norman Mailer, is striking in Paglia’s accounts, as Kelly, Burton, and Regan (1996) have noted:

If you have 10 tequilas, wear a Madonna frock and go back to some guy’s room at 3 a.m., are you then surprised when he makes a pass at you!

We have to make women realize that they are responsible, that sexuality is something which belongs to them. It is up to them to use it correctly and to be wise about where they go and what they do.

If you have an unpalatable sexual encounter so what? Big Deal! You played Russian roulette and you lost.

*(Normal Mailer 1994; quoted in Kelly et al. 1996: 89)*

In this war zone inhabited by urgent primordial male sexuality, Paglia’s advice to women is to get on out there and join in the fun of the battle – with equal measures of vigilance and eagerness. Katie Roiphe’s (1993) position is a little different. Her work reeks, instead, of an irritable refusal to think of dating and sex as dangerous. Roiphe was brought up by a feminist mother, and she was still in her early twenties when she wrote her best-selling book.<sup>25</sup> The tone of her writing seems born of a blend of naivety and indignation which you might expect from a young woman who’d grown up to believe that women and men were equal and that women were “free”,<sup>26</sup> only to encounter strong messages to the contrary when she left home and went to college. Rather than asserting men’s essential sexual aggressiveness, as Paglia does, she accuses anti-rape feminists of recycling an old-fashioned model of sexuality based on out-of-date notions that men want sex and women don’t. Her main bone

of contention with the anti-rape movement is its denial, in her view, of female sexual agency and promotion of an “infantilize[d]” image of women as gullible and incapable of taking responsibility for their own actions and protection. Roiphe suggested that all the attention to the issue of date rape might actually be creating a problem: encouraging women to wallow in the depths of vulnerability and victimhood and sending them into a state of perpetual fear. Clearly this picture, if it was a reasonable assessment, would be cause for concern for all feminists. As Kelly et al. (1996) pointed out, there is a long and proud history of feminist activism targeted precisely against such “victimism” (Barry 1979).

Indeed there are numerous problems tangled up in these backlash positions that get in the way of their offering a reasonable assessment of the social science research on rape and the broader anti-rape movement. At the outset are the straightforward errors of fact that plague many of these accounts. Roiphe (1993: 67), for example, grossly misconstrues the research on rape prevalence by casually conflating the findings about rape with those on sexual coercion. She implies that date rape is such a loose term that it stands as some kind of wild exaggeration of normal seduction: “According to common definitions of date rape, even verbal coercion or manipulation constitutes rape.” While it is true that some feminists have called for more inclusive definitions of rape, this has typically occurred in the heat of political debate in a rhetorical or philosophical spirit.<sup>27</sup> Feminists working on rape and sexual coercion within a social science framework have not themselves conflated these terms. For instance, Charlene Muehlenhard and Jennifer Schrag (1991), the researchers Roiphe cites in support of her claim, are characteristically careful to distinguish the broader sphere of sexual coercion from the specific category of “rape,” which they reserve for a more narrowly and legalistically defined act (see Muehlenhard 1994; Muehlenhard, Highby, Phelps, and Sympson 1997). As Mary Koss (1992a: 122) has noted, although some educational materials do promote a broad definition of rape, “critics err in the assumption that these definitions undergird the empirical data base.” For Mary Koss and Diana Russell, the researchers usually identified as having collected the data which created the so-called “bogus epidemic” (Gilbert 1991; cited in Koss 1992a), rape is *not* synonymous with coercive sexuality. In their prevalence research rape always refers to sex that is forced or obtained through the threat of force.<sup>28</sup>

One of the striking things in this whole debate is that despite the amount of press that the date rape skeptics have received, the actual criticisms of the research methodology can be boiled down to a handful of quibbles originating from just one person: Berkeley Social Welfare Professor Neil Gilbert. Although he has never directly studied rape himself, and appears not to have much familiarity with the general research paradigm that has been used to obtain the prevalence data, just about all the high-profile critics of Koss’s and Russell’s data – such as Roiphe (1993) and Hoff Sommers (1994)<sup>29</sup> – are highly derivative of the points in his commentaries (Wilson 1998). As John Wilson (1998) pointed out, media coverage of the controversy is to some extent the construction of a controversy fueled by the erroneous attribution of extreme positions as *the* feminist position: for instance, the

“rape by innuendo” “lie that wouldn’t die” (Wiener 1992), in which mainstream media across the U.S. published an inaccurate story accusing Swarthmore College of having an anti-rape policy that stated that “inappropriate innuendo” was an example of acquaintance rape. While no such policy existed, the claim was repeated in several publications including a cover story for *Time* magazine (see Wiener 1992). Date rape was trivialized in these stories, and those trying to prevent it were ridiculed as feminazis intent on taking the fun out of sex (see Wiener 1992). As Wilson (1998: 84) put it, the peddling of such myths about rape prevention initiatives became part of the construction of a “phantom called ‘sexual correctness’.”

Through propagating the notion that date rape is an absurd and fuzzy feminist concept – arising from “open distaste for heterosexual sex” and likely to “ruin sex for the next generation” (John Leo 1990, 1991; quoted in Wiener 1992) – the term becomes a ruse for once again denying the reality and/or potential seriousness of rape and sexual assault within heterosexual relationships. Many of these writers have been careful to declare their abhorrence of (real) rape, but suggest that feminists have trivialized genuine sexual violence by exaggerating and dramatizing the pervasiveness and effects of rape. For Paglia (1992: 64–5) rape is *only* an assault, and if a woman is traumatized by rape it is her own fault: “If it is a totally devastating psychological experience for a woman, then she doesn’t have a proper attitude toward sex.” But it is date rape in particular that is the main target of derision. In an often-quoted statement, Roiphe (1993: 79) declared:

People have asked me if I have ever been date-raped. And thinking back on complicated nights, on too many glasses of wine, on strange and familiar beds, I would have to say yes. With such a sweeping definition of rape, I wonder how many people there are, male or female, who haven’t been date-raped at one point or another.

With this kind of understanding of date rape, it is not surprising that Neil Gilbert reportedly told his students that “Comparing real rape to date rape is like comparing cancer to the common cold” (X 1999: 1072).

In their parody of date rape, many of the backlash writers celebrate as just fine the kind of sexual norms which make it okay for a man to pressure a woman to have sex that she doesn’t want in the name of seduction or excitement. In many renditions this in effect becomes an ethical-political allegiance to a harsh and gendered model of heterosex. In mocking the “sexual correctness” of anti-rape messages a very binarized set of possibilities gets produced, so that attempts to promote more equal consensual sex get framed as being anti-sex. As one woman who was involved in the Swarthmore College date-rape awareness program at the time of the media saga said, “for Leo [the journalist who first created the story], ‘ruining sex’ entails taking out the element of conquest” (Waterman cited in Wiener 1992). A common cry in the backlash literature is the complaint that “no doesn’t always mean no,” despite what feminists and rape prevention messages have tried to suggest. For example, Stephanie Gutmann retorted:

But in many sexual encounters, things are not so clear-cut, especially when the man and woman have deep feelings for each other or have engaged in sex previously. The picture is further clouded by the tradition that men should take the sexual initiative, the inclination of some women to voice resistance in order to avoid appearing “easy,” and the prevalent belief that saying no is a mere convention, part of the foreplay.

*(Gutmann 1991: 220; quoted in Muehlenhard et al. 1992: 32)*

Indeed, there are research findings that support the contention that sexual negotiation is complicated, although they do not provide strong support for disregarding the meaning of a woman’s “no.” Charlene Muehlenhard and Lisa Hollabaugh’s (1988) classic study of women’s “token resistance” to sex found that some women report that they do sometimes say no when they mean yes, but that this is not an everyday occurrence. Muehlenhard and Hollabaugh (1988) asked women to recall situations in which a man had wanted to have sexual intercourse with them, and they indicated to the man that they did not. One option that women were asked about was whether they had ever indicated to a man that they didn’t want intercourse when they actually did want it *and* “had every intention to and were willing to engage in sexual intercourse” (ibid.: 874). Presented with this scenario, 39.3 per cent of the 610 women in the study reported that they had engaged in such “token resistance.” However, most women (60.7 per cent) had never said no when they meant yes, and more than three-quarters of the women who had, reported having done so five or fewer times. As Muehlenhard and Hollabaugh (1988) emphasized, this means that when a woman says no, there is a high chance she means it. Muehlenhard and Marcia McCoy (1991) subsequently coined a new phrase to refer to this kind of behavior. They called it “scripted refusal” to avoid the connotation that such behavior is deliberately manipulative, and to draw attention to its consistency with traditional sexual scripts that embody a sexual double standard for women.

In a later study on this so-called token resistance, Charlene Muehlenhard and Carie Rodgers (1998) extended their methodology to allow participants (both women and men this time) to write an account of their experiences rather than simply reporting whether or not they had ever engaged in this kind of token resistance as it was described by the researchers. Unsurprisingly, they found that women’s and men’s narrative accounts revealed a more complex experience of any incident of apparent token resistance than the quantitative data implied. Most importantly they found that many of their participants – and likely many of those in previous studies, they suggested – misunderstood the definition of token resistance. When given the opportunity to describe in more detail the experiences they were referring to, Muehlenhard and Rodgers’s (1998) participants predominantly detailed situations in which they had said “no” and meant no. While they may have had ambivalent feelings – for example, one woman said “although my body wanted him my mind knew better” (ibid.: 459), these women and men were not generally referring to situations in which they clearly and fully wanted and intended to have sex, yet said they did not. This finding sheds new light on

Muehlenhard and McCoy's (1991) data, which indicated that over a third of the occasions of "token resistance" (or "scripted refusals" as they called them) reported by their participants resulted in sexual intercourse.

To complicate this picture further, Celia Kitzinger and Hannah Frith (1999: 310) argued that not only may women sometimes say no when they mean yes, but that they also are likely to sometimes say yes when they mean no. Their argument is based on insights from the field of conversation analysis and its study of patterns in how talk is constructed and understood within ordinary conversation: "human conversational interaction is indeed intricately complex: 'yes' may sometimes mean 'no', 'no' may sometimes mean 'yes', and the word 'no' is not necessarily a part of a refusal." Yet, they argue, it shouldn't be necessary for a woman to actually say no for her refusal to be understood when she is engaging in all the usual ways of refusing (which include pauses, excuses, and what are called palliatives to soften the message). Claims that date rape and sexual coercion are fostered through miscommunication are disingenuous according to their argument because all cultural members have a sophisticated understanding of normative conversational patterns. "[T]he root of the problem," they suggested, "is not that men do not understand sexual refusals, but that they do not like them" (Kitzinger and Frith 1999: 310). In a similar vein, Susan Ehrlich's (2001: 144) analyses of the language of acquaintance rape hearings shows how an "ideological frame of utmost resistance" works in these hearings to cast women's commonplace attempts to resist sexual violence as forms of consent.<sup>30</sup> Yet, she argued, when looked at from the point of view of a "reasonable woman" or a "reasonable person in the victim's circumstances," women's "inaction" and "deficient" signals of consent should be interpreted instead as "strategic acts of resistance," rather than as consent to sex.

So while backlash writers are no doubt correct to say that sexual encounters are not always clear cut, it doesn't make sense for this to translate into a license to disregard women's sexual rights. Defenders of men's right to interpret a woman's "no" or her tearful bodily passivity as consent are buying into a distasteful set of assumptions, ideas, and values that render women unrapeable except in the most extreme cases (i.e., if violently attacked by a stranger-intruder) (see Cherry 1983; Ehrlich 2001; Gavey 1989, 1992; Muehlenhard and McCoy 1991; Muehlenhard and Schrag 1991; Russell 1982; Weis and Borges 1973). In doing so, they risk pushing date and acquaintance rape back in to the closet (Kamen 1996). Similarly, while I might agree with some backlash writers that it is within normative cultural parameters of heterosex for men to aggressively pursue sex and women to resist it, where I part company is in my refusal to accept that it should therefore be justified and celebrated. Rather I want to call it into question by exposing it to some broader ethic of sexuality. The point is not to insist that all such cloudy interactions are necessarily rape, or even that they are necessarily harmful to women; neither is it to insist that all attempts at sexual persuasion are inherently unsavory. The point is rather to suggest that when this particular pattern of sex is so rigidly *gendered* and ritualized it not only limits sexual agency for women, but it provides too tidy an alibi for rape (just as it did for most of the twentieth century, see Chapter 1). As

Charlene Muehlenhard and her colleagues (1992) have argued, the kind of discursive work that Gutmann does in her article functions to excuse men from rape; Gutmann holds that to be guilty of rape a man must know that he has raped, but if “no” can legitimately be interpreted as part of foreplay how can he ever be held to account for not taking it at face value?

There is one further point I want to make here about the limitations of the backlash accounts. It is to do with the nature of the “subject” (or the psychology of women and men) assumed in their remedies for potential sexual coercion. In general they share an uncritical investment in a particular kind of modern liberal subject – as autonomous, rational, and free actors. Roiphe, in particular, wants women to be determined and self-determining subjects, boldly going out and playing by their own rules. The female subject in these kinds of accounts is ideally invulnerable to social pressure, or at least fully responsible for any compromising situation she ends up in, capable of subsequently interpreting, calmly and rationally, any awkward moments as ultimately having been within her own control. If Katie Roiphe’s book did have a consistent argument, a generous reader could almost see it as offering a feminist vision of and for strong and sex-savvy women. However, in her concern not to burden women with the clichéd, limiting, and old-fashioned characterizations of the female sex, she has had to adopt a head-in-sand approach to the limits on individual agency and choice. It is a thoroughly 1990s response, enthusing exactly the kind of individualizing and asocial promotion of personal freedom that feminist philosopher and cultural critic Susan Bordo (1997: 30) identified as pervading popular culture at the time (and continuing to do so), embodied in commercial slogans like “Just Do It,” “Go for It!,” and “Take Control!” In Roiphe’s world, gendered power is neutered through wishful thinking, and the social and cultural determinants of complex individual desires and anxieties are fancifully ignored.

In this and the previous chapter I have outlined how feminist analyses of rape and the new social science research on rape prevalence and on sexual coercion more generally merged to present a critical challenge to normative heterosexual sex. Forms of sex that were previously regarded as “just sex” were put under the spotlight in ways that showed that they were not always just, and were sometimes forms of sexual victimization. This move has been controversial. In a thoughtful essay evaluating the course of some of these changes, so-called “pro-sex feminist” Ellen Willis (1996: 51–2) sliced through the center of this debate:

In her book, *The Morning After*, Roiphe rightly argues against the conceptual slippage that equates verbal pressure with rape and offensive jokes with harassment; she effectively exposes the neo-Victorian assumptions of women’s helplessness and sexlessness that pervade antiviolence rhetoric. But she never seriously questions why so many women consent to sex they don’t really want (she herself professes to have done this, and so have I) and why they so often feel bullied and intimidated sexually. Can such a widespread pattern signify nothing but individual women’s failures of nerve, as Roiphe implies?

In the next part of this book, my aim is to address this and related questions, and to show the limitation of individualistic ways of thinking about sexual choices. I want to highlight why it is important to consider sex that falls in the gray area between sex and rape. For one thing, although it isn't always "rape," neither is it always fair and just. Bullied and intimidated sex, to use Willis's language, is a problem in its own right, which anyone concerned with gender equality and women's rights would be interested in challenging. But beyond this, I argue that it also provides the cultural scaffolding for rape. By this, I mean the legitimized, normalized, and normalizing constructions of aggressive male sexuality and passive female sexuality that provide not only a social pattern for coercive sexuality but also a convenient smoke-screen for rationalizing rape (within heterosexual relationships, in particular) as simply just sex.

## Notes

- 1 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Through the book I refer to a body of "new" research that embarked on a significant shift in focus, starting in the 1980s, and which dramatically changed our understanding of sexual violence. Although this research can't be considered literally new anymore, I decided to retain this framing to preserve a sense of the historical context of those changes within the overall narrative.
- 2 Prevalence refers to the proportion of those of a population who have experienced rape – either over a lifetime, or within certain age parameters – and is the usual measure of interest to psychologists. Incidence, by contrast, refers to the number of new incidents of rape that took place within a given period of time – such as over a year. Measures of incidence may be of more interest to criminologists or service providers, for example.
- 3 Researcher Linda Bourque (1989: 55) has suggested that the convenience samples used in such research might overrepresent students in social science classes whom she suggested would be likely to be more knowledgeable about sexuality and violence than other groups of students, and might therefore be more likely to self-report sexual victimizations. However, the classes targeted in Koss *et al.*'s study were randomly selected. Moreover, the assumption that, say, first-year psychology students (such as those surveyed for my study [Gavey 1991a, 1991b]) are more knowledgeable about sexuality and violence *and therefore* more likely to self-report experiences of victimization than other students is itself questionable. Even if this were the case, it seems unlikely that the rates obtained from these samples are inflated relative to the prevalence of sexual victimization in the general population. In a study with United States navy trainees, of whom only one third of the total sample of women and men had attended college, 36.1 per cent of the women in the study ( $n=1832$ ) reported an experience consistent with a legal definition of rape, since the age of 14, using the SES (Merrill *et al.* 1998). These women were in the same general age range (the mean age was 20.45 years) as college students.
- 4 Williams (1984) acknowledged Weis and Borges's (1973) prior use of this phrase.
- 5 In the 1992 redesign of the NCS into the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), specific wording on rape and "sexual attacks" was added. This resulted in a 250 per cent increase in reports of rape (see Hamby and Koss 2003: 244).
- 6 The extent to which the final sample was fully representative was limited by the response rate – which, when calculated as the proportion of women who were randomly selected that were interviewed (including those in households where no one was home, or where the interviewer could not gain access, and so on), was 50 per cent. This did affect the representativeness of the sample, as women who declined to participate were more likely to be older than women who participated, and they were more likely

- to be married. Russell used a statistical weighting procedure in an attempt to redress this “potential bias” (1982: 34) in the sample.
- 7 Intercourse was specified as “penile–vaginal penetration” (Russell 1984: 35). In her book on wife rape, however, Russell (1982: 43, 57) said that she compromised on the definition of rape to also include “forced oral and anal sex as well as forced digital penetration”; however, only 5 per cent of the 74 women who had experienced rape or attempted rape by their husband had experienced these forms of sexual violence without also having experienced forced penile–vaginal penetration (Russell notes that “digital penetration” is rather euphemistic for one woman’s experience of having her husband’s fist repeatedly forced into her vagina).
  - 8 Of course this was not legally irrelevant at the time if a woman was raped by a man she was married to.
  - 9 The refusal rate – calculated as the proportion of respondents who declined to participate, knowing that the study was about rape – was 19 per cent (Russell 1982, 1984).
  - 10 While convenience samples are unlikely to be representative of the wider population, they afford the pay-offs of relatively large sample sizes and high response rates, and so are often used as a compromise in favor of random sampling because of the high cost of such research. Often, such samples comprise university students, who are likely to be nonrepresentative of the wider population on socioeconomic and educational dimensions, as well as in terms of age, and possibly race and ethnicity. While these issues will inevitably distort the findings of the research in some directions, when the question is rape prevalence there is no *a priori* reason to believe that such women and men are any more or less likely to be raped and sexually assaulted than others of their age. Moreover, selection biases are likely to be minimized on some relevant dimensions relative to samples drawn from groups that are already highly selective in relation to rape (e.g., women who have reported rape to the police, women who have consulted rape crisis).
  - 11 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: The SES was revised in 2007, with updated and more specific wording aimed to lessen ambiguity around issues such as consent and the role of alcohol (Koss *et al.* 2007). It was also made gender neutral.
  - 12 For a useful narrative overview of this research project, known as the Ms. Magazine Campus Project on Sexual Assault, see Koss (1988a).
  - 13 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: The wording of this item has since been revised to make it less ambiguous – the new wording for this particular “coercive tactic” is “[by] taking advantage of me when I was too drunk or out of it to stop what was happening” (Koss *et al.* 2007: 362, 369).
  - 14 It is not possible to generate new percentage estimates of rape prevalence from these data as they are presented in the paper (i.e., excluding item 8). This is because these figures refer to the percentage of women who affirmed each item, whereas the figures given by Koss for the broader categories (e.g., “rape” or “attempted rape”) refer to the percentage of women for whom some experience in this category was the most serious experience of sexual victimization they reported. Simply adding the two figures for items 9 and 10, for example, would inaccurately inflate the percentage of women who had experienced rape by counting some women twice.
  - 15 Those considered to have had an experience consistent with rape does include women who responded yes to the ambiguous question relating to alcohol and drug use. In a later study in which the researchers deliberately “tightened up” the wording of these questions, they did find that considerably fewer women raped in this way (i.e., when too intoxicated to give consent) were likely to label the incident as rape, compared to women raped by physical force (Schwartz and Leggett 1999); although only 11.8 per cent of all the women whose experiences fit a definition of rape, consistent with legal definitions, classified their own experience as rape. The authors of this study also pointed out that there was no evidence to suggest that the emotional impact of rape due to intoxication was less than that of rape by physical force.
  - 16 The prevalence rates they cite range from 19.4 per cent to 27.5 per cent.

## 72 Rape in a different light

- 17 See Gavey (1992) and Basile (1999) for subsequent qualitative studies looking at women's reports of unwanted and coerced sex within heterosexual relationships.
- 18 I would prefer to exclude ex-lovers and ex-husbands from this category, but this is not possible with Russell's data in the way they are presented.
- 19 For the reason that I had never particularly considered it as a significant site in relation to my primary interest in social justice; and also probably because of its stigmatizing potential. As Jeffrey Weeks (2000: 125) has said: "Writing about sex can be dangerous. It makes you, as Ken Plummer put it, 'morally suspect'!"
- 20 Some of the influential social science researchers, such as Diana Russell and Charlene Muehlenhard, did make these connections, but Mary Koss's early empirical work did not.
- 21 Any optimism that the power of science would uncover the truth of rape, for one and all to see, became untenable in light of the backlash reaction to the scientific research on rape prevalence. Science is of course value-laden, as even researchers conducting positivist rape research have acknowledged (e.g., Fisher et al. 2000).
- 22 See Kelly, Burton, and Regan (1996: 98) for related concerns. They refer, instead, to "counter-offensives," which can be seen more optimistically as inevitable responses to feminist gains within the struggle for social change.
- 23 Although Paglia (1992: 67) explicitly denies that her position is biologically determinist, on the grounds of her insistence on ethics as something we learn in becoming "civilized."
- 24 The racism of this comment is also galling.
- 25 "A twenty-four-year-old graduate student takes on the feminist establishment in an extraordinary indictment of the women's movement today" (Back cover, Roiphe 1993).
- 26 "[H]er mother taught her that feminism meant freedom, and she believed it" (Back cover, Roiphe 1993).
- 27 Catharine MacKinnon (1987b: 82), for instance, said, "Politically, I call it rape whenever a woman has sex and feels violated." But she went straight on to add, "You might think that's too broad. I'm not talking about sending all of you men to jail for that. I'm talking about attempting to change the nature of the relations between women and men by having women ask ourselves: 'Did I feel violated?'"
- 28 Noting the caveat that one of the items on the SES that contributes to counts of "rape" is too ambiguous and hence a problematic measure (the item concerning unwanted sex as a result of a man giving a woman alcohol or drugs). Russell's definition also included instances when women were physically unable to consent.
- 29 See also Klein (1994) and to some extent Carlin (1998).
- 30 It is interesting to note here that, according to Vivian Berger (1977: 8), the ancient legal definition of rape used the phrase "against her will," implying that a woman's non-consent was the defining feature of rape. However, as Susan Estrich (1987) has documented, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century United States courts began to require proof of a woman's "utmost resistance" in order to prove her non-consent (see also Schulhofer 1998). In the cases detailed by Estrich and Stephen Schulhofer the nature and degree of resistance required to prove rape was ridiculous and totally unrealistic. This was especially so in cases of "simple rape," according to Estrich, yet not usually in cases of stranger rape, particularly those involving Black men and white women. By the mid-twentieth century the requirement for "utmost resistance" was generally replaced by the need to prove "reasonable resistance": "Chastity was still valuable, but judges no longer suggested that it was more valuable than life itself" (Estrich 1987: 37). As Malm (1996: 155) and others noted, however, in most (U.S.) jurisdictions a negative definition of consent still remains. That is, a woman's consent is presumed unless she has provided "a clear expression of dissent" (emphasis in original).

## PART 2

# Gender, power, and sexuality – and the limits of individual choice

... today we see sexual matters as essentially about individual choice. The debate is about the legitimate limits of choice, not about the legitimacy of choice itself.

*(Jeffrey Weeks 2000: 169)*

... it's the idea of freedom of choice which is the new opium.

*(Slavoj Žižek 2001; in interview with Kim Hill, Radio New Zealand, August 9)*

To begin to see differently requires ... that people come together and explore what the culture continually presents to them as their individual choices ... as instead culturally situated and culturally shared.

*(Susan Bordo 1993b: 300)*

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# 3

## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SEX, SUBJECTIVITY, AND THE BODY

it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as "natural" . . . are in fact "cultural"; made by us, not given to us. Even nature, postmodernism might point out, doesn't grow on trees.

*(Linda Hutcheon 1989: 2)*

It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions, which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them.

*(Michel Foucault in Chomsky and Foucault 1974: 171)*

"Sex is not a natural act," cries out the provocative title of Leonore Tiefer's 1995 book. Flying in the face of common sense, perhaps, such social constructionist understandings of sexuality became widely accepted within the social sciences toward the end of the twentieth century (e.g., Vance 1989), even if they still seem to run directly counter to wider cultural assumptions about sex and sexuality.<sup>1</sup> Conventional understandings of sex are embedded in the language of human nature with its lexicon needs and drives. Sex is an imperative; biologically programmed. Through these dominant traditional discourses our current conceptions of what sex is, and its meanings, are taken to be self-evident givens. Sex is simply natural (see also Tiefer 1997), and its most natural and normal forms are understood in terms of their reproductive functions (and often in terms of their evolutionary value). Sex is also understood as an important medium for the expression of our being, and the healthy glue that holds together romantic intimate relationships. At the same time, sex is conventionally understood to be "constrained," if not repressed, by society, with its normative moralities and (albeit resisted) acceptable

contexts for sex. These dominant discourses of sex are also highly gendered, although in contestable and changing ways. Fundamental to these commonsense formulations of sex and sexuality is the naturalization of particular forms (heterosexual intercourse) and the naturalization of particular understandings about sex and its place in our lives.<sup>2</sup>

In *The History of Sexuality* (1981), Michel Foucault developed an argument that thoroughly challenges this commonsense way of understanding sex and sexuality. He argued that far from being a seething mass of natural drives and urges that our society has repressed, sex is *produced* through the “deployment of sexuality”: “Sexuality is far more of a positive product of power than power was ever repression of sexuality” (Foucault 1980: 120). That is, the particular kinds of sexual practices and desires that we take for granted as normal (or perverse), our sexual identities, and so on, are discursively constituted through normative discourses and social practices. According to Foucault (1980, 1981) sexuality has been deployed in relatively recent times as a domain of regulation and social control. This theorization of sexuality allows an understanding of how the positions available to women and men in dominant discourses on sexuality are not necessarily natural and fixed, and nor are they neutral—sexuality is deployed in ways that are directly tied to relations of power and the interests of the wider social body. Foucault (1981) suggested that the whole proliferation of discourses on sex that has taken place in the last few centuries is related to increasing forms of what has come to be known as governmentality. Is it not motivated, he asked, “in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative?” (ibid.: 37). This possibility has clear implications for understanding the strict norms of sex that we currently know (as heterosexual, as coupled, as coitus) as culturally produced rather than self-evidently natural:

For was this transformation of sex into discourse not governed by the endeavor to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction: to say no to unproductive activities, to banish casual pleasures, to reduce or exclude practices whose object was not procreation?

*(Foucault 1981: 36)*<sup>3</sup>

For Foucault this question is speculative, but it is an idea that has resonance with observations of earlier changes in sexual practice. For instance, in seeking to explain what appears to be a sharp rise in the popularity of sexual intercourse during the eighteenth century in England, Henry Abelove (1989) has argued a very similar point. That shift, he speculated, goes hand in hand with the rise of value on production more generally within capitalism. Carol Bacchi (1988) has traced a connection between the turn of attention toward a more active sexuality for women in the early twentieth century and a eugenicist agenda, which relied on successful, reproducing, middle-class heterosexual marriages. Bacchi argued that such motivations are explicit within the works of early twentieth-century “sex reformers” Marie Stopes and Margaret Sanger, whose advice was designed to

improve the experience of sex for middle-class women. Their promotion of pleasure was not as an end in itself, she maintained, but as a strategic step toward a particular goal for the social body at large.<sup>4</sup>

Foucault's point about the consolidation of a procreative sexuality can be illustrated by following the introduction of the science of sexology in the early twentieth century. While the sexological pioneers are often credited with "leading everyone out of the darkness of Victorian prudery and sexual repression into the light of 20th century sexual freedom" (Jackson 1983: 3), an analysis with an eye to the social construction of sexuality portrays instead the creation of ideologically loaded new truths about sex and sexuality (see Jackson 1983, 1994). While conventional understandings of science and knowledge see only the peeling back of obfuscation to reveal the raw truth, the social constructionist lens highlights how partial these new truths are, and how shaped they are by dominant cultural assumptions. The upshot is, as Tiefer would have it, that "contemporary sex research *has* become focused on an ideology that is so implicit and unexamined as to be invisible" (1988: 21; emphasis in original; see also Irvine 1990a; Weeks 1985).

In their discussion of the later sexologists, for instance, Miller and Fowlkes (1987: 152) criticized William Masters and Virginia Johnson for overriding the complexities and contradictions posed by their own data. The physiological data they collected on women's orgasm showed that its intensity was negatively correlated with coitus. Yet they nevertheless simply continued to reproduce heterosexist models of women's sexuality whereby the "vaginal barrel" was claimed to provide "the primary physical means of heterosexual expression for the human female" (Masters and Johnson 1966; quoted in Miller and Fowlkes 1987: 152).<sup>5</sup> In other words, data usually don't speak for themselves. The products of science are inevitably shaped by the values and interpretations of the scientists. The bounty of this kind of sexual science for women, suggested Miller and Fowlkes (1987: 153), has been to earn "for women the right to have equal time and space with men on the sexual production line" (see also Irvine 1990a, 1990b; Jackson 1984; Segal 1994; Tiefer 1995; Jeffreys 1990). Even theorists who have emphasized that the new sexual ideologies of the sexual revolution were a genuine shift away from an instrumentalist procreative sexuality have raised concerns about elements of the new understandings. Steven Seidman (1989: 311), for instance, argued that the sex manuals of the 1960s and 1970s did represent a genuinely progressive shift in "our sex code" toward greater tolerance. However, he pointed to the "overloading of sex with surplus meanings" (ibid.: 313) so that sex came to be promoted as the primary realm of pleasure and it came also to represent the foundation of love; both of which, he suggested, generate potentially oppressive expectations.

There are numerous examples of ways in which twentieth-century sexology promoted a *particular* model of sexuality *as natural*. One of many dominant assumptions still is that (real) sex is coitus; so dominant that to question it risks ridicule. But at least some historians of sexuality have argued that "putting a penis in a vagina" has not always been the dominant sexual activity between women and men (e.g., Hitchcock 1997, 2002: 191; see also Abelow 1989). If we accept that some of our most basic

assumptions like this may be historically contingent, rather than fixed, then it provides promising grounds on which to advance an ethic of sexuality between women and men that is not constrained by the norms of sex we have today. Historian of sexuality, Jeffrey Weeks (2000: 11), has argued that “the sexual is not an all-powerful force beyond human control. Made in a complex history, it can be changed in and through history.” As Susan Bordo (1993a: 180) has maintained, this kind of historicism is “the great liberator of thought” because it challenges

enduring social myths about human nature and gender by showing them to be . . . products of a temporal imagination negotiating its embodied experience; the point, therefore, is not to refute such notions, but to demystify them, to excavate their concrete human (psychological, social, political) origins. ‘Because they are made they can be unmade,’ as Foucault said in an interview late in his life, ‘assuming we know how they were made.’

*(Foucault 1989: 252)*

Which is not to say that this unmaking is an easy or straightforward task. Just as it is incorrect to assume that biology is destiny (it is more plastic and open to change than commonsense thinking suggests [e.g., Gray 1997; Oyama 1985]) it would also be a mistake to assume that desires, anxieties, or even bodies, that are said to be socially constructed are automatically more malleable at the level of any one person’s lived life. Certainly they are no less “real,” being as they are the material process that is the ongoing entanglement of nurture and nature (that can never be neatly pulled apart from one another). At the less personal and more future-oriented level, however, this kind of historicism does promise opportunities for social change. It radically opens up the possibilities of what could be different, paving the way for imagination and debate to consider the merits of change, not as (pejoratively cast) forms of “social engineering” away from some imaginary pure and natural human state, but instead as part of natural and ongoing processes of cultural change.

In this chapter, I will look briefly at a theoretical explanation of how sexuality (and other forms of subjectivity and action as well as the body itself) can be seen to be socially produced. Although I draw on Foucault as a major influence on my own thinking in this area, I don’t pretend to present a pure “Foucauldian” analysis. I use these ideas instead as a means to an end: as tools to think differently about sex and sexuality, rather than to further any theoretical agenda or history of ideas. Nor do I make any claim about the theoretical origins of these ideas, although it’s fair to point out that there is wider discussion about these points. As Jeffrey Weeks (2000: 53) good-humoredly laments, Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (Vol. 1) is often privileged “as the fount and origin of the currently dominant approach, which emphasizes the historical, contextual nature of the sexual, and which for shorthand is generally known as social constructionism”; an irritation to those scholars who have been working in the field and developing similar ideas for many years. More poignantly, perhaps, for feminist scholars is Susan Bordo’s (1993a, 1997) reminder of the pervasive othering of feminist theory in narratives of revolutionary

twentieth-century theory; and the widespread denial of the theoretical contributions of the feminist activism that preceded and surrounded it. In particular, Bordo argues, it wasn't Foucault who invented ideas about the body as socially constructed and as a focal site for the exercise of power; it was feminism, as far back as Mary Wollstonecraft writing in the eighteenth century (Bordo 1993a).

These reservations noted, this chapter is designed to offer a bare-bones outline of the theoretical tools I've found helpful for approaching questions about coercive heterosex in different ways to what was on offer within mainstream psychology when I started looking.<sup>6</sup> Broadly speaking, these theoretical influences are associated with what could loosely be called poststructuralism.<sup>7</sup> My aim in the first part of the chapter is simply to sketch these ideas in a way that might orient readers without any background in poststructuralist theories to the general theoretical terrain from which my wider arguments in this book develop. A few important caveats first. It is essential to acknowledge that the term "poststructuralism" papers over crucial differences between different theorists' work and also within particular theorist's work over time. Given that my overview is necessarily abbreviated, it inevitably runs the risk of oversimplifying a complex theoretical field. While this is always a potential frustration, it is a necessary one to bear when academic work is concerned primarily with "real-world" social justice issues rather than theoretical elegance as an end in itself. The terms of my theoretical engagement are pragmatic, and I make no apology for that! While theory is extremely important, for my uses here, it is imported in the service of unpacking questions about the cultural scaffolding of rape and sexual coercion; it is a servant rather than a master.

A slightly more edgy caveat concerns what is omitted in this discussion. My theoretical orientation draws simultaneously on feminism and critical psychology, as well as poststructuralism. Yet I will not be taking the time to so explicitly delineate the key principles and assumptions that I draw from these quarters. Perhaps this is something that does require some apology, as it could be seen as playing into that all too common othering of feminist theory that Bordo (1993a, 1997) has referred to. The reasons – albeit perhaps not entirely adequate ones – for my choices about where to focus this discussion arise from the specific context of my own particular academic engagements. Within my "home" discipline of psychology it has always appeared to me (perhaps incorrectly!) that feminism has had more success in making inroads into the discipline; that it has been more easily accommodated, but only so long as and to the extent that it plays within the dominant epistemological and methodological frameworks of positivism. The more difficult task, it has seemed from my standpoint, has been in attempting to justify, not feminist work per se, but critical work that insists on an alternative framework (epistemologically and methodologically) for doing scholarly work.

## Language and discourse

One of the key points of difference associated with poststructuralist theories in relation to mainstream psychology is the insistence that meaning is constituted

through language. This simple but challenging idea is a legacy of a whole range of theorists including Saussure, Derrida, Foucault, and many others. There are numerous examples of where and how this approach to language punctuates so many areas of scholarship (including those that are not identified as post-structuralist – for example, recognition of the impact of metaphor and rhetoric in shaping how we see the world). However, poststructuralist theories would take this recognition further by accepting that it is not possible to simply avoid these kinds of influences and biases by stepping back into some neutral linguistic terrain associated with, for example, science. Even in such stripped-back genres of writing and speaking, fundamental assumptions about the nature of the world are carried through in ways that are usually invisible and/or totally naturalized to those inhabiting these linguistic spaces. Thus, in a practical sense, within psychology, it is conventional to treat language as transparent and expressive, merely reflecting and describing (pre-existing) subjectivity and human experience of the world. The poststructuralist view of language stands in marked contrast to this view of language. It requires an ongoing critical reflexivity about the way we formulate our ideas and construct our arguments, so that we can be more aware of the assumptions we are making and the priorities and exclusions that these maintain.

For Foucault, language is always located in discourse, and this gives rise to a particular analytic framework for exploring the social production of meaning and action. In this approach, discourses are organized systems of statements that provide the socially understood ways, or rules almost, for talking about something and acting in relation to it. In contrast to many other uses of the term, discourse is not merely a linguistic concept for Foucault. Discourses are evident in both language and in social practices. According to Foucault (2002) in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, they construct the objects to which they refer. Discourses are multiple and they offer competing, potentially contradictory ways of giving meaning to the world. They are not absolute or universal; rather they take shape in specific ways in different times, places, and within different cultural contexts.

Discourses constitute and are reproduced in social institutions, modes of thought, and individual subjectivity (Weedon 1987). So, for example, the discursive production of the desire to be a “good mother” (which has particular material and political implications for women) would include such things as “the child-care books, the hospital visits, the routine check-ups, the normalizing techniques which define satisfactory maternal health or development, and so on” (Henriques *et al.* 1984: 219). It is through discourse that material power can be exercised and that power relations are established and perpetuated. At the same time, every discourse is “the result of a practice of production which is at once material, discursive and complex, always inscribed in relation to other practices of production of discourse” (Henriques *et al.* 1984: 106). They offer “subject positions” for people to take up (Henriques *et al.* 1984; Weedon 1987). These positions, or specific possibilities for constituting subjectivity (or identity, behaviors, understandings of the world), vary in terms of the power they offer. Discourses vary in their authority. The dominant

discourses appear “natural,” denying their own partiality and gaining their authority by appealing to common sense or culturally valued forms of truth, like those underwritten by science.<sup>8</sup>

While the term can be used in a way that is similar to a “set of assumptions” (Hollway 1983: 231 n 4), the concept of discourse has radical implications beyond what this would suggest. For example, it is a concept through which we can attempt to transcend the individual–social binary (see Henriques et al. 1984, 1998). Thus the notion that discourses are shared cultural products is an important point that distinguishes them from more individualistic cognitive frameworks of meaning. They are “a product of social factors, of powers and practices, rather than an individual’s set of ideas,” as Wendy Hollway (1983: 231 n 4) put it. Beyond this, too, is the sense that discourses permeate and constitute not only social practices and institutions, but minds and bodies too. As Chris Weedon (1987: 108) said, “Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern” – a suggestion I will follow up on later.

In order to understand how sexuality is socially constructed or discursively constituted, it is useful to look in more detail at two particular insights from Foucault’s work. One is the power–knowledge nexus, which helps us to understand the relationship between discourse and subjectivity. The other is Foucault’s account of how disciplinary power works through normalization and surveillance to produce compliance, or “docile bodies.”

## Power–knowledge

In an illuminating discussion of the meaning of Foucault’s power–knowledge nexus (or *pouvoir–savoir* in French), and the problems of translation, Gayatri Spivak (1993) has drawn attention to the meaning of *pouvoir* in the original French. She pointed out that *pouvoir* refers not only to *power*, but it is also (in its various conjugations) the most usual way of saying *can* in the French language. So, the *pouvoir* part of *pouvoir–savoir* carries with it a sense of “can-do”-ness, according to Spivak (1993: 34; emphasis in original): “*Pouvoir–savoir* – being able to do something – only as you are able to make sense of it.” Thus, the ways in which we are able to make sense of something (i.e., discourses) enable and constrain what we are able to do. Similarly it would be a trap to take the English-language translation “knowledge” too literally. Foucault’s writings in this area provide an important model for appreciating the inseparability of the social and the individual. “Knowledge” in this sense does not refer to cognitive properties of the individual person; neither does it refer simply to shared knowledge conveyed through language. As I have already suggested, discourse refers also to the material realm; to regulated human practices, forms and routines of the body, as well as properties of space and technology, and so on. In all these, knowledge is embedded and manifest in the particular order and shape of these forms of social organization.

This Foucauldian way of thinking about how knowledge or discourse makes possible certain ways of acting, particular choices, and so on, provides a way of understanding how the dominant discourses of sexuality – which are highly gender-specific – make possible different kinds of desires, and ways of being, sexually, to women and men. His analysis of the workings of power supplements this to show how we are each made subject in relation to these normative cultural forms.

## Disciplinary power

Central to a Foucauldian analysis of power is the recognition that power is not a unitary force that is independent of us and operates only from the top down, through repression and denial. Rather, Foucault argued that over time traditional sovereign forms of power have been intersected with (but not replaced by) what he called “disciplinary power.” “Discipline” regulates human life and imposes particular forms of behavior, “assuring the ordering of human multiplicities” (Foucault 1979: 218). In Foucault’s (ibid.: 138) terms, “discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies.” Discipline is infused in multiple and diffuse ways throughout the whole social body, and disciplinary power is exercised through its invisibility (Foucault 1979).

In contrast to a judicial regime that works by “bringing into play the binary opposition of the permitted and the forbidden” and condemning that which is forbidden (ibid.: 183), disciplinary power works largely by bringing “the power of the Norm” (ibid.: 184) to “the web of everyday existence” (ibid.: 183). Through a myriad of techniques of observation, measurement, reward, and punishment, pressure is brought upon people to strive for conformity. A whole range of micro-practices of everyday behavior and of bodily comportment became subjected to these normalizing processes: “It was a question of making the slightest departures from correct behavior subject to punishment” (ibid.: 178). Such punishments included “a whole series of subtle procedures . . . from light physical punishment to minor deprivations and petty humiliations” (ibid.: 178). By contrast to modes of sovereign power, disciplinary power thus works through “subtle coercion” (ibid.: 209), making the exercise of power more effective.

Central to Foucault’s theorization of disciplinary power is the point that power is not only negative, but is also “positive.” There are possibly three distinct senses in which this notion of power as positive can be understood. First, and most importantly, this idea emphasizes that power is positive in the sense that it is *productive and constitutive* – that is, it produces meanings, desires, behaviors, practices, and so on. As Weeks (2000: 116–17) has put it, Foucault’s interest in power came to be centered on “what it constructs rather than what it denies.” A second way in which disciplinary power is positive relates to the specific techniques used to discipline or train people: “In discipline, punishment is only one element of a double system: gratification–punishment” (Foucault 1979: 180). The use of rewards came to be recognized as invaluable in the training of individuals. As an early eighteenth-century educationalist recommended, “the lazy [are] more encouraged by the desire to be

rewarded in the same way as the diligent than by the fear of punishment” (Demia; quoted in Foucault 1979: 180). A third way in which Foucault’s analysis might lead us to think of power as, at least potentially, positive is in the sense that it can produce desires, practices, and so on that are *pleasurable* as well as unpleasurable, and which may be liberating as well as oppressive (although the possibilities of pleasure and liberation do not necessarily directly map on to each other). Thus, according to Foucault, power is “inherently neither positive nor negative” (de Lauretis 1987: 16); “in itself the exercise of power is not violence” (Foucault 1982: 220).

Foucault’s account of the Panoptican provides a brilliant way of illustrating a powerful mode of social organization that can be seen to produce conformity by instilling self-surveillance in people. Foucault described Jeremy Bentham’s design for the Panoptican as an exemplary model for the operation of “a new ‘political economy’ of whose object and end are not the relations of sovereignty but the relations of discipline” (Foucault 1979: 208). The panoptic schema, then, illustrates how disciplinary power functions. The Panoptican is an architectural model for a prison that consists of a central watchtower surrounded by a circular building divided into cells. Each cell extends the width of the building and has a window on both the outside and inside walls, thus creating an effect of backlighting which makes the cell occupant visible from the central tower. Furthermore, the central tower is designed so that the observer is not visible to the prisoners in their cells. This arrangement ensures “that the surveillance is permanent in its effects” (ibid.: 201), without needing to be continuous in its action (that is, the supervisor need not always be present). In this model, the moment that power is exercised is both invisible and unverifiable, yet its ever-present potential is always apparent. That is, the inmates are constantly aware of the central tower from which they are observed, but they never know if they are being looked at at any one particular time. In this way, the Panoptican induces “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (ibid.: 201). This model is useful for illustrating how people are regulated and normalized through the operation of disciplinary power. When subject to these social forces, we are enlisted into the service of regulating our own behavior, thus becoming in effect our own jailors (Bartky 1988):

it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. We are much less Greeks than we imagine. We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, *invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism.*

(Foucault 1979: 217; *emphasis added*)

The Panoptican is a representation “of a mechanism of power reduced to its *ideal form*” (Foucault 1979: 205; *emphasis added*), however. As Foucault (ibid.: 205) noted, it is “abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction,” and so it does not necessarily explain resistance to power. According to Colin Gordon, the impression

that his analysis did not sufficiently deal with resistance was of later concern to Foucault who, despite what some might claim, did not hold to a view of power having an “absolute capability to tame and subject individuals” (Gordon 1991: 5). Rather, Foucault saw resistance as an essential part of the power package. As he famously said, “power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free” (Foucault 1982: 221):

By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse compartments may be realized. Where the determining factors saturate the whole, there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains. (In this case it is a question of a physical relationship of constraint.) Consequently, there is no face to face confrontation of power and freedom, which is mutually exclusive (freedom disappears everywhere power is exercised), but a much more complicated interplay.

*(Ibid.)*

Nevertheless there has been criticism of Foucault’s model of disciplinary power on the very grounds that it doesn’t take adequate account of agency as a necessary precondition for resistance and social change. For instance, Monique Deveaux (1994) is harshly critical of Bartky’s use of Foucault’s Panoptican model. She considers that

Bartky’s use of the docile bodies thesis has the effect of diminishing and delimiting women’s subjectivity, at times treating women as robotic receptacles of culture rather than as active agents who are both constituted by, and reflective of, their social and cultural contexts.

*(Ibid.: 227; see McNay 1991 for similar objections to Foucault’s work, also on feminist grounds)*

However, one of the problems with these kinds of criticisms, I think, is that they read analyses of the workings of particular modes of power as unnecessarily overdetermining. As an abstracted model of power, Foucault’s explanation of the workings of disciplinary power is useful for prompting us to consider how desires and behavior, for example, are shaped and cajoled into certain forms rather than others. Surely it must be feasible to use a model of disciplinary power for understanding how *it is possible* that we can engage in practices, form desires, and so on, that can be seen in a wider picture as related to our own oppression or disadvantage, *without* seeing that such engagement is always and necessarily so. Like Bartky’s work on the recruitment of women into the disciplines of femininity, Bordo’s work on eating disorders and the reification of slenderness has also been accused of underestimating or not taking account of resistance; of treating women as “cultural dopes” (e.g., Davis, 1995). Bordo’s (1997: 35) response to these charges is characteristically incisive. Part of her argument is that “agency feminists” (which she describes as “the more moderate, sober, scholarly sister of ‘power feminism’”) claim to find women’s

agency in too many places, including in our submission to limiting cultural inducements toward certain restrictive forms of femininity (such as cosmetic surgery in the case of Kathy Davis's 1995 own work). It's not that Bordo is against the recognition of agency, of course. But she draws attention to the problem with an overzealous emphasis on agency; an emphasis that she suggests can create a diversion of our attention away from the social landscape that produces such conformist desires (see also Bordo 1993a).

Feminists are interested in agency not just because it seems to convey a respect for people's active attempts to shape their own lives, but also, importantly, because it is taken as a precondition for resistance and thus social change. Critical psychologists, too, have debated the place of agency in theories of the subject – often in the course of arguments over the necessity of psychoanalysis as a corrective supplement to discursive analyses. Henriques et al. (1984, 1998) for example, have been concerned with what they call “discourse determinism” and raise questions about the lack of agency ascribed to people within Foucauldian discourse theory. But a preoccupation with agency (or autonomy or freedom or whatever we call it) arguably misses the point, according to Bordo (1997: 186), who wants to make a clear distinction between agency and resistance: “Whether our actions can be said to be autonomous or ‘free’ is distinct from the question of which of those actions can be said to ‘resist’ a social norm”:

Postmodernists like to see resistance “acknowledged” in texts and “accounted for” by theories. But texts and theories can also function as *practices* of resistance, which work in a variety of ways to help instigate change.

Resistance can be produced in many ways. How it is produced, whether it is imagined as a cultural construction or an act of pure freedom, whether it appeals to a natural body or a cyborg or no body at all – these, to me, have no bearing on the issue of effectiveness. The fact that resistance is produced from within a hegemonic order does not preclude it from transforming that order, any more than the fact that we are our parents' children precludes us from living lives very different from theirs.

*(Ibid.: 190)*

Nancy Fraser (1997: 214) agrees: “Nothing in principle precludes that subjects are *both* culturally constructed *and* capable of critique” (emphasis in original). Arguments that accuse Foucauldian theories of denying agency to women (e.g., McNay 1991) and leaving inadequate grounds on which to explain empowerment (e.g., Deveaux 1994) seem, in light of these considerations, to be hankering after a more pure asocial subject. Like Bordo, I think anxieties about agency have been frequently overstated. Foucault's notion of *pouvoir-savoir* does not just hold for explaining the destructive and unjust operations of dominant discourses that can be seen to have oppressive effects. It can also be seen to apply to the liberatory potential within oppositional or “reverse” discourses and within new deconstructive discourses that refuse the traditional terms of a particular debate. For instance:

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.  
(Foucault 1981: 101)

While theoretically, from a Foucauldian perspective, there is no way out of discourse, no retreat to some position of socially untainted authenticity, no utopian pinnacle of pure freedom, these alternative discursive formations can make possible significant new paths for agentic action, resistance, and political action.

There is one other point to consider in relation to Foucault's theories of power, and this is vitally important for an analysis of the cultural scaffolding of rape: "the bringing into play of power relations does not exclude the use of violence any more than it does the obtaining of consent" (Foucault 1982: 220). In this broadest sense, the exercise of power, according to Foucault (*ibid.*),

is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting of being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions.

As I will show in Chapter 5, in the blended realm of sexual coercion and sexual violence we find a domain in which it is necessary to simultaneously take into account both disciplinary forms of power that incite consent and/or compliance as well as those forms of power that fit with a more conventional understanding that includes acts of force (or the threat of force) by one person<sup>9</sup> against another.

It has to be said that attention to the specificities of gender is lamentably absent in Foucault's analysis of power and sexuality. He largely ignored the differential operations of power through the deployment of sex for men and women, as feminist scholars have consistently pointed out. Disciplinary power may produce "docile bodies," but there are profound differences in the forms these take for women and men – particularly within a heterosexual matrix. Still, while debate within feminism has simmered over the theoretical and political value of Foucault's work, many of us have found his insights and analyses useful. When fused with a feminist analysis of the politics of gender, I have found they provide fruitful ways of exploring the cultural scaffolding of rape – particularly women's experiences of unwanted sex with men.<sup>10</sup>

## Subjectivity and the body

Western psychology tends to assume that each individual person has an essential, coherent self, which has stable properties like "personality" and "attitudes."<sup>11</sup> In direct contrast to the humanist assumptions of a unified, rational *self*, poststructuralist

theories draw on psychoanalytic destabilizations of rationality and consciousness to envisage instead a *subject* that is fragmentary, inconsistent, and contradictory. Subjectivity can be thought of as the *process* of being a subject (whereas the self tends to be thought of as a *product*); it refers to “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (Weedon 1987: 32).

In the emphasis on the constitutive nature of language and discourse, Foucauldian poststructuralist theory suggests that, as social beings, we are produced through discourse and culture (e.g., Foucault 1981; Weedon 1987). Teresa de Lauretis (1987) has, for instance, outlined simple everyday processes by which the social technologies of gender produce us as gendered subjects. Drawing on Foucault, and using the Althusserian notion of interpellation, she describes, for example, how every time we mark the “female” box on a form we are once again propelled into an identification with the social requirements for our sex. Through reiteration of these processes of interpellation particular kinds of identities are produced (Butler 1997; see also Butler 1993). Not only our minds, but our whole beings, including our bodies, are constructed through this discursive power. As Judith Butler has suggested, discourses “actually live in bodies. They lodge in bodies, bodies in fact carry discourses as part of their own lifeblood” (in Meijer and Prins 1998: 282).<sup>12</sup> In relation to sexual *practice*, the notion of reiteration of interpellation also works to make sense of how our physical bodies can be recruited into the material practice of normative (hetero)sexuality; how the habitual routines of the normal can come to shape our physical experiences of sex.

While all discourses offer subject positions which suggest particular ways of being in and experiencing the world, they vary in their accessibility and power. Those discourses which are commensurate with widely shared commonsense understandings of the world are perhaps most powerful in constituting subjectivity, yet their influence can most easily remain hidden and difficult to identify and, therefore, resist. At the same time, other discursive influences can generate different expectations, understandings, and so on, which may result in inconsistent, even contradictory, experiences. It is possible that we more actively and self-consciously adopt positions in relation to oppositional discourses (such as feminism) and discourses which espouse new cultural ideals (such as the call to safer sex). For example, we may choose to adopt or reject new norms, or to express an explicit ambivalence about them (which does not necessarily imply that we are able to act accordingly!). By comparison, the influence of more traditional cultural assumptions, patterns, and practices may be almost invisible. Such dominant discourses may position us in various ways without us even knowing it. For example, a woman’s heterosexual identity could largely comprise ways of thinking about and experiencing herself in her sexual relationship that are consistent with dominant discourses on heterosexuality and women’s sexuality, yet she may be unaware of how she has been socially produced in these ways because they exist at the level of taken-for-granted norms within a culture. Despite this, she may be very aware of those ways in which she attempts to carve an identity in opposition to those aspects of heterosexuality that she has identified and critiqued. For example,

inspired by popularized liberal and feminist discourses about women's rights to sexual pleasure, she (and her partner) may deliberately strive for equality under the guise of mutuality and reciprocal (physical) pleasure. Nevertheless, it may be more difficult to recognize and resist other forms of normal(izing) practice – for example, the male sexual drive discourse (Hollway 1984a, 1989; see Chapter 4) and the coital imperative which together function to ensure that penis–vagina penetration is a necessary part of “real” sex for heterosexuals. Arguably, part of the reason for this is that critiques of the regulatory function of the coital imperative, in particular, are not yet well established or widely available.

This way of thinking about identity and social action differs in important ways from both commonsense Western notions of the individual and conventional psychological concepts of the self. It disposes with the assumption of a unique essential core self and deconstructs the individual–social dualism implicit in psychology. Poststructuralism holds that people are always-already social so that the “individual” cannot be understood apart from its social and cultural formation (see Henriques et al. 1984, 1998). In these ways, it is different even from models that fully accept the importance of social context, but which carry on as if it is possible to conceive of the individual as formed in an essentially pre-cultural way.

Within feminist and critical psychology circles, as I have already mentioned, there is debate about the implications for resistance and agency within a Foucauldian analysis of power, discourse, and subjectivity. Because I would argue that subjectivity is constituted or constructed through discourse (keeping in mind that my understanding of discourse is quite a materialist one that includes normative social practices embedded in social and economic systems and structures, as well as language per se), my own approach would no doubt be accused of discourse determinism by some. Yet, accepting that subjectivity is discursively produced does not mean that it is determined in a simplistic or mechanical way. It does not mean that we are simply passive dupes of discourse or culture. Rather than being a static product, “simply the sum total of all positions in discourses since birth” (Henriques et al. 1984: 204), subjectivity can be thought of as a process that is fluid and complex, and which is determining (or agentic), even if always in a way that is constrained and limited. Thus as subjects we are able to pull at the same time as we are pulled – never capable of truly free choice, but able to make choices nevertheless. At any moment in time the process of subjectivity is a transient “product” – yes, of discursive constitution<sup>13</sup> – but never so crass as a simple sum of all positions in discourse, because subject positions are always taken up in relation to the provisional shape and history of this subjectivity, making the possibilities for combination and permutation endless.

While we are active negotiators through discourse, our agency and choices are always constrained by the cultural conditions of possibility and by the particular contingencies of those choices within our cultural and interpersonal contexts. Similarly, the “me” who is the active subject making her way through culture is “her”self a moment of cultural production. The political challenge is surely, at least partly, to chip away at those dominant discourses of gender and sexuality that disadvantage women, and simultaneously to work on the creative task of generating

new oppositional and otherwise inventive discourses. It is these new discourses (such as feminism itself) that provide new cultural resources by which we can become shaped differently as subjects. As I have already discussed, we don't need to believe in the existence of some pre-cultural authentic form of experience and subjectivity to see how agency and resistance can come into play and, perhaps more importantly, how a different range of choices can be legitimized within our particular cultural locations. I think this point – that subjectivity is produced through a range of discourses that include revolutionary as well as oppressive ones – is significantly overlooked in the criticisms of Foucauldian feminism launched by McNay (1991) and others.

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Before I look in more detail (in Chapter 4) at the specific discourses of heterosex that currently provide the template for normative behavior, I want to first briefly address the issue of biology – which for some provides a resolute counterpoint to arguments about social constructionism. Evolutionary psychology was newsworthy at the turn of the century. Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer's (2000) book, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*, generated enormous controversy and media interest. As is unfortunately typical of this kind of evolutionary analysis of human social behavior, Thornhill and Palmer claim the higher scientific ground, while stopping short of a truly scientific (if this means critical and rigorous) grasp of the social, cultural, and political elements of rape (for the same problems see also Thornhill and Thornhill 1992, and the commentaries on that paper). As the jacket cover of their book promises, they “address, and claim to demolish scientifically, many myths about rape bred by social science theory over the past 25 years.” As Mary Koss (2003: 191) put it: “Not only do Thornhill and Palmer have some evolutionary ideas to advance, they want to do so on a battlefield.”

Thornhill and Palmer were widely criticized – both on scientific grounds (e.g., Coyne and Berry 2000) and on more philosophical and political grounds. While they don't see rape as inevitable, their recommendations for rape prevention do rest on accepting an inevitably rampant and dangerous male sexuality and teaching men to understand, so that they can employ rational control over, their rape-adapted bodies. Women are taught these same truths about male sexuality so that they can restrict their dress and behavior in ways that don't provoke rape. Philosopher of science and evolutionary theorist Elisabeth Lloyd (2001: 1536) observes that throughout their book Thornhill and Palmer “resort to what is known among philosophers of science as ‘The Galileo Defense,’ which amounts to the following claim: I am telling the Truth and doing excellent science, but because of ideology and ignorance, I am being persecuted.” After a careful and detailed analysis of their argument, Lloyd (2001: 1537) concludes “that the Galileo defense is impotent in the hands of Thornhill and Palmer because of glaring flaws in the science” (a view that seems to be shared by many of their many critics; see Travis 2003).

While it is beyond the scope of this book to develop a full critique of this kind of evolutionary psychology, I do want to briefly explain how I see the kind of Foucauldian-inspired social constructionist approach to sexuality that I've already outlined fits alongside these controversial evolutionary models of sexuality and rape. Essentially, poststructuralist and evolutionary theories grow out of different interests and assumptions about the nature of the world and our ability to know it. While evolutionary approaches seek to provide explanations for what we already think we know about ourselves, poststructuralist approaches seek to unpack and revamp those understandings. This does not, in my view, imply a rejection of science<sup>14</sup> but an insistence that it be careful, critical, and that its truth claims be presented with a full acknowledgment of their partiality, limitations, and speculative quality (where the theories – like those of evolutionary psychology – can only ever be speculative), rather than as some kind of grand truth and knowledge. Neither does a focus on the social construction of sexuality and rape imply a rejection of biology's complex and important place in the construction of human behavior. Few social constructionists<sup>15</sup> would argue that the materially sexed bodies we know now are irrelevant to understandings of sexuality and rape. The point is rather that the specifics of these biological materialities rarely, if ever, come with meaning ready assembled. "The body doesn't carry only DNA," as Bordo (1999: 26) points out, "it also carries human history with it." For example, while some anthropological claims about "rape-free societies" have to be looked at skeptically given what we know about our own Western societies' tendencies toward institutionalized minimization and denial of rape, Christine Helliwell's (2000: 806) article, "It's only a penis': Rape, feminism, and difference," offers a stronger case than others that have been tabled against the universalism of rape. She claims, on the basis of her ethnographic work among the Gerai people of Indonesian Borneo, that they find rape impossible to imagine, in part because the penis is not inscribed with phallic power as it is in the West. Gerai men and women, according to her account, are shocked at the notion that it would be possible for "a penis to be taken into a vagina" if the woman didn't want this to happen. Her argument is a thought-provoking analysis of the cultural inscription of bodies necessary to make rape possible. Moreover, the very form and nature of the biological bodies we know is itself shaped by culture (although not exclusively, of course). Muscle development, fat distribution, and posture, for instance, are clear examples of specificities of substantive bodily formation that are clearly the product of some complex interplay between biological and sociocultural factors.<sup>16</sup>

Social constructionism does not necessarily reject outright that there could be evolutionary explanations for rape and gendered sexuality. However, my acquaintance with contemporary biological theory and research suggests that the existence of such explanations (true or not) makes little difference for a project that is interested in cultural transformation. That is because human biology is probably more plastic than commonsense stories tell us; and also because many biologists, like poststructuralists in some ways, also believe in the constitutive force of the environment (including the social environment or culture). Developmental systems theorists, for instance, argue

that we cannot properly understand development as a dichotomous process with nature and nurture as separate opposing processes (e.g., Gray 1997; Oyama, Griffiths, and Gray 2001). Even biologist Richard Dawkins who was responsible for popularizing the concept of the selfish gene (Dawkins 1978), and who has often been pejoratively described as a genetic determinist, has been at pains to point out that genes are not “super-deterministic, in comparison with environmental causes”; rather, he claims, this assumption is a “myth of extraordinary tenacity” (Dawkins 1982: 11).<sup>17</sup> In going beyond this, however, influential population geneticist Richard Lewontin (e.g., Lewontin 2001a, 2001b; see also Oyama et al. 2001 and Singh, Krimbas, Paul, and Beatty 2001) has argued for a “dialectical biology,” in which the dominant metaphor of adaptation used in evolutionary biology would be replaced with the metaphor of construction. In this model, organisms and environments are co-constitutive: “‘internal’ and ‘external’ factors are not independent variables and do not exist, in any meaningful way, in isolation from one another” (Gray 1997: 395).<sup>18</sup>

The rather sober and simplistic evolutionary argument proposed by Thornhill and Palmer, and others, is not then the only way of making sense of the importance of biology and evolution. Taking into account tales of biological variability and flexibility found in this other strand of biology, as well the significant shifts that have occurred in representations and practices of gender and sexuality over recent centuries (e.g., Laqueur 1990; Hitchcock 1997, 2002) renders the certainty of the current evolutionary psychology models of rape and sexual coercion – and especially their pessimistic conclusions about the tenacity of male adaptations to rape – dubious, at best. These insights call into question the commonsense level at which we may take it for granted that we can read back from how we experience our own bodies and desires and what we see in other people’s as some kind of direct access to the truth of human nature; as warrants for not only what is natural but what is therefore inevitable. Recourse to biological essences and foundations as bottom-line arguments against social change (on the grounds that it’s not realistic or possible, for example) has to be seen at least partly as an investment in the values associated with current behavioral patterns and social relationships and a commitment to the status quo<sup>19</sup> – either that or an astounding lack of imagination.

## **A word about discourse analysis**

Some of the analysis that follows arises from a form of discourse analysis based on feminist Foucauldian analyses of heterosexuality. The theoretical assumption informing this kind of analytic work is that discursive networks form the basis for the ways in which people both talk about their experiences and actually live those experiences. Identifying these cultural systems of meaning through talk allows us to investigate the processes by which subjectivity and, in particular, desires, choices, and identities are discursively produced. This approach departs from what might be considered a purely linguistic approach to discourse analysis in some important ways. Because I am interested in the relationship between discourse and practice, and because I also regard social practices to be part of discourse, I read interview

texts with an interest in more than just the talk itself. I read texts not only for what they can tell us about the discursive constructions of sexuality but also for what they can tell us about actual sexual practice and, therefore, the relationship between the two. These kinds of analyses rely on knowing something about the dynamics of heterosex in at least some instances – that is, who does what to whom, and how? This necessitates combining a discursive reading of women’s accounts with a realist reading of their accounts *as descriptions* of what actually happened in the sexual experiences they have told us about. This approach ironically relies on contradictory understandings of language (a poststructuralist understanding of language as constitutive of meaning, on the one hand, and a more conventional understanding of language as a transparent medium of description, on the other). This is of particular concern to discursive psychologists influenced by conversation analysis, who are more interested in the communicative “work” done in the interaction than in the distal referents of talk.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, I would argue that this compromise of theoretical purity is necessary in order to be able to ask certain sorts of questions. In particular, it is necessary if we want to move beyond a study of language alone, to take account of broader notions of discourse (that include cultural practices, for instance), and bring these poststructuralist insights to a critical study of social issues such as rape. It is useful in generating a materially grounded understanding of how the discursive characteristics (meanings *and* practices) of gender and heterosexual sex can limit possibilities for women’s agency in heterosexual encounters.<sup>21</sup>

## Heterosexuality and (date) rape

In the following two chapters, I will look at the dominant discourses of heterosexuality to see how they operate to reinforce gendered relations of power through which women’s choices and control in heterosex are potentially compromised. I will then go on to present analyses of women’s accounts of unwanted sex which show how the cultural conditions of possibility in which heterosexual sex is practised set up a dynamic that can be seen to clearly support rape. When we see how heterosex routinely works in ways that tend to privilege men’s (putative) sexual interests over women’s, it becomes clear that a major weakness in the work of the critics of the (date) rape research is their refusal to also put normative heterosexuality itself under the microscope for critical analysis.

## Notes

- 1 This is not to say that social constructionist perspectives are not found in the public arena and in some official policy documents. The New Zealand sexuality education curriculum, for instance, is underpinned by what is described as a “socio-ecological perspective” that is at least influenced by social constructionist thinking. Through this perspective, the curriculum claims, “students will critically examine the social and cultural influences that shape the ways people learn about and express their sexuality, for example, in relation to gender roles, the concept of body image, discrimination, equity, the media, culturally based values and beliefs, and the law” (Ministry of Education 1999: 38).

- 2 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: I think there has been some shift away from this underlying reproductive logic to what we consider sex to be and mean. We see this in recent moves toward wider mainstream acceptance of same-sex sexual relationships – tangible, for example, in the legal recognition of same sex marriage across many parts of Europe, the Americas and several other countries. From a different vantage point, the vocabulary of sexual acts that characterise mainstream pornography (including anal sex and ejaculation on a woman’s body rather than in her vagina) might also be seen to unsettle the reproductive dimension of heteronormative sex (although not its gendered dominance–submission dynamic). Shifting norms around the practice of heterosexual anal sex have also been noted, and although data are limited, there is some indication that its frequency has increased (McBride and Fortenberry 2010). At this stage it is difficult to know how it is seen in relation to “sex” per se. As Sanders and Reinisch (1999) showed, in relation to oral sex in the late twentieth century, some sexual practices can be common without necessarily being regarded as “sex”, or “real sex”. Therefore, it is possible, or even likely, that it would be regarded as a more marginal and/or exotic practice that remains more optional than penis-vagina intercourse within adult heterosex.
- 3 Of course these very forms of pleasure and practice excluded in the regulation of sex now mark a starting point for an inclusive rendition of queer sex.
- 4 Bacchi’s analysis, however, trades on her claim that Stopes wrote in the preface to her 1918 sex manual, *Married Love*, that she hoped “this book may serve the State by adding to their numbers” (xiii; quoted in Bacchi 1988: 46); Bacchi cites this as relating to Stopes’s concern about population growth. However, the full paragraph, in my 1926 copy, reads: “More than ever to-day are happy homes needed. It is my hope that this book may serve the State by adding to their numbers. Its object is to increase the joys of marriage, and to show how much sorrow may be avoided” (Stopes 1926: xiv). In this context, the most obvious reading of “their numbers” would be a reference to happy homes, not babies, which is implied in Bacchi’s excerpt. Nevertheless, Stopes’s agenda clearly is about strengthening the marital unit (see also Jackson 1994; Seidman 1991).
- 5 While it would be reasonable to question the reification of the primacy of orgasm assumed in this critique, Masters and Johnson’s claim needs to be considered within the terms of their own Human Sexual Response cycle model which emphasizes the similarities between women and men in terms of a universal natural physiological pattern of sexual response (Irvine 1990a, 1990b) in which orgasm is “the ultimate goal”.
- 6 See Bell (1993), Lamb (1999b), and Reavey and Warner (2003) for some other examples of feminist work that draws on social constructionism and/or poststructuralism in relation to sexual coercion and abuse.
- 7 Although I am more likely to associate the loose theoretical framework and sets of assumptions that I use with “poststructuralism,” at times I also use the term “social constructionism” in a way that might seem almost interchangeable. I use it to refer to certain general features of the poststructuralist approach and also to refer to a more general particular orientation to thinking about the nature of knowledge and the nature of reality.
- 8 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Reductive and context-blind methods within the human sciences have produced scientific truths that are sometimes banal and misleading and, in doing so, at times reinforced systemic discrimination and disadvantage. Critical psychologists and others have therefore been critical of the way science as a broad category of knowledge and practice has been deployed without always sufficient attention to the values and interests it serves and promotes. However, the relationship between science and dominant political power has recently become dramatically strained. Many commentators have identified Donald Trump’s inauguration as president of the United States of America as crystalizing a new “post truth era” – with concerning effects not only for journalism but also for science. Scientists have described this as “a sea change for the scientific enterprise”; an era in which science and scientists face “marginalization and suppression” by the new political leadership (e.g., Vernon 2017: 2). This major shift in the relationships between science, knowledge, truth and power raises questions about if

and how dominant discourses relating to gender and sexuality will reshape. Critical scholars would argue that the influence of scientific knowledge in shaping wider knowledge (and dominant discourses) about the human condition has never been simple or straightforward. In this area, scientific findings that challenge the status quo have always had a rocky road to wider acceptance. Nevertheless, the tenor of this new political rejection of the values of science is a major threat to all forms of scholarship, including for critical scholars like myself who never wanted to abandon science, but rather see it become practiced and used in ways that were more inclusive, careful, and less prone to misplaced epistemic certainty.

- 9 Of course in many frameworks for understanding sexual violence, the theorization of such acts of force emphasizes the relevance of seeing that it is carried out by members of particular social groups (i.e., men) rather than by isolated individuals.
- 10 There is, however, a certain discomfiting irony in drawing upon Foucault's ideas on discourse, power, and sexuality to make sense of rape and sexual coercion. As Monique Plaza (1981) has shown, his musings on rape in *La folie encerclée* demonstrate just how pernicious his inattention to gender could be. Foucault argued in this round table discussion against punishing rape as a sexual act: "when rape is punished, it is exclusively the physical violence that should be punished"; "it is nothing but an assault, and nothing else" (Foucault 1977; quoted in Plaza 1981: 27). This distinction, according to Monique Deveaux (1994: 236), is "preposterous." As Plaza argued, this perhaps reveals Foucault's apparent blindness toward the gendered specificities of the deployment of heterosexuality in ways that have historically relied on the relative objectification of women's bodies through sex (see also Cahill 2001; de Lauretis 1987). However, a more sympathetic reading of Foucault's position in this debate has been proposed by feminists like Vikki Bell (1993; see also Bell 1991) and Winifred Woodhull (1988). Bell (1993) suggested that his strategic purpose in arguing for a desexualization of rape might have been that it would undermine rape's transgressive, and harmful, power; or as Woodhull (1988: 170) put it, "undermine the supposed 'prestige' of rape as a grand transgression."
- 11 Although increasingly within some branches of social psychology, the influence of broadly social constructionist approaches has led to an acceptance that identity (one of the central concepts of social psychology) is a more fluid, and actively produced, construction (e.g., Wetherell 1996).
- 12 Susan Bordo's work is also extremely useful for developing a position that elaborates on the social construction of the body, while simultaneously insisting on a full recognition of its materiality (see Bordo 1989, 1993a, 1993b, 1997). See also Susan Hekman's (1997) illuminating comparison of the theories of the body found in Bordo's and Butler's work; a fuller consideration of these nuanced theoretical differences is beyond my scope here.
- 13 But of course never just this, if we recognize the complex role of biology, for instance.
- 14 In fact, as feminist psychologist Lynne Segal (2001: 35) concludes, after an amusing demolition of Thornhill and Palmer's (2000) work, in part by pointing out some of the human data their theory conveniently ignores: "For the sake of reclaiming science, if nothing else, the work of Thornhill and Palmer should be treated with the derision it deserves."
- 15 There are, of course, many different versions of social constructionism, and many important differences among work that could be described as social constructionist. In this part of the discussion, I am referring to my own social constructionist perspective.
- 16 For a more dramatic illustration, consider the example reported by Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) in *Sexing the Body*, of two girls raised by a pack of wolves in India at the turn of the twentieth century. They could apparently run extremely fast using all four limbs, were nocturnal, and craved raw meat. As Fausto-Sterling (2000) remarks, clearly their whole bodies, from their skeletal structures to their nervous systems, had been shaped in ways that strikingly demonstrate the malleability of the body.
- 17 Similarly, Neil Malamuth (1998a: 154) has emphasized that it is a fallacy to regard evolutionary psychology as suggesting that "humans are 'hard-wired' or do not make choices." Rather, he says, evolutionary approaches "focus on the interaction between

organisms and their environments and under what conditions organisms change their behavior in different environments (Crawford and Anderson, 1989).” At the same time, however, he claims (citing the first couple of evolutionary psychology, Cosmides and Tooby) that the theory holds that “the mind’s mechanisms developed to their present form” in ancestral environments and have changed little since that time (Malamuth 1998a: 153). Clearly, the promise of change in this model is one requiring virtually endless patience and stamina.

- 18 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Trends within evolutionary biology continue to cast suspicion on crude evolutionary psychology arguments, like those of Thornhill and Palmer, which portray men as biologically primed for rape. Research from several areas of biology support what Laland and colleagues call the “extended evolutionary synthesis” (Laland *et al.* 2014, 2015; see also Garcia and Heywood 2016, Jablonka and Lamb 2014; Moore 2017), which suggests that organisms play a more active role in evolution than often assumed, that the environment (which includes cultural conditions, patterns of behavior and experience) can produce epigenetic processes that not only effect how genes are expressed within an individual, but that these changes can be passed on to the next generation. This means that evolutionary change can happen much more rapidly than would be possible through natural selection (Garcia and Heywood 2016; Laland *et al.* 2015), and that transforming human value systems can, at least in theory, contribute to the way human minds and bodies evolve. Thus, while social constructionists would point to considerable plasticity in human behavior within the parameters of any particular biological constraints, newer evolutionary theory and empirical biological research would suggest that the form of any biological correlates of particular forms of behavior are themselves more plastic than evolutionary psychologists influenced by Darwinian models have suggested.
- 19 I don’t mean to imply that Thornhill and Palmer are invested in rape. However, I think it is possible that some evolutionary psychologists are invested, perhaps unwittingly, in the contemporary normative patterns of gender relations that both they and I see as underpinning rape. For instance, while listening to a talk by David Buss (2003) on “Sexual treachery,” that was spiced with the odd personal anecdote, it was difficult not to have passing thoughts that some men might find it convenient to have a grand theory that provides compelling rationalization for some of their own desires and behaviors. With this in mind, it is worth considering Anne Fausto-Sterling’s (2000: 255) insistence that, “our debates about the body’s biology are always simultaneously moral, ethical, and political debates about social and political equality and the possibilities for change.”
- 20 Frith and Kitinger’s (2001) “discursive psychology” analysis of women’s talk about refusing sex is a good example, in my view, of how this kind of approach unhelpfully limits the kinds of questions that can be asked. Through a theoretical commitment to privileging the immediate conversational context when looking for meaning in people’s talk, such analyses can easily lose sight of a feminist or social justice orientation even when, as in this case, it appears to be a background *raison d’être* for the work. Their analysis involves detailed attention to describing the “devices” that women in their focus groups used to discuss refusing unwanted sex. They claim that these women “actively construct sex as scripted” (*ibid.*: 228), as opposed to the wrongheaded assumption that sex actually is scripted. The reason women might do this, according to Frith and Kitinger, is because of the “interactional business” (*ibid.*: 220) this construction affords. The “advantages” of these particular constructions, they suggest, are in allowing women to normalize their actions, manage their reputations, and minimize any need to account for their “own particular failure to say no to unwanted sex” (*ibid.*: 225). While I don’t dispute that these may be reasonable interpretations of their participants’ talk, it is an analysis that can’t offer any insights about the social phenomenon of unwanted sex itself, because questions pertinent to this kind of understanding have been barred from consideration due to some kind of rigidly anti-realist methodological straitjacket. While it is legitimate to frame their analytic question in a way that excludes attention to women’s lived experiences of sexual coercion, beyond not providing any illumination of the social

problem of sexual coercion, it is difficult to see where the feminism lies in this kind of approach. In emphasizing the instrumentalism of their participants' talk the overriding impression conveyed by the analysis is of self-serving women and an indeterminate and possibly unimportant material world. (See Weatherall 2000 and Wetherell 1998 for critical yet sympathetic considerations of the merits of this kind of conversation analytic perspective for discursive psychology. See also Matoesian 1993: 66, for an explanation of the limitations of a conversation analytic approach for analyzing rape trial talk, despite drawing heavily himself on conversation analysis for his analytic framework.)

- 21 In another somewhat contradictory move, that I have not yet drawn attention to, I do cite positivist empirical research data in places to illustrate, support, or contextualize my argument, despite having critical objections to the epistemological assumptions that underlie this paradigm of social science research. Yet despite this methodological and epistemological skepticism I do think it is possible to draw cautiously on such research, so long as the "findings" are treated as provisional, partial, and limited answers.

# 4

## HETEROSEXUALITY UNDER THE MICROSCOPE<sup>1</sup>

Sex has always been political. Feminists have long recognized this, and since at least the nineteenth century have actively campaigned against men's sexual exploitation of women. Further back, still, Mary Wollstonecraft (1775) published a searing critique of middle class gendered norms in the late eighteenth century. In the early twentieth century, however, feminist attention to sexual politics diminished – a decline that Margaret Jackson (1994: 3) has linked to the development of sexology and its scientific legitimation of what she referred to as “the patriarchal model of sexuality”<sup>2</sup>: that is, a model of heterosexuality in which the domination of women was naturalized. Through sexology and its popularization within sex manuals, she argued, the norms of sex that feminists had been fighting to change were (re)cast as immutable, determined by the laws of nature.

It was not until the 1970s that sexual politics were once again on the political agenda. In the midst of the so-called sexual revolution, the women's liberation movement and the gay liberation movement brought new concerns to bear on the liberal status quo of sex (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988: 308). Both protested the ways in which sexuality was a realm of subordination for particular social groups of people (such as heterosexual women, lesbian women, and gay men). This activism drew attention to the shadow of power and politics *within* sex for the first time (with any influence) in decades. Kate Millet's (1970: xiii) classic *Sexual Politics*, for instance, announced that it was in part “devoted to the proposition that sex has a frequently neglected political aspect,” an aspect that had clearly been temporarily forgotten. This recognition of the relationship between sex and power was sedimented through women's exchange and analysis in CR groups of their often demoralizing experiences of sex, and became the cornerstone of radical feminism (Shulman 1980).<sup>3</sup>

At least part of the momentum for this new critical scrutiny of everyday heterosexual sex can be said to have arisen within the anti-rape movement (see Chapter 1). This politicized gaze was further reinforced by findings a decade or so

later from the surveys conducted by Mary Koss, Diana Russell, and others – which showed that most rapes and other forms of sexual victimization are done by men who are in at least potentially appropriate heterosexual relationships with the women they force sex on. What had previously been thought of as simply just sex was suddenly itself the object of critical attention. Unsurprisingly, this critical attention to the valorized domain of sex met with opposition from many quarters. In all the debate surrounding rape, and date rape in particular, a perennial issue of concern is the question of women’s disappearing agency. Both backlash commentators and some feminists alike have worried that airing too much concern about the risks of date rape somehow undermines women’s agency – their ability to be active, determining subjects. By emphasizing women’s sexual vulnerability, it has been argued, women are unrealistically portrayed as asexual and as ready-made victims. In going beyond the argument that women *should* have choice about sexuality, some of these commentators quickly moved to the position that women *do* have choice about sex. Writers like Katie Roiphe, for instance, have accused the feminist campaigners against date rape of treating women as fragile child-like creatures who are incapable of making their own choices.<sup>4</sup>

Arguments around agency are complex and potentially fraught (see Chapter 3). The accusation that particular theories – such as Foucauldian discursive approaches and radical feminism – deny human agency is now commonplace. Concerns about the place of agency have been of long-standing concern to critical psychologists working with poststructuralist theory (e.g., Henriques et al. 1984, 1998) and to feminists. It seems to be readily and widely agreed that underrating agency is theoretically and politically problematic. But while agency is an important concept (albeit one I have argued, drawing on Susan Bordo, is oversold), my focus in this and the next chapter is on the somewhat less popular project of examining the limits of agency. In this chapter, in particular, I will look at how heterosexual sex is normatively constructed in ways that compromise and circumscribe individual sexual choices.

### Discourses of *heterosex*

A broadly poststructuralist understanding of sexuality – influenced in particular by the Foucauldian notion of discourse – has been widely employed by feminist social researchers studying heterosex. Much of this work owes a debt to Wendy Hollway’s (1984a, 1989) early work on gender relations. She proposed that three dominant discourses of heterosexuality provide a cultural template on which heterosexual relations are organized: a male sexual drive discourse, a have/hold discourse, and a permissive sex discourse. Her work on the discourses of heterosex has been extremely influential in feminist research on heterosexuality. Subsequent work has suggested that the so-called “male sexual drive discourse” is a pervasive and powerful influence on male sexuality. It certainly is a highly familiar, commonsense, way of understanding male sexuality in Western culture. The male sexual drive discourse holds that the desire or “need” to have sex is a strong, almost overwhelming drive that exists in all healthy normal men. Moreover, men will go to great lengths to have sex (including paying for

it). Reminders of the power of this discourse appear daily within popular cultural media, where humor and irony frequently rely on this subtext, and where it forms the taken-for-granted foundation of many cultural truths.

Drawing on the phrase used in Christian wedding ceremonies “to have and to hold,” Hollway (1984a, 1989) also described a discourse that has conventionally played an important role in shaping women’s sexuality in relation to men. Within the terms of this “have/hold” discourse, women are seen as comparatively asexual creatures for whom sex is a means to an end – that is, a monogamous heterosexual relationship and children. According to Hollway (1984a), underlying portrayals of women’s asexuality are beliefs that women’s sexuality is dangerous and in need of control, although this perhaps tends to figure less overtly in dominant contemporary Western portrayals of heterosex.

Hollway described how the male sexual drive discourse and the have/hold discourse work together, in highly gender-differentiated ways to prescribe cultural forms of heterosexual sex and relationships. According to this argument, both women’s and men’s sexuality are constructed through both discourses. Men are the subjects of the male sexual drive discourse; women are its objects. That is, men are always-already ready for sex, and it is women (or women’s bodies, or images of women’s bodies!) who activate this interest. When I was revising this chapter (for the original edition) I encountered a startlingly distilled reiteration of this representational dynamic. *Rip It Up*, which was a local music magazine self-styled as hip and youth-oriented, had just released a “sex issue,” which had on the cover a headless torso of a naked woman. The issue and especially its cover were controversial, with some schools writing to the magazine to complain that it was not suitable for its teenage readers, and at least one outlet (a chain of petrol stations) refusing to display it on their shelves. In a radio show analysis of the controversy the magazine editor explained that New Zealand was prudish about sex (apparently people “cower and shiver when the word ‘sex’ or ‘nipple’ is mentioned”), and the magazine wanted to make a provocative statement in this context. What about the fact that some high school students complained that the cover image was offensive and that it objectified women, asked the interviewer? The segment ended with the magazine editor summing up the logic that led to the cover choice: “One woman said to me, ‘You couldn’t really have a man’s chest on there could you?’ No you couldn’t. It’s not really that attractive”: illustrating clearly the male sexual drive discourse and the ways in which it constructs male sexuality as active and desiring, and women’s sexuality as implicitly without desire, existing perhaps only as the object of male desire. I have to say that this unreconstructed masculinist approach to “sex” did take me by surprise – coming as it did from within what would hail itself as part of the cutting edge of early twenty-first-century youth culture.

Within the terms of the male sexual drive discourse, it is women’s role to receive or reject men’s sexual advances. Women are thus not passive objects of this discourse. It has often been noted that they “set the limits” on sex. However, women’s agency within this discursive context is limited to the extent of responding to (or perhaps anticipating) the man’s needs and initiatives. That is, her actions are premised on the

basis of meeting, or denying, his sexual pleasure, rather than acting to advance her own. Of course it is possible for women to resist a male sexual drive discourse, but for heterosexual women this can never simply be a matter of stepping outside of it without the possibility of being marked by it. For example, within our culture the woman who chooses to not have sex with her male partner when she doesn't feel like it herself enters a discursive space spiked with pejorative and potentially punitive consequences. Our language is littered with terms for the woman who sets firm sexual limits or is sexually uninterested: "ball-breaking," "a cock-teaser," "frigid," "a cold bitch," "uptight." This vocabulary is widely understood, and can be readily drawn on by women to police their own behavior, or for others to insult women who don't toe the line. There is a whole other set of discursive resources available for punishing and policing a woman whose sexuality is deemed excessive (particularly outside the confines of a monogamous heterosexual relationship). These are signaled through a different set of pejorative terms such as: "slut," "slag," "nympho," "whore," "tart," "loose," "easy." These kinds of accusations – about both sexual excess and sexual insufficiency – are not trivial. They are used as insults, pejorative judgments, and as excuses or justifications for treating women badly.

Within this discursive weave, women's rewards in heterosex are not primarily sexual but rather "secondary gains" related to *relationships* and *family*. We are all familiar with cultural tropes related to women using their sexuality to variously "hook," "trap," or "keep" her man! Thus women give (up) sex in return for love, commitment, and relationship; whereas men give (up) sexual freedom in return for a woman to look after them, sexually as well as in other ways.

This particular interlocking of a male sexual drive discourse and a have/hold discourse seems old-fashioned in the twenty-first century. Since at least the 1970s, women's rights to sexual pleasure have been staunchly argued and widely reiterated. Sex and marriage manuals increasingly promoted an active, competent, and "autonomous" sexuality for women outside of marriage (Weinberg, Swensson, and Hammersmith 1983). The "permissive turn" that emerged in the 1960s has undoubtedly had an enormous influence on heterosexual practice – bolstered, of course, by biotechnological developments such as the contraceptive pill. According to the terms of what Hollway calls a "permissive discourse," women were now assumed to be equally sexual, with "natural" drives and urges just like men. Many feminists, however, argued that the so-called sexual revolution was not all it was cracked up to be, and the gender neutrality of permissive discourse was only a façade behind which a sexual double standard and gender inequality went on as usual.

John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman (1988) distinguished distinct counterculture (e.g., hippie) and consumer-culture dimensions to this revamping of sexual mores. Both shared a rejection of the traditional norms of monogamous maritally based sex; yet on other grounds the values and politics of these movements diverged sharply (e.g., love and peace versus hedonistic pleasure; a rejection versus an embrace of capitalist values). Before long second-wave feminists became cynical of the new promises of "sexual liberation." It was a sexual revolution in which, Beatrix Campbell (1980: 2, emphasis in original) suggested, "the very affirmation of

sexuality was a celebration of *masculine* sexuality.” Women’s place in this revolution was contradictory. Some feminists have insisted on recognizing the positive changes for women’s sexuality brought about in this era, despite its limitations (e.g., Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs 1986; English, Hollibaugh, and Rubin 1982; Segal 1994). But given the broader cultural context of systemic gender inequality it is hardly surprising that the degree of change was disappointing. Women were still objectified second-class citizens within the new liberatory rhetoric. As Lynne Segal (1983: 30)<sup>5</sup> observed:

Women, we had been told, were “free now as never before”, yet the underground press was alive with sexist porn imagery of women as “chicks”, all cunts and boobs, “happily” screwed every which way by the steely cock of the urban guerrilla. The ubiquitous symbolism of male conquest and female submission, built into almost every image of heterosexuality, depicted a strange “liberation” for women.

Although women stood, theoretically, to gain the benefits of better sex and more autonomy and control given improved means for separating sex from reproduction, in reality the *normative* patterns of heterosex appear not to have changed sufficiently for this to have come to *widespread* fruition.<sup>6</sup> In their review of empirical research relating to the sexual double standard, Mary Crawford and Danielle Popp (2003: 23) concluded that while women had greater sexual freedom (to be sexual) than in the past, contemporary double standards “still represent a covert means of controlling women’s sexuality by judging its expression more harshly than men’s sexual expression is judged.” It is also important to recognize that what changes did occur in the direction of freeing women up to be sexual have always been moderated by specific cultural and/or religious values and norms. For instance, Oliva Espín (1997: 89) noted that sexual “purity” is important for Latin women in North America. Enjoying sexual pleasure, she said, even for women within marriage, “may indicate a lack of virtue.” Aída Hurtado (2003: 54) found that for the young Chicana women she interviewed “virginity was a big deal.” Similar observations have been made in relation to Pacific peoples in New Zealand. For instance, within Samoan culture, there is a high value placed on sexual purity, chastity, and virginity for girls and unmarried women, even if this is sometimes at odds with young women’s experiences (Park et al. 2002; Shore 1981; Sua’ali’i 2001; Tupuola 2000)<sup>7</sup>.

In the permissive overhaul of sex within dominant Western culture, women theoretically also stood to lose. In the old sexual contract men were morally obliged to support any children they helped conceive; sex implied responsibility for men, as it did for women (English 1983). As sex became detached from commitment, the traditional currency of exchange was no longer guaranteed. The message from some sexual libertarians was staunchly anti-marriage at the same time as it celebrated other forms of sexuality that were largely exploitative of women. At the (semi)respectable end of big-business pornography, *Playboy*, for example, recommended its readers to “enjoy the pleasures the female has to offer without becoming emotionally

involved” (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988: 302). While there is nothing inherently sexist about sex detached from emotional involvement, the *Playboy* model<sup>8</sup> relied on submissive and objectified women. As Don Smith (1976: 23) concluded from his analysis of 428 “adult only” books in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the nature of sex and gender relations portrayed was “almost defiantly” “a man’s world.” Women’s place within this particular, highly visible, pornographic liberalization of sex was strictly by invitation, on men’s terms. As many feminists argued, this new sexualization of women was a conduit of misogynist fantasy. Pornographer and *Playboy* boss, Hugh Hefner, was himself vehemently anti-feminist, writing in a leaked memo, “these chicks are our natural enemy” (quoted in Allyn 2000: 281).

Women did, however, get in on the act too. Helen Gurley Brown’s *Sex and the Single Girl* was published in 1962, celebrating sex for unmarried women and extolling the pleasures of sexual affairs with men, where marriage was not on the agenda (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988). This book, according to David Allyn (2000), marked the beginning of a new era, and launched “the sexual revolution”; probably because of the role it played in recruiting women willing to play the game. Gurley Brown’s endeavors were in the same consumerist vein as *Playboy* libertarianism. Yet some responses to her work, within libertarian quarters, were far from pleased. “The womanization of America” was the title of a roundtable discussion published in *Playboy* in 1962. Male commentators expressed concern and anger about what they saw as women’s increasing “dominance” and sexual assertiveness (Allyn 2000: 21). One wrote:

The assumption that a woman is supposed to get something out of her sexual contact, something joyful and satisfactory, is a very recent idea. But this idea has been carried too far, too. It’s become so that women are sitting like district attorneys, to see what the man can or cannot perform and this has put men tremendously on the defensive.

(King 1962; quoted in Allyn 2000: 21)

By many accounts this new sexual freedom was taking place – where it took place at all – within very circumscribed limits that in many ways stayed firmly within traditional conventions of gender. Gurley Brown went on to edit *Cosmopolitan* magazine, revolutionizing it through an open foray into undomesticated sex, and making it extremely successful. Kathryn McMahon’s (1990) analysis of the magazine from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s points out that sex was discussed in *Cosmopolitan* in terms of marketplace exchange – which, she argued, may not actually be very liberating to women. While women might have been encouraged to look beyond marriage as an immediate goal, they were nevertheless instructed on how to transform themselves into objects of sexual desire, so that they could improve their marketplace value:

Sex, for the female libertine, is subsumed by the dictates of reason, a means-to-an-end morality, and the marketplace. In the ideology represented by

*Cosmopolitan*, it is work. The bottom line is how to benefit most from the exchange value of one's female sexuality.

(*ibid.*: 394)

In this shift toward a more libertarian ethic, women lost not only the right to expect traditional forms of exchange for sex (love, commitment, marriage), but also the "morally based" grounds on which to refuse sex they did not want (Weis and Borges 1973: 109); a right won, if only ever to a limited extent, by nineteenth-century feminists (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988). The notion of "chastity" became old-fashioned meaning, as Lucy Bland (1983: 28) put it, "the removal of unmarried women's right to say 'No'" (see also Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1976). In the bigger picture of what these older moral codes had offered for women's sexuality and gender relations more broadly, a shift in this direction was ultimately necessary for women's liberation. What is at question, however, is the extent to which the new ethic of sexuality was open to recognizing its own blind spots and limitations. Even when stripped of its more overtly sexist shades, the lack of attention to questions of power rendered it ultimately problematic. The libertarian ethic of sex in the new permissive era relied on the assumption of autonomous rational actors unconstrained by power differences when making choices about their sexual engagements. Recognizing the limitations of these assumptions, and the ways in which they ignore both the socially constituted nature of sexuality and the gendered operation of power, has been more difficult. As Lynne Segal (1994) argued, sexologists like Masters and Johnson, who have often been hailed for ushering in a progressive and more pro-woman view of heterosexuality, make the standard liberal error of assuming equality by simply asserting it and promoting egalitarian relations, while simultaneously ignoring the real constraints on achieving this:

Masters and Johnson, like sexologists before and since, are willfully blind to social and linguistic contexts of gender and power (in and out of the bedroom), where men typically have, or expect to have, more power than women, and where male sexual activity has come to symbolize that power.

(*ibid.*: 99)<sup>9</sup>

Arguably there has been some retraction of the libertarian ethic since the 1980s, fueled by the arrival of HIV/AIDS and the spread of other sexually transmitted infections as well as independent and/or opportunistic moves toward moral conservatism in some areas. Steven Seidman (1991) claimed that this has certainly been the case within the United States, where he observed increasing depictions of casual sex as dangerous and pathological, with a renewed emphasis on the connections between sex and intimacy. Masters and Johnson's 1988 book, *Crisis: Heterosexual Behaviour in the Age of AIDS* (with Robert Kolodny), is a telling example of the impact of AIDS in causing a definite uneasiness about casual sex. The only "totally and completely safe" form of sex, they noted, was within a relationship (heterosexual or homosexual) where both partners had never had sex with anyone

else and had not been exposed to HIV through nonsexual means (Masters, Johnson, and Kolodny 1988: 98). The message for heterosexual women and men was clear: a return to the values of monogamous marital sex. Masters et al. (1988: 166) even went so far as to argue for a “mandatory premarital testing program.” Moral conservatives within the United States (at least) reportedly gained influence since the 1980s, trading on anxieties around the HIV epidemic and issues like teenage pregnancy, to justify and support campaigns against nonmarital sex (Irvine 2002). Abstinence was promoted as the answer to the potential perils of sex, in defiant opposition to sex education, contraception, or barrier forms of protection. Right-wing leader, Phyllis Schlafly, apparently said she would rather her children became infected with sexually transmitted diseases than have them learn about condoms (ibid.). Despite this counterrevolution, which notched up numerous successes in the United States (see Irvine 2002), it’s not clear to what extent it has had an impact on refashioning values of chastity among heterosexual women and men.<sup>10</sup> It has no doubt reintroduced a morally based, and also a health-based, discourse for young people who are not in long-term committed relationships to refuse unwanted sex – something that many reflected had evaporated by the 1970s.<sup>11</sup>

There is some evidence in the United States, in the form of declining rates of teenage pregnancy since the early 1990s (Kaufmann et al. 1998), of a reduction in the proportion of teenage women who are having heterosexual intercourse; although one report (Darroch and Singh 1999) suggests that the drop in numbers of teenage girls having sexual intercourse is relatively small, and accounts for only around a quarter of the pregnancy rate decline.<sup>12</sup> No similar trend has been observed in New Zealand, which after the United States has the second highest teenage birth rate among similarly developed OECD countries,<sup>13</sup> and where there has been less visible public promotion of sexual “abstinence” (but possibly also less change in contraceptive practices over this time period). Even where values associated with delaying sexual intercourse until marriage have been taken up to some extent, it can never be simply as a return to an era when those values were taken for granted, and existed without reference to legitimate alternatives. These discourses of abstinence now exist in a different cultural context; one in which it is arguably taken more for granted that young heterosexual women and men *will* have sex – probably casually, and definitely within romantic relationships. While clearly not impossible to achieve, abstinence in the current milieu is more likely to be a point of curiosity than a norm. While the “Religious Right,” as D’Emilio and Freedman (1997: 365, 366) termed “this latest version in a long history of purity movements” in the United States, had a profound influence on the politics of sexuality through the 1990s, they claimed that “it is neither as great as its leaders claim nor as its opponents fear.” They detailed, for instance, the resurgence of political and popular cultural challenges to conservative sexual mores during that same period. Writing in 1993, Jeffrey Weeks (2000: 176) also noted a faltering during the 1980s of the trends that had been in place toward secularization, liberalization, and diversity. But his prognosis was that they were more likely to be “blips rather than fundamental shifts.”

Regardless of any blips that have occurred in redrawing the boundaries for whom and in what context sex is appropriate, there has certainly been no slowing down of the more general sexualization of society. Within these parameters an ardent sexual imperative has survived intact.<sup>14</sup> In fact, over the last two decades it has been the absence of sexual desire, activity, and pleasure (often narrowly conflated with orgasm) that has been the problem (see Irvine 1990a). Arguably this construction of *lack* of sex or sexual desire as problems of great magnitude and importance is reaching a new pinnacle. In the wake of the unprecedented “success” of pharmacological treatments for men’s erectile “dysfunctions,” there has been an explosion of renewed interest in promoting women’s “sexual health.” Data have been rushing in to demonstrate the pervasiveness of so-called female sexual dysfunction. According to one highly influential report,<sup>15</sup> the prevalence of “sexual dysfunction” for women aged 18–59 is 43 per cent (for men, according to the same study, it is 31 per cent; Laumann, Paik, and Rosen 1999). Sexual health doctors and therapists, such as celebrity sisters Jennifer and Laura Berman, urge that it is women’s turn for the benevolent attention of sex enhancement treatments. One of the big problems among women – reaching epidemic proportions we are told – are disorders of desire. The profit potential for pharmaceutical companies must be huge, given the magnitude of this budding untapped market. Journalist Ray Moynihan (2003) argued just this point, in his examination of the role of drug company interests and involvement in the recent promotion of “female sexual dysfunction.” Controversially, he claimed that “the making of female sexual dysfunction is the freshest, clearest example we have” of “the corporate sponsored creation of a disease” (ibid.: 45). Despite the 43 per cent figure incorporating many women whom the researchers themselves agreed were “perfectly normal,” Moynihan (ibid.: 47) demonstrated how the figure has been used carelessly to exaggerate any problem that may exist, with the effect of “turning the complaints of the healthy into the conditions of the sick.” The study’s authors, themselves, claimed in their paper that their prevalence data revealed a “significant public health problem” (Laumann et al. 1999: 544). The implications of this for pathologizing forms of ordinary human behavior and for skewing “treatment options” toward medication are clear. Of course, such an inclusive construction of female sexual dysfunction represents significant opportunities for drug companies, as Moynihan (2003: 46) pointed out, in showing how the statistics get used:

As an example, in November last year a California firm offering “business intelligence” announced that “43 per cent of all women over 18 experience sexual dysfunction . . . Greater public awareness and acceptance of SD [sexual dysfunction] as a common and treatable disease will heavily influence market growth, predominantly for women.”<sup>16</sup>

These days we can hardly complain about a missing discourse of female sexual desire – rather it is a problem of the escalating discourse of women’s missing desire. It’s no longer simply the case that women are expected to have sex with men when they don’t want to, but within certain parameters they are expected to want

it most of the time – and the problem is they don't (seem to).<sup>17</sup> Or, according to the title of Germaine Greer's (2003) cynical (and lovely) discussion of the current clamor by drug companies to find a solution to so-called female sexual dysfunction, "A woman's duty [now] is not only to have the sex she doesn't really want, but to enjoy it." The problem is, too many women seem to be lacking in desire – a problem that the pharmaceutical industry and other obliging promoters of sexual health are desperately seeking to remedy. (Ironically, women's missing desire is only ever a problem once women are ensconced within a stable heterosexual relationship; it has not yet been widely discussed as a troublesome absence in teenage women, for instance, except by feminist sexuality researchers!)

Perhaps part of the reason for women's desire deficiencies is that they don't like the kind of sex on offer – something that a biochemical fix probably won't change (at least in isolation). To be fair, many sexologists and sex manual writers over the twentieth century have addressed this issue of attending to women's pleasure. Even Havelock Ellis (1948: 239) observed that:

When we find that a woman displays a certain degree of indifference in sexual relationships, and a failure of complete gratification, we have to recognize that the fault may possibly lie, not in her, but in the defective skill of a lover who has not known how to play successfully the complex and subtle game of courtship.

The position most of these sexological writers adopted however, usually took for granted many of the premises of the dominant discourses of sexuality, including the location of "sexpertise" (Potts 2002; see also Tiefer 1995) in men's hands and an unproblematic notion of pleasure itself; all of which arguably prevent a more radical and potentially "liberatory" effect. The traditional discursive amalgam that produced men as active sexual subjects – the sexual initiators, and even aggressors – and women as the passive recipients of these acts is not dead and buried.

Janet Holland and her colleagues' work in the United Kingdom generated a pessimistic picture of young women's sexual experiences. They interviewed 148 young women and 46 young men between the ages of 16 and 21 between 1989 and 1992. On the journey through these large studies, Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, and Thomson (1998: 11) arrived at the conclusion that "Heterosexuality is not, as it appears to be, masculinity-and-femininity in opposition: it *is* masculinity." Hence the title of their book, *The Male in the Head*. It refers to a sort of Foucauldian notion of the surveillance power of a "male dominated and institutionalized heterosexuality," which they contrast to the "man-in-the-bed of everyday experience." Not only is there apparently not much room for women's pleasure and desire, but heterosexual femininity can be downright unsafe. Holland and her colleagues wanted to make room for the instability of these oppressive constructions and for agency and empowerment. However, while they acknowledged that young men and women can attempt to resist hegemonic masculinity, and that male power is not monolithic, they nevertheless concluded that the experience of heterosexuality is very different

for women and men. The overwhelming impression created by their analyses is that a young woman's lot in the heterosexual bed can be pretty dismal.

A similar picture of adolescent sexuality emerged from Sharon Thompson's (1990) analysis of U.S. teenage girls' accounts of their early sexual experiences and their first experience of intercourse. Based on narrative interviews with 400 girls between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s, the picture is largely, although not entirely, pessimistic. Thompson reported a common story, told by around three-quarters of her participants, of first sexual intercourse as boring, painful, and a romantic disappointment. Much like the picture generated by Holland *et al.*'s work, these girls' accounts also paint an uninviting image of youthful heterosexual sex. When asked to describe their first experience of coitus, "many girls blink and freeze, dropping predicates and leaving passive sentences dangling as if under a posthypnotic suggestion to suppress. 'It was something that just happened,' they say finally (Rogel *et al.* 1980)" (Thompson 1990: 343). Their stories were marked by this kind of passivity and the absence of their own sexual desire. "In an uninformed and undesirous state," Thompson (*ibid.*: 345) noted, "girls find it hard to distinguish choice and coercion, and they aren't at all certain of how to make such a distinction."

Other girls Thompson interviewed – around one quarter of her sample – provided more uplifting accounts of their early heterosexual encounters. These girls told stories in which sexuality was "relished," and where their experiences were marked by their own sexual exploration, adventure, and pleasure. Thompson (*ibid.*: 357) emphasized that these girls had had a "foretaste of desire from earlier experiences – masturbation, childhood sex play, heavy petting – and from their mothers' accounts." While this kind of knowledge and desire did not guarantee a trouble-free experience it at least provided some positive point of reference. Other feminist social scientists have concurred over the crucial importance of fostering cultural spaces that allow girls and women to experience and acknowledge sexual desire. In a fascinating and provocative exposé of the open secret of girls' sexual play, Sharon Lamb (2001) argued that unless we respond more constructively and positively to girls' sexual play and their engagement with their own bodies, we teach them to become ready-made for adult sexual relations with men that privilege androcentric norms of sexuality and relegate women's sexual desires and pleasures to second place. We might also help to nurture lifetimes of shame and guilt.

Deborah Tolman (2002), who also interviewed teenage girls about sexuality and sexual desire, is another researcher devoted to finding more cultural space for girls' sexual desire. She laments the ongoing power of a sexual double standard, through which girls who dare to express sexual desire still risk being castigated as bad girl "sluts" – in different ways depending on race and class. The "missing discourse of desire" that Michelle Fine (1988) identified in sexual education material designed for girls is part of the problem. The emphasis on teaching girls to "say NO" simply reinforces this passive sexuality and, according to Thompson (1990: 358), does nothing to help lighten the "triple-whammy that love, ignorance, and guilt already exercise over girls' ability to accept themselves as sexual beings."

Authors like Sharon Thompson and Sharon Lamb recognize the ways in which a validation of active female sexuality interlocks with women's choice and agency in heterosexual sex. It may plausibly militate against at least some of the more subtle instances of sexual coercion and abuse (forms that might pass as "sex" in the eyes of some young men accustomed to female passivity as part and parcel of normal sex). Tolman (1999: 135) even argued that femininity is a barrier to adolescent girls' sexual health. Here she is referring to the norms of romance that regulate heterosexual relationships and "center on girls identifying and meeting boys' needs, including their sexual desires." These norms further encourage "girls to seek and maintain these relationships at the expense of their own needs and desires" and prevent feelings of entitlement to positive sexual agency. In a study I did with Kathryn McPhillips we showed how this same kind of dynamic can also be a problem for adult women in heterosexual relationships (Gavey and McPhillips 1999). When a woman is positioned within a conventional discourse of romance her sexuality may be constituted as femininely passive and responsive to her male partner's leads. This leaves her in a difficult position if he does not act in a way that is consistent with her own desires (for example, if he initiates sex of a kind that she does not want or if he does not initiate safer sex measures like using a condom). As I have argued elsewhere (Gavey 1996), a recognition of the important place of women's sexual desire is equally important in thinking through the prevention of sexual violence against adult women (particularly within intimate contexts).

\* \* \*

I want to return now to where I left off in the early part of this chapter in introducing the discursive triplet identified by Wendy Hollway (1984a, 1989). Subsequent researchers have built upon this framework to incorporate some of the extra dimensions at work in the discursive production of "normal" sex. For example, the place of reciprocity in patterning contemporary heterosexual relations (Braun, Gavey, and McPhillips 2003) or, as Gilfoyle, Wilson, and Brown (1992) proposed, a "pseudo-reciprocal gift discourse." Others have also emphasized the importance of cultural imperatives that relate to the more nitty-gritty aspects of sex. For example, a coital imperative (e.g., Jackson 1984) and, perhaps, an orgasm imperative (e.g., Nicolson 1992; Béjin 1985; see also Potts 2002).

In the rest of this chapter I want to look in more detail at two particular features of the discursive weave of heterosexual sexuality – the male sexual drive discourse and the coital imperative – in relation to seeing how normative (hetero)sex is patterned in ways that constrict choices for women (and also for men).

### **Facing up to the male sexual drive discourse**

Sources of knowledge about our culture's norms of sexuality are multiple. We learn these norms through word of mouth from friends and family; through fictional representations that we encounter every day in popular media; and through scientific

(or religious) information and professional advice disseminated through the media and self-help books and sites, as well as packaged into educational media used in schools, on health promotion websites and campaigns, and so on. One of the most persistent features of just about any of these representations of heterosexuality is the presence of a male sexual drive discourse. What does this so-called male sex drive discourse look like? How does it manifest in the everyday experiences of heterosexual women and men? And how does it relate to the possibilities for just sex? It is impossible of course to capture a definitive answer to these questions, given the abstract nature of what discourses are and also given their fluidity and permeability in practice. Yet in the next part of this chapter I introduce two sets of cultural moments to flesh out some appreciation of what the answers to these questions might look like. One comes from the genre of popularized professional sexual advice, and helps show the forms in which a male sexual drive discourse can be promoted. The other comes from two women's narrative accounts of sexual experiences that show how a male sexual drive discourse can be embodied from a woman's point of view.

Already, in Chapter 1, I have discussed early twentieth-century sexology and popular sex advice that assumes a dominant, aggressive male sexual drive. Although women's sexual pleasure was definitely beginning to be emphasized during the twentieth century, it was for a long time not represented as an essential part of sex. At the time my mother was newly married, "A famous doctor's frank, new, step-by-step guide to sexual joy and fulfilment for married couples" was published.<sup>18</sup> Dr Eichenlaub advised the following:

*Availability.*

If you want good sex adjustment as a couple, you must have sexual relations approximately as often as the man requires. This does not mean that you have to jump into bed if he gets the urge in the middle of supper or when you are dressing for a big party. But it does mean that a woman should never turn down her husband on appropriate occasions simply because she has no yearning of her own for sex or because she is tired or sleepy, or indeed for any reason short of a genuine disability. As a rule of thumb, I usually tell women *always* to meet their husbands' sexual requirements unless frank disability keeps them from performing their usual household or working duties or specific disorders of the sex organs themselves make intercourse impossible. Sex is too important for any wife to give it less call upon her energy than cooking, laundry, and a dozen other activities.

(Eichenlaub 1961: 36)

. . . I have known women who never had an orgasm and yet regarded sex as a great personal satisfaction. Pleasing someone you love and meeting biologic needs competently with your body brings full contentment to many women during the non-climactic sexual intercourse, just as nursing a baby brings

contentment to a willing mother. If anything, non-climactic sex is easier to enjoy than nursing, since a considerate husband can always make intercourse comfortable while even a well-meaning infant sometimes bites. If you conscientiously work at being available, you may ultimately find the feminine role quite satisfying even in the absence of ardor or desire.

*(ibid.: 37–8)*

*If you are beginners.*

Remember: the wife always goes along with her husband's urges, the couple strives for wifely comfort and masculine control, and neither need expect much satisfaction at first.

*(ibid.: 59)*

When you play the feminine role specifically for the purpose of bringing satisfaction, adequate sex play helps tremendously in achieving that goal. The habit of taking an active part even when you feel poorly disposed toward sex often leads to delayed but genuinely passionate response. It definitely contributes to the later development of ardor in many women. Every episode in which you actively extend yourself in totally willing service to someone you love builds feminine passion by pleasant emotional involvement in sex.

*(ibid.: 61)*

When either fatigue or illness makes the wife prefer a highly passive and inactive role, she can let her husband satisfy himself through an approach from the rear while she lies on her side. Throughout the years of marriage, a number of such occasions will arise. The moderate satisfaction available in this way will usually keep the husband happy . . .

*(ibid.: 77)*

This advice is fascinating for what it tells us about Western sexual discourse when it is stripped bare of any of the revolutionary sentiments that might have emerged through the 1960s. Without even the slightest nod toward feminist sensibilities, there is no “politically correct” packaging that needs to be unwrapped in getting to the central message about men's and women's roles in heterosex. This is an art of marriage in which it is taken for granted that the wife is subordinate, and that it is her feminine duty to serve her husband in all domains, including the sexual. The husband's sexual needs are taken for granted, while implying that the wife is relatively asexual – although Dr Eichenlaub holds out paternalistic promise for the woman who patiently succumbs to sex in any circumstance, that she may eventually find it pleasurable too.

Eichenlaub's advice is characteristic of the “different-and-unequal” model of sexuality that predominated within sex and marriage manuals published in the United States between 1950 and 1972 (Weinberg et al. 1983). It is a model that

might just as well have been labeled the “‘sleeping beauty’ model,” according to Weinberg et al. (1983: 315), “because of this assumption of sexual dormancy in women and the heroic role it implies for men.” Popular advice during the 1970s did, however, begin to take on a different flavor, in line with the “sexual revolution” discussed earlier. Well-known sexologists such as Masters and Johnson, and sex manual authors such as Alex Comfort (*The Joy of Sex*) were influential in promoting pleasure for women as well as men as a legitimate *raison d’être* for sex, even if their advice was not always up to the task (e.g., Ehrenreich et al. 1986; Irvine 1990a; Jeffreys 1990;<sup>19</sup> Segal 1994; Seidman 1991; Tiefer 1995).

Despite these shifts in the kinds of sexual norms and ideals being recommended by the experts, several women have told me they were explicitly given advice reminiscent of Dr Eichenlaub’s, never to decline their husband’s sexual advances, often given by mothers at the time they got married. For whole groups of women, perhaps, sex is still perceived as simply part of “the job.” One woman I interviewed<sup>20</sup> talked about sex in this way, directly evoking the spirit of Dr Eichenlaub’s advice:

NICOLA: You said that you enjoy intercourse up to a point. Um, beyond that point, um, what are your reasons for continuing, given that you’re not enjoying it?

BRONWYN: Ohhh, I just think it’s part of my function if you like (laughter) that sounds terribly cold blooded, but it is, (laughing) you know, it’s part of the job.

NICOLA: The job of-

BRONWYN: Being a wife. A partner or whatever.

While this might sound old-fashioned to many women who have grown up in a more liberal milieu through or since the 1960s, it seems that the new rhetoric of sexuality – celebrating women’s equal and active participation in sex and promoting women’s autonomy<sup>21</sup> – never quite erased the old model of difference and inequality; at best it just joined it.

John Gray’s “Mars and Venus” series of self-help books were at the forefront of a popular resurgence of the different-and-unequal model of gender relations. In his best-selling 1995 volume, *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom: A Guide to Lasting Romance and Passion*, Dr Gray recycles a whole universe of clichéd stereotypes about “the differences between the sexes” into a compendium of advice for success in the heterosexual bedroom.<sup>22</sup> What makes this work simultaneously interesting and distasteful is Gray’s capacity to appear to be taking seriously the challenge of rising to the task of dealing to women’s interests and pleasures as well as men’s (in a way that Dr Eichenlaub presumably had not thought necessary in 1961). Annie Potts’s (1998, 2002) marvelous deconstruction of Gray’s guidance reveals the rather androcentric core of his pearls.<sup>23</sup> In his model, sex is essential to men’s ability to experience intimacy and relationality: “When a man is aroused, he rediscovers the love hidden in his heart. Through sex, a man can feel, and through feeling, he can come back to his soul again” (Gray 1995; quoted in Potts 1998: 158). Although emphasizing the importance of women’s sexual pleasure, its role is in many ways as

a means to an end – the logic is that men need sex, and by giving women “great sex” too, men will get more for themselves. Women, in return, will assure their man’s happiness and sustain their relationship. As Potts (1998: 54) surmises:

without a frequent supply of great sex from willing women, men are deprived of physical health and spiritual happiness as well as an opportunity to connect with their elusive emotions; moreover they may cease to find their “wives” attractive, and therefore begin to look elsewhere for “love” (Gray, 1995).

Nothing new here; Gray’s revolutionary new message – if anyone ever really believed it was new – is simply the old commonsense story of naturalized sexual differences in sex – sold back to us in lightly modernized repackaging.

The implications of Gray’s message for sexual pressure and unwanted sex are straightforward:

By now, the message should be becoming clear to heterosexual women: not only is sex necessary to ensure effective communication and love in a relationship, but men especially require sex fully to feel, and connect with their innermost beings. The denial of sex for men thereby becomes tantamount to the denial of existence for men.

*(Potts 1998: 158)*

Potts continues:

Women also learn that sexual rejection wounds a man’s soul, and “feeling that he will not be rejected is essential for a man to continue to be passionately attracted to his partner” ([Gray] p. 81); “a woman’s acceptance of occasional quickies and a positive message whenever her partner initiates sex ensures lasting attraction and passion” ([Gray] p. 88).

*(ibid.: 160)*

As Annie Potts demonstrates, despite Gray’s paradoxical insistence that a woman must be able to say no (for his example, in the middle of the night) in order for her to not be put off sex, men’s sexual “needs” ultimately take precedence in his advice. This is necessary because, as Gray wants to argue, sex for men is about more than just pleasure, it is intimately intertwined with, and an essential foundation of, emotional and psychological well-being. Thus while he bends to the rhetoric of women’s liberation, his message ultimately ends up looking not too different from Dr Eichenlaub’s earlier advice.

What is once again missing in this model of heterosexual sex – just as it was missing in the early accounts of rape – is a woman’s-eye view of the experience. I don’t mean to imply that there is one essential, unitary, and universal experience of heterosex for women. There should be no need to argue that there is no such thing. But what I think is missing is the discursive space for an articulation of

women's contrary points of view, where they do exist. That is, a space in which different experiences and views about sex can be seen through a different lens so that they can be understood as equally legitimate rather than subtly pathologized and/or disregarded. For instance, there is still some sense in which it is culturally expected that a woman should be flattered by a man's sexual attention. Romantic discourses of seduction can be used to tell women that they "really want it," despite any claim not to be interested in a man's sexual advances. But are these kinds of experiences always so romantic for women? What does it look like when women encounter embodiments of the male sexual drive discourse that take an unwelcome form?

In the context of a 1990s study on women and condoms,<sup>24</sup> I interviewed two women in their twenties who both recounted sexual encounters that were impressive not only for their rich portrayals of a male sexual drive discourse in action, but also for their own agentic responses "against" it. In the first extract below, I present a rather long exchange with Rose, who was in her early twenties at the time. She was describing a casual sexual experience she had had only three weeks or so before our interview, where there had been some contest with a man over whether or not he would use a condom during intercourse. This extract demonstrates, I think, how even an embodiment of the male sex drive discourse that is not perceived to be coercive can act out levels of sexual urgency that provide a momentum that is difficult for a woman to stop.

NICOLA: So were condoms involved at all in that um-

ROSE: Yeah um, actually that's quite an interesting one because we were both very drunk but I still had enough sense to make it a priority, you know, and I started to realize that things were getting to the point where he seemed to be going ahead with it, without a condom, and I was- had to really push him off at one point and- 'cause I kept saying sort of under my breath, are you going to get a condom now, and- and he didn't seem to be taking much notice, and um-

NICOLA: So you were actually saying that?

ROSE: Yeah. I was-

NICOLA: In a way that was audible for him to-

ROSE: Yeah. (NICOLA: Yeah) And um- at least I think so. (NICOLA: Yeah) And- and it got to the point where (laughing) I had to push him off and I think I actually called him an asshole when I- I just said, look fuck, you know, and- and so he did get one then but it seemed-  
[19 lines of transcript omitted]

NICOLA: And um you said that it was kind of disappointing sexually and otherwise and he was quite selfish, (ROSE: laughter) like at the point where you know you were saying, do you want to get- are you going to get a condom, at that point were you actually wanting to have sexual intercourse?

ROSE: Um, mmm that's a good question. I can't remember the whole thing that clearly. And I seem to remember that I was getting um- I was just getting sick

of it, or- (laughing) or- I might have been, but my general impression was that it was quite a sort of fumble fumbled thing, and- and it was quite- he just didn't- he didn't have it together. He wasn't- he possibly would've been better if he was less drunk, but he was just sort of all over the place and um- and I was just thinking, you know, I want to get this over and done with. Which is not the (laughing) best way to go into- into that sort of thing and um- yeah I- I remember at points- just at points getting into it and then at other points it just being a real mess. Like he couldn't- he wasn't being very stimulating, he was trying to be and bungling it 'cause he was drunk. And being too rough and just too brutish, just yeah. And um-

NICOLA: When you say he was trying to (laughing) be, what do you-

ROSE: Ohh he was just like you know, trying to use his hands and stuff and just it- it was just like a big fumble in the dark (NICOLA: Right) type thing. I mean I'm sure h- I hope he's not usually that bad it was just like- I was in- sometimes- most of the time in fact I was just saying, look don't even bother. (Laughing) You obviously haven't got it together to make it pleasurable. So in some ways-

NICOLA: You- you said you were thinking that or you said that?

ROSE: I just sort of- I did push his hand away and just say, look don't bother. Because- and I thought at that point that probably penetration would be, um more pleasurable, yeah. But- and then- yeah. And I think I was actually wanting to just go to sleep and I kept- I think I um mentioned that to him as well and said, you know why don't we- we're not that capable at the moment, why don't we leave it. But he wasn't keen on (laughing) that idea.

NICOLA: What did he- is that from what he said, or just the fact that he didn't-

ROSE: I think he just said, ohh no, no, no we can't do that. It was kind of like we had to put on this big passionate spurt but um it just seemed quite farcical, considering the state we were both in. And um so I- yeah I thought if- yeah I thought it would probably be the best idea to (laughing) just get into it and like as I- as I presumed- ohh actually I don't know what I expected but he didn't last very long at all, which was quite a relief and he was quite- he was sort of a bit apologetic and like ohh you know, I shouldn't have come so soon. And I was just thinking, ohh now I can go to sleep. (Laughter) Yes, so I just um- since then I've just been thinking, um one night stands ahh don't seem to be the way to go. They don't seem to be much fun and (laughing) I'm not that keen on the idea of a relationship either at the moment. So I don't know.

This unflattering picture of male heterosexual practice painted by Rose's account classically illustrates two of the dominant organizing principles of heterosexual sex – a male sex drive discourse, which I have discussed already, and a coital imperative. Within the terms of this discursive convergence, it would not be right or fair for a woman to stop sex before male orgasm. This construction of male sexuality places the sexual needs of men as paramount; the absence of a corresponding discourse of female desire, as an equally necessary precondition for sex, serves to indirectly

reinforce these dominant perceptions of male sexuality. Thus he was able to ignore all her hints that she was not equally keen to continue.

The extent to which male behavior, as patterned by the male sex drive discourse, can constrain a woman's attempts to shape the course of sex are graphically demonstrated in Rose's story. In this particular case, she was concerned with getting the man she was with to use a condom (as she said, "he has a pretty dubious past"). He behaved with such a sense of sexual urgency and unstopability that although she was able to successfully ensure a condom was used, it was only as a result of particularly determined and persistent efforts. He was unresponsive to her verbal requests, and didn't stop proceeding with intercourse until Rose became more directly confrontational – calling him "an arsehole" and physically pushing him off. At this point he eventually did agree to wear a condom and did not use physical strength to resist and overcome her actions to retain or take some control of the situation.

The other woman I interviewed in this study, Anita (who was in her mid-twenties) described a very similar experience:

ANITA: This one friend and I- I mean I got quite drunk, I have to say, and we had penetrative sex without a condom but then- no I think we- I- I think we had sex without a condom and then I stopped, and 'cause I was like, no no no, you have to use a condom.

NICOLA: What you mean after he'd ejaculated you stopped, or-

ANITA: No no no it was just- (NICOLA: You stopped) we did- and like he did put his penis inside me, (NICOLA: Right) we were just sort of having sex and I suddenly thought he hasn't got a condom on, (NICOLA: Right) (laughing) 'cause I was really pissed. So was he. And I made him stop and he said, ohh no it's all right, I trust you. And I was (laughing) just floored. Fuck you arrogant- what a nerve, and stopped, at that point.

NICOLA: What you mean you- you sort of physically stopped him?

ANITA: Yeah I pushed him off (NICOLA: Yeah yeah yeah) and said, that's not- that's you know- that's not okay, I can't believe you said that. And um I think we had sex with a condom after that.

Using slogans such as "if it's not on, it's not on" and "no glove, no love," safer sex promoters have encouraged women to be assertive in sex, to ensure that men use a condom to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (see Gavey, McPhillips, and Doherty 2001). Rose and Anita did indeed act in the "Trojan woman fashion" that condom researchers have advocated (Chapman and Hodgson 1988: 104). But their accounts demonstrate how sexual assertiveness can be anything but straightforward to do.<sup>25</sup> In both Rose's and Anita's cases, acting "assertively" necessitated strong physical resistance and some hard talking. The literature on women's heterosexual experiences (e.g., Holland et al. 1998), as well as my own interviews with women about condom use (Gavey and McPhillips 1999; Gavey et al. 2001), strongly suggest that this form of resistance or agency won't be an attractive or possible option for many, or even most, women. Some

women may find themselves literally unable to act during sex with a man in any way that overtly attempts to take control of the situation or to change the course of events already underway – such as by bringing out a condom (see Gavey and McPhillips 1999). When this can't be achieved through indirect and subtle forms of communication (like Rose and Anita first tried), women are required to act in ways that transgress the conventional norms of femininity.

The male sexual drive discourse, in the absence of a corresponding discourse of active female desire, sets up a heterosexual dynamic where sex is something that is done to women by men. And the ultimate “it” takes a prescribed and restricted form – sex is intercourse or “coitus”, involving the penetration of the vagina by the penis, and (typically) male ejaculation inside the vagina.

### **Interruptus coitus**

In Madrid in the mid-1990s, I listened to a conference paper by Adriana Băban on the experiences of women living with the extreme pronatalist policies of the Ceausescu regime in Romania between 1966 and 1989 (Băban and David 1994: 4). Băban and her colleague interviewed 50 women to find out about “the effects of a rigidly enforced pronatalist policy on women’s lives, sexual and reproductive behaviour, and partner relations.” Although it was not the main theme or argument of the talk, I was deeply struck not only by the dismal social and political conditions that faced Romanian women during this time, but also by the way that taken-for-granted features of their personal relationships appeared to exacerbate aspects of this tough life. What especially struck me was the durability of intercourse in those women’s lives despite the high potential cost of its possible consequences (unwanted pregnancy).

According to Băban and David (1994), under Ceausescu contraception was illegal, abortion was illegal to women under 40, and both were expensive and difficult to obtain on the black market. Death or permanent injury were very real risks associated with illegal abortions, due to regulations which meant women were unlikely to seek or obtain treatment or hospitalization for complications. Ten thousand women died from illegal abortion complications in those 23 years. But the harsh social and economic conditions of the country at the time meant that providing for children could lead to considerable hardship. Among the women interviewed by Băban and David, multiple illegal abortions were common. One woman reported 16 illegal abortions. Băban and David painted a vivid picture of the stress this placed women under. For example, a woman who had had seven illegal abortions said, “When I was asked by my husband to make love with him I began to feel pains in my stomach because of fear” (ibid.: 11). Another woman said, “I felt like committing suicide when I found out I was pregnant again” (ibid.: 13). Yet despite the common “traumatic and catastrophic” (ibid.: 13) consequences of unwanted pregnancy in this particular social and economic environment, most women still had intercourse with their husbands even though many reported little or no pleasure from it. Although some women and their partners had chosen

“abstinence,” only one woman said that she and her partner had changed their sexual practices to have only noncoital sex after an “awful” abortion.<sup>26</sup>

Why, I wondered, would women choose to have intercourse when the consequences could be so devastating? If it was overwhelmingly exciting and pleasurable perhaps it would be understandable; but this did not seem to be the case for many of these women. Although this is a particularly disturbing example, the central problem – of women having intercourse in “risky” circumstances without great pleasure – is not restricted to women living in misogynist totalitarian conditions (see Gavey 1992; Gavey and McPhillips 1999).

In a culture saturated with the rhetoric of choice, it can be an uncomfortable realization that some choices are perhaps not *really* choices at all. It is possibly somewhat ironic that this limitation on choice extends beyond the right to choose acts that could be considered to broaden normative ideas about what sex is. Or even the right to choose what might be considered quirky, fetishistic, or even deviant forms of sex. These limitations are more prosaic than that. They are about the possibilities for choosing sex that does not include intercourse. At some level that possibility – the idea of heterosexual sex without intercourse – is so oxymoronic that it invites scoffing dismissal by some at what they see as the academic (read: unrealistic) nature of such a proposal. Yet, despite the centrality of coitus on the heterosexual menu, there is something that doesn’t quite square up when we consider the accounts of those women who don’t particularly enjoy intercourse, or don’t enjoy it enough in relation to the risks (e.g., unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections) or discomforts it poses to them (or in relation to the disadvantages of some forms of contraception).<sup>27</sup> Strikingly, it appears to be an area of life robustly immune to the proliferation of what Nikolas Rose (1999: 160) has described as the “relentless imperative of risk management” supposedly characterizing our so-called “risk society.”

## The coital imperative

The coital imperative (Jackson 1984) is arguably the most robust of all contemporary norms of heterosexual sex. It constructs the main point of heterosexual sex as penetration of the vagina by the penis (typically with male ejaculation inside the vagina). Embedded within the normative script for heterosexual sex, this kind of intercourse is the defining feature of (hetero)sex (e.g., Hamblin 1983; McPhillips, Braun, and Gavey 2001).<sup>28</sup> Sex, in shorthand, is *intercourse*. Although other sexual acts and forms of physical intimacy may be included within an inclusive understanding of heterosexual sex, its absence renders what has taken place as not properly sex, as a simple unpacking of the notion of *foreplay* suggests (prior to and less serious than the main event, the real sex).

The coital imperative is *not* the same thing as coitus itself. Rather it is the cultural nest in which coitus takes place that renders it central to sex; the defining feature of sex; the main act. Within the logic of this discursive construction, it is the most natural sexual act, “designed” for human reproduction (Gavey, McPhillips, and Braun 1999). It is the designating feature of mature sex, which marks the transition from immature forms of sexual play associated with adolescents or the inexperienced.

The coital imperative can be witnessed through what we know about both the practice and the language of heterosex. Representations of heterosex in popular cultural sites such as film and television, as well as research participants' accounts of their everyday experiences, tell us that it is uncommon for heterosexual sex to exclude coitus. When it does, it is generally represented as problematic and unsatisfactory – for example, the result of male impotence. Popular culture is littered with illustrations of the taken-for-grantedness of the coital imperative. And not just a feature of some old-fashioned notion of heterosex. A striking enactment occurred on the popular early-2000s Australian television program, *The Secret Life of Us*. When Will, one of the twenty-something characters in this Melbourne-based show, “suffers unprecedented performance problems” (as the program website succinctly describes the subject of that episode), his inability to “get it up” abruptly signaled the end of any sex between him and his girlfriend. As Will petulantly stormed up from the bed I was reminded of Wendy Stainton Rogers’s (2000) evocative “thought experiment” that asks us to imagine how different things might be if the measure of a man’s “sexual potency was seen as a product of his skill in and enthusiasm for cunnilingus rather than his ability to get erections.”

But even when oral sex does make an entrance it’s just not quite the real thing. In the 2001 film *Intimacy*, director Patrice Chéreau required actress Kerry Fox to perform *real* oral sex on actor Mark Rylance. Unsurprisingly, in real life this was a testing experience for Fox’s boyfriend, Alexander Linklater. It is fascinating to read Linklater’s (2001) confessional article about the experience, which reveals that the limits of his tolerance would have been breached if real *coitus* had been scripted:

There would have been a point of no return if Patrice had asked Kerry and Mark to perform penetrative sex. But, perhaps uniquely, I was being offered a safe emotional laboratory, with parameters I understood, in which I would find out how far the elastic of my trust would stretch.

*(ibid.: G2 4)*

It is perhaps through the logic of the coital imperative that former U.S. President Bill Clinton could say to the American (and global) public that he “did not have sexual relations with that woman,” and not simply be lying because by all accounts he and Monica Lewinsky did not have coital sex. The gist of this commonsense discursive construction of heterosex possibly provided Clinton with a useful mode of rationalizing his infidelity out of existence. It was not perfect though, as revealed by the reaction to his claim. That he was accused of lying about his relationship with Lewinsky, once the details were known, shows how the discourse of the coital imperative is not totalizing. Fissures exist within its commonsense logic. It stands as a meaning-making set of assumptions and practices, unless there is particular and exceptional cause to question it. A married U.S. president’s indulgence in fellatio, given by a White House intern, is obviously such an exception.

So while we all know that sex is not *really* synonymous with coitus, it is never entirely clear that sex without coitus is really “sex.” Despite any cracks that may

exist in the coital imperative, all the evidence suggests it is still widely in force. As a single act, it has a kind of status that sets it unquestionably apart from all other sex acts. Arguably, then, the reason why the Romanian women interviewed by Băban and David (1994) “chose” intercourse in circumstances where it did not seem like a rational choice lies in its existence as the kind of thing that is perhaps not really easily open to individual choice (within the normative context of heterosexual relationships such as marriage). Within the dominant discourses of heterosexuality, sex is necessary for mature proper relationships, and *coitus is sex*.<sup>29</sup>

## Viagra

Nothing perhaps provides such a compelling demonstration of the vitality of the coital imperative than the marketing and uptake of Viagra – the first popular drug targeted at “erectile dysfunction.” Available since 1998 in the United States (and in New Zealand and many other countries around the world), this drug was met with “unprecedented demand” according to media reports. By 2001 it had been prescribed to over 17 million men.<sup>30</sup> Indicative of the early hype surrounding Viagra, in 1998 the Australian Health Minister reportedly “predicted that sales would probably outstrip those of the century’s other wonder drug, penicillin.”<sup>31</sup> Viagra and other products like it aim to give men erections that are capable of penetrating a woman’s vagina.<sup>32</sup> In the early direct-to-consumer marketing of Viagra in New Zealand and in the United States, the drug manufacturers were clearly trading on a coital imperative to sell their product. Changes to a man’s erectile abilities that result in a penis insufficiently hard to consistently penetrate a woman’s vagina were captured within the biomedical language of “dysfunction” – pathologizing bodily states that in many cases could as easily be argued to be part and parcel of a diverse range of normal bodily responses and/or natural aging (see Potts, Grace, Gavey, and Vares 2004). (Indeed, as Pfizer’s New Zealand website for Viagra indicated – when I was studying the marketing in the early 2000s – over half of all men over 40 years of age “have some difficulty getting or maintaining an erection”<sup>33</sup>). Not only was this dysfunction portrayed as a devastating blow to masculinity: “the problem . . . strikes at the very essence of what it means to be a man,”<sup>34</sup> but also as a serious threat to intimacy within heterosexual relationships. As many of the advertisements, widely found in New Zealand popular media in the years following the drug’s release, advised: “Whatever the cause of your erectile problem don’t let it distance you from the one you love.”<sup>35</sup> The by-line to the drug name “Viagra” in one advertisement was “Helping to restore relationships”.<sup>36</sup> The drug company website went further to caution that “Failure to admit to this condition has often led to low self esteem, depression, marriage and partner break-ups.”<sup>37</sup> In the “FAQs” section of the same website, men were told in relation to the posed question “Is my partner affected?”:

Most definitely. Although erection problems usually have a physical cause, they can have a devastating affect on a couple’s emotional life. Your partner

may feel guilty or undesirable. It is vital that you do not let sexual problems raise a barrier between you and your partner. Share this information.<sup>38</sup>

What runs through all this information about the problem of erectile dysfunction and the promotion of Viagra as its solution is a hardcore coital imperative. Take the introduction to one magazine advertisement to potential consumers:

If the fear of failure is stopping you from making love, your relationship may be suffering from a very common but little talked about problem. The medical term is “Erectile Dysfunction” (ED), which means you have a problem achieving or maintaining an erection sufficient for satisfactory sexual activity. In other words you can’t make love when you want to.<sup>39</sup>

In this construction, which utilizes and reinforces everyday assumptions about sex, both “satisfactory sexual activity” and “making love” require a penis erect enough for penetration that lasts (the “Sexual health inventory for men” on the Pfizer website guided men on whether they might need the drug<sup>40</sup>). Sex *is* penetration. The possibility that sexual activity or making love could happen without penile penetration of the vagina – which conceivably might be an option that some heterosexual men with erectile changes, and their partners, might otherwise consider – is completely absent from these promotions. The more fundamental assumption that sex is essential within the “healthy” relationship is even more entrenched. This is hardly surprising, given the role of product advertising within capitalist medicine. But it is precisely the power of such messages to reinforce (with the authoritative assistance of medicine) limiting constructions of what is normal that indicate a wider social influence of such drugs.

The surge of popularity for treating these so-called sexual dysfunctions is a further indication (if any was needed) that we have moved well and truly beyond a reification of sex for procreation. Most men using Viagra and similar products are beyond a procreating stage of life. Yet, while the reproductive function of coitus is no longer valorized, the particular heterosexual act for reproduction is. Apparently, in nineteenth-century United States of America when the reproductive function of sex was still of primary importance (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988), and sex was based even more narrowly around the procreative act of coitus than it is today,<sup>41</sup> it was assumed that sex between a husband and wife would generally diminish over the course of their marriage (Seidman 1991). By the age of 50, it was thought, men’s sexual life would be over, the “sex drive” being “either absent by that age or enfeebled to a point where it would have little significance in the marriage” (Seidman 1991: 25). Today, when men’s bodies give up on producing the kind of rigid penile arousal required for “successful” intercourse, it is considered to be a sexual dysfunction (even though to some extent statistically normal as the drug company promotions like to reassure people). Such trends might have been predicted by Jeffrey Weeks’s (1985) diagnosis of the colonization of sex by capitalism since the beginning of the twentieth century. As part of a more general “commoditisation and commercialisation of social life,” Weeks (*ibid.*: 22, 23, 24)

pointed to an “expansion of perceived sexual needs, particularly among men.” This set fertile ground for the “proliferation of new desires as the pursuit of pleasure became an end in itself.” But the pursuit of pleasure is not only an end in itself, perhaps, for we see how sex has become entangled with all sorts of “higher” psychological and relational meanings.<sup>42</sup> Orgasm, for instance, is not simply a pleasurable bodily response but an opportunity for transcendence (albeit illusory according to Potts 2002). Intercourse is not simply a (possible) means to orgasmic physical pleasure, but an expression and/or confirmation of love and intimacy (Gavey et al. 1999). As Steven Seidman (1989: 298) has argued, the new “libertarian sex code” promoted through sex manuals in the 1960s and 1970s, while progressive in his opinion, nevertheless burdened “sex with excessive meanings” (ibid.: 312).<sup>43</sup> As I have already mentioned in Chapter 3, this led to a sexualizing of both pleasure and love, or at least an intensification of such connections. These shifts help set a cultural stage for responding to problems of sexuality – the so-called sexual dysfunctions within psychological and medical genres – as problems expected to have dramatic significance in the lives of those who experience them.

Concern about the sociocultural implications arising from the ways that Viagra’s entry into the pharmaceutical armory was being heralded led Annie Potts, Victoria Grace, and I to apply for research funding to study these kinds of impacts. Seed funding was provided by the Health Research Council of New Zealand in 1998, followed up by a full project grant awarded in 2000. In this study, led by Annie Potts, we interviewed 33 men who had used Viagra and 27 women whose male partners had used the drug, as part of a wider project to look at the sociocultural implications of Viagra and other “sexuopharmaceuticals” (Potts, Grace, Gavey, and Vares 2001–3). Probably the most striking outcome of our study was the diversity of participants’ responses about their experiences of sexuality, including the ways they negotiated and made sense of erectile “dysfunction,” and the ways that Viagra worked in their sexual interactions and their relationships more widely (Potts et al. 2004). Although this range of experiences included many counter-normative expressions – including some participants who spoke of increased intimacy and sexual pleasure following the male partner’s experience with erection difficulties – there was also strong representation of the coital imperative in many of our participants’ accounts. Of course this is not at all surprising given that sales and consumption of this drug trade on the cultural template of the coital imperative. One of our concerns was how the promotion of drugs for erectile “dysfunction” may simultaneously reinforce the coital imperative in ways that strengthen its hold. We found evidence in our interviews that some Viagra users and partners of men using Viagra also had these concerns (Potts, Gavey, Grace, and Vares 2003). Some of these women and men with experience of Viagra spoke of their concerns with how the promotion of Viagra *and* the very availability of this quick-fix solution to the “problem” of erectile “dysfunction” put pressure on older people to monitor and adjust their sexual activity to conform to the new norms that were being made possible through Viagra and, subsequently, other drugs like it. This is not to deny, of course, that there were some people for whom the occurrence of erectile

difficulties *was* a devastating experience. But this was not true for all men and women; and it is this silent side of the story that we believed was particularly important to represent. For some of the women and men we interviewed the cultural phenomenon of Viagra involves the *construction* of a problem. That is, the invitation to understand erectile changes as pathology rather than simply a natural change or as an expression of acceptable corporeal and sexual diversity. For example, one 60-year-old woman participating in our study explained:

Yes, it would definitely be different for everybody, I guess, but I think you'd probably find that . . . a large percentage of women in my age group would all say that . . . the desire decreases as you get older and . . . you know, different friends will say . . . "oh well maybe twice a year", if you're discussing things with close friends, and if it doesn't matter, well (small laugh) doesn't matter . . . Possibly, if I think about it, it'll come up *because* Viagra has been brought up, right? Because I think Viagra has made a lot of people feel inadequate . . . everybody's on the defensive about how often they have sex and so on, in the older age group.

(Potts et al. 2003: 712; see also Potts et al. 2004)

Even for women and men who already do see erectile changes clearly as a problem to be fixed, the "magic bullet" of Viagra delivers one solution (restoring the erectile capacities) with such force that other potential "solutions" are either obscured or devalued. In the case of men for whom Viagra poses an identifiable health risk (e.g., those taking nitrates in medication prescribed for angina or those using recreational drugs that contain nitrates, Medsafe 2001), the dangers of this fixation with an erect penis and coitus *as* sex are potentially serious.

Somewhat inconspicuous in the rush toward Viagra is a consideration of the particular views and experiences of partners of men who use the drug. Judging by some indignant reactions to the news about our research in the New Zealand media, one could be forgiven for thinking momentarily that women were at best sideline participants in heterosexual men's sex. Even the scientific assessment of our project (as part of the research funding process) raised as a matter of potential concern the fact that the three named investigators on the project were all women. While this admittedly does privilege particular points of view, it is unlikely that the same question would be asked of an all-male research team studying drugs like Viagra. The idea that heterosexual men's erections may also be the legitimate business of women who have sex with men would probably have escaped notice.

Exploring the perspectives of sexual partners was one of the main aims of our research. For this part of the study, we ended up recruiting solely female partners of men who had used Viagra. Again, it is important to stress that several of these women shared generally positive narratives about Viagra. However, some of these women and also women who were more clearly dissatisfied with the effects of Viagra in their sexual relationship expressed a number of concerning issues (see Potts et al. 2003).

We found that many women were not involved with any medical consultation concerning their partner's erectile changes, and some had not been consulted over the decision about whether their partner should take Viagra. As would be expected, there were many reported changes to people's experiences of sex and their relationships that they attributed to Viagra. Many of our participants (both women and men) spoke of an increased frequency of coital sex after obtaining the drug. This was not always a positive outcome for women, some of whom preferred the de-emphasis on intercourse that had occurred in their relationships.<sup>44</sup> Other women noted that hand-in-hand with an increased frequency and emphasis on intercourse, the introduction of Viagra brought a reduction in other pleasurable non-coital forms of sex, such as those that might be referred to as "foreplay" (Potts et al. 2003).<sup>45</sup> As well as these kinds of reorderings of sex under Viagra's influence, many women also spoke of more direct forms of pressure to have sex when they didn't particularly want to once Viagra had been used. This would come as no surprise to feminist sexologist and critic Leonore Tiefer (1998: 3), who questioned early on how the utopian promise of Viagra would play out in ordinary bedrooms where the everyday realities of gendered power and economics meet head to head. As she asked, "will Viagra-sex be all about worshipping the penis, since no one spending upwards of \$10 to have an erection will ignore it?" Even if it doesn't always eventuate in sexual intercourse, the introduction of an economic consideration to negotiations around sex is understandably likely to bring a whole new layer of contingencies and tensions to sexual choice. As one 65-year-old woman in our study reported:

Sometimes we go to bed and I think I'll go to sleep and then I realize that he's making, you know, sort of like overtures . . . he's sort of trying to get me to want sex, and it'll be a while and then I'll say "have you taken the pill"? He'll say "*of course* I've taken the pill, you know, what did you *think*"? And I'll say "well I had no idea . . . I've *asked* you not to take it unless we discuss it". He said "well I don't have to get your permission to take it" . . . [Interviewer: And when that happens would there be times that you have sex where you don't want to at all or-?] Well, there'll be times when it happens like that when we go to sleep and we don't speak for twenty-four *hours* [small laugh] 'cause he's so annoyed . . . at what it's cost . . . and he'll say as a matter of fact I took one last night as well and you weren't interested so it's cost twice as much and we haven't had sex.

(Potts et al. 2003: 707)

★ ★ ★

In this chapter I have examined some of the normalizing dimensions of contemporary heterosex. Even within the realm of sexuality that is not thought of as coercive or victimizing there are strong social scripts, codes, and norms that legitimate particular forms and circumstances of sex, constructing them as normal, natural, and healthy, and

de-legitimate others as deviance or dysfunction. A social constructionist approach to sexuality sees these cultural standards as operating to shape people's experiences, desires and behaviors. But because we live in an incredibly complex and rapidly changing cultural milieu the dominant discourses of sexuality don't always sit perfectly with other discourses – particularly those that shape our modern understandings of equality, justice, rights, and even pleasure. Therefore, while dominant discourses of sexuality are constitutive, they are not overdetermining because subjectivities, and even sexualities, are shaped by a myriad of other dominant discourses as well. Consequently, people's experiences and desires don't always perfectly map onto the normative codes and scripts for sexuality. Within this complex context, however, some choices are authorized as common sense while others are doomed to be met with uncertainty if not outright censure. What I hope to have conveyed here is something of the power of these dominant discourses and the cultural imperatives (albeit not absolute) they give rise to. When we understand ourselves as culturally produced in these ways and as always inevitably and thoroughly socially embedded, the liberal notion of a rational autonomous individual freely picking and choosing the assumptions and values they will live by, and the acts and forms of relationship they will enter into, starts to look rather fantastical.

In the next chapter I will look at some women's accounts of their experiences of unwanted sex and sexual coercion. While the experiences these women describe are not generally "rape," I hope to show that neither are they kinds of experiences we should complacently tolerate as just sex. If we accept that choice is never entirely "free," but is shaped and constrained by sociocultural parameters, then these women's accounts highlight some of the problems with normative discourses of heterosexual sex. This position does not deny the possibility of positive choices and agency to the women whose accounts I draw on, but suggests that they, as do we all, always act within what we understand to be the range of practical possibilities for being and action.

## Notes

- 1 Literature on the history of heterosexuality and cultural representations of heterosexuality in the West – even over the past one to two centuries – reveals an incredibly complex narrative, punctuated by pockets of contestation that make any general claims problematic. In addition to this there are important differences in how heterosexuality has been practised and represented according to place, class, religion, culture and race or ethnicity. It is beyond the scope of this book to do full justice to a comprehensive recent history of heterosexuality, with the nuances that would demand; however, I have been careful to attempt to draw out those themes and claims that appear to have some general consistency within writings about the history of sexuality in Western countries (for further and fuller discussions see D'Emilio and Freedman 1988; Phillips and Reay 2002).
- 2 See Hall (1998) for a contrary point of view.
- 3 Of course, while radical feminists waged a battle against the exploitation and victimization of women within heterosexual sex, there were battles within feminism (the so-called "sex wars") over whether the proper focus of feminist activism should be fighting against the dangers of sex or rather fighting for the pleasures of sex (e.g., Ferguson et al. 1984; Rich 1986; Snitow, Stansell, and Thompson 1983; Vance 1984a, 1984b).

- 4 Although Roiphe's polemic is stirred by a strange misreading of the rape research whereby she claims that verbally coerced or pressured sex is defined as rape in such research, when in fact it is not (see Chapter 2).
- 5 There are several accounts of this kind of sexual exploitation of women by men within progressive political movements. In the U.S. context, Shulman (1980: 592), for instance, has referred to the resentment of young women who "far from having felt freed by the so-called sexual revolution of the sixties," "actually felt victimized by it." Anecdotally:

They complained that they were expected not only to type the speeches, stuff the envelopes, and prepare the food and coffee for the radical men they worked with, but to sleep with them besides, without making any demands in return. Their own feelings, their needs for affection, recognition, consideration, or commitment, did not count. If they did not comply, they were often made to feel like unattractive, unhip prudes who could readily be replaced.

- 6 It is interesting to note that the double-edged implications of contraception for women were an issue for some feminists in the first wave of the women's movement in the late nineteenth century (Gordon 1976; Jackson 1994). As Jackson (1994) noted, they realized that providing contraception without promoting a feminist understanding of women's sexual rights and autonomy merely reinforced the possibilities for male sexual exploitation by removing "fear of pregnancy" as a legitimate reason for women to refuse sexual intercourse that they did not desire.
- 7 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Veukiso-Ulugia's (2016) more recent research shows diverse views related to sexuality among young Samoan people in New Zealand.
- 8 *Playboy* has been described as more than a magazine; it represented a lifestyle and a particular, libertarian sexual ethic (e.g., Seidman 1991).
- 9 See also Irvine (1990a) for a discussion that acknowledges the contribution that Masters and Johnson have made while at the same time criticizing the deep conservatism of their work. According to Allyn (2000: 169), Virginia Johnson herself "recoiled from the label 'feminist'" and reportedly said that feminism threatened to cause sexual dysfunction in men.
- 10 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: see note 9, Introduction.
- 11 Interestingly, one small study of unwanted sexual experiences among "Christian college women," who were "children from primarily conservative Christian homes" (Neal and Mangis 1995: 177), found that over half reported some unwanted sexual experience, and many described experiences in which they had felt unable to say "no" to a man within a relationship.
- 12 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Pregnancy rates among teenage girls in the United States have continued to decline significantly since the early 1990s (Kost, Maddow-Zimet, and Arpaia 2017). More recent declines have been attributed primarily to increased, and more successful, contraceptive use; although declines between 1991 and 2007 were also attributed in part to "declining sexual activity" (Lindberg, Santelli, and Desai 2016). In New Zealand, fertility rates have also declined (although most dramatically since 2008) (Stats NZ 2017). While the timeframes of data collection don't correspond neatly, Clark *et al.* (2016) found a significant reduction in the proportion of teenagers who "had ever had sex" (defined as "sexual intercourse or going all the way") between 2001 and 2012. Contraceptive use did not increase over this period.
- 13 In both the United States and New Zealand rates of teenage pregnancy have varied according to race or ethnicity, with significantly more Black and Hispanic young women in the United States, and Māori and Pacific Island young women in New Zealand, becoming pregnant as teenagers than white American, or Pākehā New Zealand, women respectively (Dickson, Sporle, Rimene, and Paul 2000; Kaufmann *et al.* 1998).  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: For more recent data on teenage pregnancy rates see Sedgh *et al.* (2015).
- 14 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: However, new strands of critical scholarship are questioning "compulsory sexuality" (e.g., Gupta 2015), often through an asexual lens or perspective that critiques "the constraining force of the sexual imperative" (Przybylo 2013a: 194).

- 15 According to ISI Web of Science figures, it had already been cited over 250 times by April 2003, and over 350 times by March 2004.
- 16 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: See note 14, Chapter 8.
- 17 These parameters of course vary across different social and cultural milieu, a woman's age and in some contexts her relationship situation.
- 18 The quote is from the front cover of Eichenlaub (1961). There were reportedly 1.5 million copies of this book in print (see Weinberg et al. 1983).
- 19 See Jeffreys (1990) for a detailed feminist critique of *The Joy of Sex*.
- 20 My own research interviews that I draw on here have been transcribed verbatim, including hesitations, repetitions, false starts, and so on. All participants are referred to by pseudonyms.
- 21 Which Weinberg et al. (1983) observed had come to predominate in popular sex and marriage manuals from 1973 to 1980. Their study involved a thematic analysis of 49 sex and marriage manuals published in the United States between 1950 and 1980.
- 22 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: In their analysis of popular North American sex manuals published since the year 2000, Gupta and Cacchioni (2013) found that the majority continued to uncritically reproduce stereotypical portrayals of women and men as fundamentally sexually different.
- 23 See also Zimmerman, Holm, and Haddock (2001) who discussed the work in the context of a broader analysis of best-selling self-help books within the United States. They rated Gray's (1995) *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom* as disempowering for women.
- 24 See Gavey and McPhillips (1999) and Gavey, McPhillips, and Doherty (2001).
- 25 For a feminist critique of "the assertiveness bandwagon" see Crawford (1995); see also Kitzinger and Frith (1999).
- 26 It seems that in other times and places "abstinence" has been used as a method of birth control. As Linda Gordon (1976) documented in her history of birth control as a social movement in the United States, nineteenth-century sexual reformers promoted various forms of sexual abstinence. Edward Shorter (1977) also suggests that abstinence from intercourse was in prior times a common method of birth control in Europe and North America.
- 27 This is not to deny that many women do, of course, report enjoying intercourse very much (e.g., Hite 1977; see Segal 1994), and my intention is not to make generalizing claims about the experience, the nature of which is surely related to differing desires and sexualities, as well as on the changing contexts of women's emotional and bodily, social, economic, and relational situations.
- 28 While I'm referring to this cultural knowledge / practice as a "script," I am using the term in a way that is not theoretically distinct from how I use "discourse." I use the term script here for the way it evokes the fairly contained set of cultural norms, understandings, and guidelines for the drama that is "sex," narratively structured around clear interpersonal and temporal relationships.
- 29 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: I am not sure if this association remains as tight as it once was. For example, with the popularization and increasing normalization of heterosexual anal intercourse (at least the idea of it) (see for example, Fahs and Gonzalez 2014; Fahs, Swank, and Clevenger 2015; Marston and Lewis 2014; McBride 2017), it is possible that it now counts as "sex" (between a woman and a man), even in the absence of coitus. My colleague, Maria João Faustino, for instance, who is studying popular cultural representations of anal heterosex, suggests a "penetrative imperative" has replaced a coital imperative. (It remains the woman who normatively is penetrated within heterosex [although not necessarily exclusively, McBride 2017].)
- 30 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: My original source for this figure, the Pfizer Annual Report 2001, is no longer available on the Pfizer website. The same figure for the number of Americans who had used the drug is, however, cited in a 2000 *New York Times* article (Hitt 2000).
- 31 "US deaths cloud Viagra's European launch" (1998). *BBC Online Network*. Available [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special\\_report/1998/viagra/159407.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special_report/1998/viagra/159407.stm) [accessed December 17, 2002].

- 32 Or, perhaps, a man's or woman's anus. Most of the early direct-to-consumer promotion of Viagra in New Zealand explicitly targeted a heterosexual market, although at least one of the mainstream print advertisements could be read as targeting a gay male audience (John Fenaughty, personal communication, April 26, 2003), notably in a way that was subtle enough to probably escape most heterosexual readers.
- 33 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: This was a flash up message on the New Zealand Pfizer website, accessed in 2002. The link is no longer working, but I have a screenshot available on request.
- 34 "Erectile problems can affect your confidence, health and happiness." [Advertisement for Viagra.] *New Zealand Listener*, February 20, 1999: 28.
- 35 For example, "Because of his courage we're even closer together." [Advertisement for Viagra.] *New Zealand Listener*, March 17, 2001: 15.
- 36 "Erectile problems can affect your confidence, health and happiness", see note 34.
- 37 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: This was a flash up message on the New Zealand Pfizer website, accessed in 2002. The link is no longer working, but I have a screenshot available on request.
- 38 From the Frequently Asked Questions section of the New Zealand Pfizer website, accessed in 2002.
- 39 "Erectile problems can affect your confidence, health and happiness", see note 34.
- 40 New Zealand Pfizer website, accessed in 2002.
- 41 Steven Seidman (1991), for instance, has suggested that not only did proper marital sex in the nineteenth-century United States center on the act of coitus, but that reference to noncoital sex was rare in publications of the era, and when it was mentioned it was always associated with prohibitions. (Noting that this norm of sexuality itself was the result of a shift during the eighteenth century [e.g., Hitchcock 1997, 2002; Laqueur 1990]). Within the popular medical texts of the time that Seidman consulted, "foreplay and oral-genital sex" were not mentioned at all. Edward Shorter (1991) paints a very grim picture of marital relations in Europe prior to the twentieth century. The nature of these relationships, as he portrays them, was more akin to an economic arrangement, in which the wife's role was providing service and sons. An emotional bond was not necessarily present. Within this kind of relationship, Shorter argues that women had little control over sex, and little right to refuse intercourse with their husbands, despite the significant health risks of childbirth for women. Intercourse itself, he claims, was "brief and brutal" in the traditional family (*ibid.*: 9). Shorter (*ibid.*: 13) concludes that "the overwhelming body of evidence suggests that, for married women in the past, sex was a burden to be dutifully, resentfully borne throughout life rather than a source of joy." Such interpretations are not uncontested, however (e.g., for some strands of this debate see Degler 1974; Freedman 1982; Gordon 1976; Maines 1999; Seidman 1991: 209).
- 42 This is not to say that sexual intercourse was not imbued with meanings beyond procreation at other points in history, but that they were not the same as those we take for granted today.
- 43 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: "Sex for health" (and well-being) is another modern extension to these excessive meanings of sex, or at least a rationale for its importance – permeating advice in sex manuals (Gupta and Cacchioni 2013) and found in scientific and popular literature (Gupta 2011).
- 44 It is important to bear in mind that some of these women had health problems (such as disease and the effects of surgery) which lead to increased sensitivity and pain in parts of the body "impacted" by intercourse. It has already been reported that intercourse with a man using Viagra might precipitate physical problems, such as acute cystitis for women (Little, Park, and Patton 1998). This is likely to be particularly relevant for older women experiencing anatomical and physiological changes to the vagina that make prolonged sexual intercourse physically uncomfortable or intolerable (Potts, Gavey, and Grace 2001).
- 45 Although a few women reported more "foreplay" once their partner started using Viagra, which was attributed to reduced "performance" anxieties for the man.

# 5

## UNSEXY SEX

### Unwanted sex, sexual coercion, and rape

Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away.

*(J. M. Coetzee 1999: 25)<sup>1</sup>*

Many women have talked to me about experiences that they didn't call rape, but which I find difficult to see as just sex. They include stories of situations in which a man applied pressure that fell short of actual or threatened physical force, but which the woman felt unable to resist, as well as encounters where a man was rough and brutish, and the woman described letting sex happen because she felt unable to stop it. They also include stories of situations where a male partner was not directly coercive at all, but where the woman nevertheless found herself going along with sex that was neither desired nor enjoyed because she did not feel it was her right to stop it or because she did not know how to refuse. All of these accounts in different ways point to a complex gray area between what we might think of as mutually consenting sex, on the one hand, and rape or sexual coercion on the other.

In this chapter I draw on accounts from women I have interviewed to illustrate a range of circumstances in which women may end up having unwanted sex with men (usually but not always in the absence of direct force). I am not talking about sex that is unwanted only in the sense that it takes place in the absence of sexual desire. That is, sex which may be agreed to within some mutually recognized ethic of reciprocity and giving, and entered into willingly in a way that doesn't compromise strong desires in the other direction (i.e., not to have sex). Rather, my focus here is on occasions when women didn't feel like they had a choice; when the sense of obligation and pressure is too strong.<sup>2</sup> Such examples run from the relatively harmless to the dangerous. All, though, raise questions about how we understand sexual choice and consent.

## Normalizing practices

One of the most poignant stories I've heard about this kind of sex is from a woman called Marilyn, talking about her experiences with her first boyfriend when she was 14 years old. Marilyn painted a picture of herself as a young teenager who did extremely well at schoolwork, in a school where academic achievement was not positively valued among her peers. As part of her quest for social acceptability from the other girls at her school she sought to be the girlfriend of a particular kind of boy. The status this relationship gave her was important to her attempts to fit in among the other girls. It was for this reason, she suggested, rather than for any intrinsic rewards of the relationship that she was in this early relationship. At the time, Marilyn perceived that it was necessary for her to have sex with her boyfriend in order for her to have the relationship with him:

MARILYN: Oh yeah, yeah, definitely. It was the- you know, that was like what- well that was all it was really. I mean, he would never- we'd never have talked about anything. We would've gone out, but as part of a group, and um then it was just accepted that whenever we went out we would end up having sex in his car or something, afterwards.

Her sexual experiences within this relationship were undesired and totally unsatisfying. Marilyn described her boyfriend as "not a skilled lover"; she also said that "he made no attempt to, um (pause) be affectionate." Furthermore, the actual details of the scene of sexual intercourse were far from ideal. As she described it, "we'd gone to a car park, and he had a, sort of horrible old, um car, and then- and he propped the, the um front seats up with paint cans, and made me lie in the back with my legs out the window." Sexual intercourse itself was seemingly totally unconnected to her sexual desire:

MARILYN: I didn't really like having it, but, I pushed that away and I could do it without thinking about it. I never enjoyed it, I never had an orgasm or anything like that, but I mean, and I never got any feeling from it at all, but-

NICOLA: Any feeling, um physical feeling?

MARILYN: Any physical feeling, any (pause), no I don't even think I got any emotional feeling really. I didn't really feel that I needed to be loved by him and this was how he showed me that he loved me or anything like that.

What makes Marilyn's experiences so problematic is that this was not simply bad sex: end of story. Marilyn spoke about how her feelings about her body changed during that relationship. From being "very comfortable in it," and feeling "it was mine and nobody could sort of do anything to it," she said, "and that was taken away, by him, from that relationship because it was in that relationship for the first time that I would look at myself and think I look awful in those, or I'm too fat." This unpleasurable sex had heavy consequences beyond this. As Marilyn explained,

“the worst thing about having sex really was the contraception thing.” Too young to obtain oral contraception herself, her boyfriend refused to responsibly use condoms, and so she was regularly having unprotected sexual intercourse:

MARILYN: It was a terrible stress you know, I mean I really, it dominated how I thought about things all the time. I felt, I was worried about it all the time . . .

I, I worried. Probably, probably for about um two years I would have been just hysterical with worry.

MARILYN: I was really frightened of getting pregnant all the time, every, every month I would just lie in bed petrified with fear about what I was going to do. I used to think if I got pregnant I would commit suicide, and I knew how to do it. I used to write, I actually wrote a letter to [name of national women’s magazine] pretending to be a young mother worried about my children eating poison, around the house, and said “which ones should be locked up?,” so I could find out what would kill you. And that was what I would do, that is what I thought I would do.

Despite the sex with her boyfriend being, at best, what could be described as only tolerable, and despite extreme anxiety about pregnancy, to the extent of potentially fatal consequences, Marilyn said, “I never would have ever, ever thought of saying no or yes, you know, until I was, until a few years ago.” Her own appraisal of the situation, based on her assumptions about supposedly “normal” behavior between men and women, meant that sex was required and compulsory. Some sort of sexual imperative was woven into her cultural knowledge about what having a boyfriend or being a girlfriend meant. She went along with this unpleasant (and high-risk) sex, she said, “because it was really important to me to be seen to be normal.”

In this particular example, the forms of exchange conform pretty closely to what would be expected with the convergence of dominant traditional variants of a male sexual drive discourse and a have–hold discourse. The rewards of relationship for Marilyn were less ideal than what might be on offer in more traditional and utopian notions of relationship; but, from her own account, it would seem that she had actively chosen this relationship from what she saw as the range of choices at the time for fitting in with her peer group. Within this teenage relationship though, there was no hint of influence from emergent discourses of reciprocity and mutuality in heterosexual sex (see Braun et al. 2003). Like the women in Holland et al.’s (1998) research, there was little room within Marilyn’s sexual relationship for her own sexual desire (see also Thompson 1990 and Tolman 1994). Their sex was not about, and nor did it require, her desire or pleasure.

From whatever understanding of these events we can piece together on the basis of Marilyn’s remembered account, it seems evident that her boyfriend behaved selfishly and with a lack of consideration. However, the point is not to pin blame on this individual boy, I don’t think – particularly when the details of what happened can only be pieced together through one person’s account of events

many years in the past. Marilyn did not emphasize her boyfriend's culpability; she certainly didn't describe him as forcing her to have sex. It would be difficult to argue that what happened was any form of sexual assault (based on these details alone). Rather, the pressure came indirectly, through the cultural knowledge and understandings they both shared. What is telling in an example like this is what it shows us about the cultural conditions of possibility for unwanted sex. A sexually exploitative arrangement was consented to because it was considered normal, and not automatically culturally deviant. Clearly this raises questions about the notion of consent as an adequate standard for ethical sexual engagement.

Within the terms of a discursive framework of heterosexuality, Marilyn's involvement in such unpleasurable and anxiety-provoking sex can be understood to have been produced within the dominant discourses of (hetero)sex, which I outlined in the previous chapter. These discourses provide the knowledge and assumptions about what sex is, about the nature of men's and women's sexuality, and about the place of sex within relationships. They also provide normative scripts for the practice of sex – who does what to who, and how. The convergence of a male sexual drive discourse and a have–hold discourse provides ample room for this kind of *unjust* sex to take place. According to the male sex drive discourse, men are sexually needy creatures and, within the terms of the have–hold discourse, women know that they need to give men sex in order to retain the relationship that they desire. Reminiscent of old-fashioned edicts about the need for women to satisfy men's sexual urges, whenever he “needs” it, Marilyn and her boyfriend performed a kind of sex that was consistent with these gendered patterns of behavior. As some feminists have cynically pointed out, the permissive turn of the 1960s simply made many more women subject to these androcentric notions of sex by loosening the moral connections around sex and marriage. While morally conservative prohibitions against sex before marriage would have been oppressive and unwelcome for many women in many situations, the erasure of these restrictions at the same time removed socially acceptable ways for women to avoid sex in situations where it was not desired. For Marilyn, a permissive discourse didn't go so far as to script attention to her sexual pleasure, but it did go far enough to “require” her to be sexually active in order to hold or “keep her man.”

Numerous other women told me similar stories of obligatory sex, if not always with the same dire potential consequences. For instance, Chloe who was 31 at the time of our interview explained how normative notions of sex and relationships had in the past created a context for her in which she found herself acting as the object of her boyfriend's sexual desires:

CHLOE: Like he always, when I used to stay the night a couple of times a week, he'd always wanted to have sexual intercourse in the morning and that was just, that was just how it was. Like, you know, you had a fuck then you got up and you had a cup of tea then you had your breakfast, (laughs) And I never really enjoyed sex. And I mean I just thought, you know, like I didn't even question it. There was nothing– There was so much taking the cue from the guy. There

was, I don't know how, I guess I just wasn't tuned into my own feelings or that, or I couldn't have gone through with it. Because, you know, that person wanted me, and I was in a *relationship*, we were going out together and, isn't this what everybody does? And, you know, all that sort of stuff. Most unpleasant.

This undesired and unpleasurable sex was made possible for Chloe, as it was for Marilyn, through the normalizing effects of dominant discourses of heterosexuality. Another woman, who had been having a relationship with a married man over a 14-year period, described a similar situation. Pat was 52 at the time of our interview. She described how she ended up having sex she neither wanted nor enjoyed to fit in with her lover's sexual wishes:

PAT: If we went away to the cottage he would drink quite a bit and I'd, I *detest* being made love to when somebody's been drinking. I absolutely detest it, I think it's, it's *revolting* and they *stink* and I- they're not all there, and, um, that was when he was at his most insistent, and that was when he took ages to actually have an orgasm because he'd drunk too much and I used to detest it. And, um (pause) because we hardly- because we didn't have many weekends together I used to go along with it.

The normalizing practices of heterosex worked, in this context, to obscure Pat's right to dissent from her partner's insistent pursuit of sex. Instead her best option was experienced as allowing herself to act as a passive object of his desire, for his pleasure.

PAT: And I mean (pause, sighs), because we never had many weekends together I just used to sort of let him get on with it. But I (laughing) can't say that I was (pause), you know, a, a full participant.

Both Chloe and Pat describe patterns of sex in these relationships in which their bodies / their selves became objectified as they acted – under a sense of obligation – to be the body / the woman that they understood their partner wanted and expected. Within these relational dynamics, and the sexual moments more particularly, are clear indicators of the lack of necessity of women's desire and pleasure, because its absence was able to go unquestioned and seemingly unnoticed.

Prevailing understandings of male sexuality as the dominant driving force within heterosex are no doubt crucial in establishing this kind of dynamic. Within heterosexual relationships an economy of sex can get set up around shared acceptance of the male sexual drive discourse. Within the terms of this discourse, men need sex regularly, so women can feel responsible for monitoring the frequency of sex so that it stays within the bounds of some implicit norm. As Marilyn, who was 28 at the time of our interview, explained with regard to her current *de facto* relationship:

MARILYN: But I do think to myself, "How long ago was it, um, and, and so how long can we sort of acceptably put it off for?"

NICOLA: And what do you think is a- you know, what's your answer about that? What's acceptable?

MARILYN: Well, well, my, my answer, is um, (pause) at the moment, I, I sort of think to myself that once a month is alright, I'm doing okay, . . . but I mean, that's like, really changed. Beforehand I would have - a, a year ago - would have been like, if I could- I couldn't have sex twice a week, you know, I felt guilty, I felt bad about it. I'd, I would make myself sort of want to do it, or, or no I wouldn't want to but, you know, I would feel *bad* if it didn't happen twice a week.

Here Marilyn describes a form of “self-surveillance” through which she actively monitored and evaluated her own behavior in relation to her understanding of cultural norms. In the terms of a Foucauldian discursive appreciation of the social construction of subjectivity, this illustrates how cultural knowledge or discourse works to make possible (through “pouvoir”) certain ways of being and behaving. The dominant discourses of heterosex prescribe the norms that must be adhered to, and inform choices about how long sex that is not desired can be “acceptably” delayed. Notably, however, this and other women’s accounts of unwanted sexual experiences highlight the complexity of embodied subjectivity as a site of contradictory thoughts, feelings, and desires. That Marilyn experienced a lack of desire which she had to manage in this way attests as much to the productive power of other discursive forces as it does to any raw truth of her physical and emotional responses to sex: such as the notions that sex *should be* pleasurable; that women have sexual *rights*; that it is *unreasonable* for the body to be subjected to pain and discomfort; and so on, that all became part of sexual and/or general humanitarian discourses in the latter part of the twentieth century. Arguably such points of discursive dissonance produce experiences that are suffered in silence.

As these examples illustrate, within the dominant constructions of heterosex a woman may sometimes end up having unwanted sex with a man because it either does not occur to her to question it, or it does not seem within the realm of possibility that it is a truly negotiable point. The sexual imperative apparent in these accounts renders the place of sex within relationships exists as a given, something that is taken for granted as the normal and natural glue that holds together intimate relationships.<sup>3</sup> What is particularly striking about these types of accounts is the way in which they suggest a lived experience of sex that is in sharp contrast to popular contemporary portrayals of women’s active and agentic sexuality. While I wouldn’t suggest that this is the *real* story that somehow negates representations of women as more sexually active and interested, it is surely important not to forget this other, less sexy, side of the story. What these accounts do show is that heterosexual encounters can easily be narrated in ways where the absence of a woman’s desire and pleasure is not only permissible, but almost unremarkable. As the tone of Bronwyn’s account of her “cold-blooded” acceptance that sex is simply “part of the job” of being a wife or partner (see Chapter 4) suggests, sex under such conditions may not be out of the ordinary enough to even be noteworthy to some women in some relationships.

Marilyn, Chloe, Pat, and Bronwyn were all discussing sex that was experienced as obligatory within some kind of relationship – where there may be expectations of some form of explicit or implicit return (such as minimally holding onto the relationship). From other accounts, though, it is clear that a male sexual drive discourse operating in a permissive context can produce a sexual imperative that women may experience as pressure to have sex even without the potential returns implied by relationship. The experiences of Anita and Rose, described in the previous chapter, illustrated this. Another woman, Ann, discussed a series of “one night stands” when she was around 14–16 years of age in which the currency of exchange was apparently reduced to a purely sexual level (intercourse was represented as a girl’s way of “paying [her] dues” for flirting):

ANN: Yeah, it wouldn’t have occurred to me to have said no. (Long pause) And also that feeling of, “well, I’ve led them on,” you know, “I’ve led them on this far, I’ve, I’ve done these things, I’ve gotten a bit drunk, I’ve danced in a certain way, I’ve got in the car, we’ve come to the park.” And there is still, remember, very much that feeling where, you know, I mean, if you led boys on then that’s what you did. Whereas, when I think about it, I think, well, did I, when I was sort of leading them on, did I want to have it to end in penetrative sex? I don’t think I did really. I think it was just more the enjoying of the flirting, I mean I was definitely quite flirtatious and enjoying of the attention that that got me, um– but then sort of the getting in the car, it was like, well, it was like, you just had to pay your dues really, for the other three hours of flirting, you know.

Given what appears to be a purely sexual currency of exchange – enabled by the ascendance of permissive ideas around sexuality in the 1970s – girls in this situation don’t expect the “trappings” of more traditional notions of relationship or partnership (modeled on marriage). Nevertheless, as shown repeatedly in studies of young people’s experiences of heterosexual, the actual practice of sex seems to have remained strongly linked to traditional androcentric models of what sex is, and whose pleasure it is for.<sup>4</sup> As Holland et al. (1998: 11; see Chapter 4) concluded from their extensive study with young heterosexual women and men, “Heterosexuality . . . is masculinity.” Even the deployment of a more “liberated” and egalitarian discourse of reciprocity is no guarantee that norms of sexual practice will shift away from those which appear to ultimately privilege men’s supposed sexual interests (Braun et al. 2003).

Women’s accounts of the kind discussed so far raise serious questions not only about the limits of choice in heterosexual, but also, as I have already suggested, about the adequacy of a notion of consent as a criterion for ethical sexual relations. When, as MacKinnon (1983: 650) argued, “sex is normally something men do to women,” consent can be a very passive act; perhaps even an act wrought from a lack of viable alternatives. Individualistic explanations, as we would expect from the likes of Katie Roiphe, for these types of compliance with unwanted sex might blame particular women by questioning their strength of will and character. However, we cannot properly appreciate any individual’s choices without at least

considering the implications of acting otherwise; that is, the cultural scaffolding that provides the context in which decisions and choices are made.

In Chapter 3 I introduced Foucault's theories of discourse and his model of disciplinary power, and suggested that they provide useful ways of understanding how women can end up having unwanted sex with men. Within this framework for understanding the everyday workings of the social, dominant discourses provide implicit cultural knowledge and strong norms that guide us in knowing how to be and act in everyday life. The processes of self-surveillance and accommodation that are explained through a model of disciplinary power help us to understand how this conformity might come about. The normalizing and regulatory effects of this kind of "productive" power shape subjectivity and behavior, through our own active identification with the subject positions embedded in discourse. However, because this process of identification is also a process of subjectification, and because there is no rational coherent self that pre-exists this kind of social production of subjectivity, it doesn't make sense to think about a person's active role as simply one of rational choice between competing possibilities for action and identity. This is because we are always-already constituted in relation to the discursive context in which we exist; our own subjectivity, the "me" doing the choosing, is not a neutral generic subject (who doesn't exist) but a person embedded in particular sociocultural locations with a unique culturally inscribed and embodied personal history. These processes of social construction of subjectivity help to explain actions or behaviors that look like compliance with or submission to social arrangements that seem unjust and not in a woman's own best interests.

### **The limits of communication: Just say no . . . or not**

Within a liberal model of subjectivity in which people are rational autonomous actors, it is difficult to appreciate why women faced with pressure to have unwanted sex wouldn't just say no. While women may once have been obliged to say no (to be "good" girls), women (well, *young unmarried* women at least) are now bombarded with messages about their *right* to "say no." But how easy is this right to enact?

Some women I interviewed identified an absence of a language for saying no or an inability to actually say it. Pat, for instance, expressed incredulity at her own inability to say no to a man she had already had sex with previously:

PAT: There've been times in my life when I have really felt like . . . "what the hell did I go to bed with that man for? Why am I doing this, I must be mad. Why can't I say no?," you know. It's, it's (pause) it's very hard, I find it- *I have in the past found it very difficult to say no to a guy who wants to go to bed with me. Very difficult. Practically impossible, in fact.* Not to someone I've just met, but to someone that I'm, I've known a while, and been to bed with. If you've been to bed with them once, then there's no reason why, that you shouldn't go to bed with them again in their heads. And of course (pause), I mean, you can see that point of view (laughing). [Emphasis added.]

One way of understanding this kind of extreme difficulty in “saying no” is that if a man does not back off in response to a woman’s more subtle communications that she doesn’t want to have sex, then she is required to act in a way that not only strongly challenges the norms of femininity, but also contravenes the norms of everyday communication.

Insights drawn from conversation analysis (CA) of ordinary communication provide a useful adjunct at this point to the Foucauldian discursive framework I am using to understand women’s compliance with unwanted sex.<sup>5</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2, in a novel analysis of young women’s accounts of refusing sex, Kitzinger and Frith (1999) drew on CA to question the logic of the “just say no” slogan in rape prevention campaigns. It is deeply problematic, they concluded, because it is insensitive to the everyday ways in which “no” is communicated. CA’s empirical analysis of ordinary conversations shows that refusals are, in fact, typically *not* accomplished through the bare linguistic act of saying “no.” In the technical language of CA, refusals are “dispreferred” responses to requests, proposals, invitations, and so on (which in the case of sexual invitations might be happening at both verbal and/or nonverbal levels). Typically these “dispreferred” kinds of responses are more complex, hesitant, and indirect than so-called preferred responses (that is, the easier responses of accepting an invitation, etc.). Moreover, refusals also typically can contain token agreements, appreciations, and apologies embedded in them. Kitzinger and Frith’s point is that it is not standard practice within English-language speech communities to “say no” to invitations by simply directly saying “no.” The advice to “just say no” to sexual pressure, then, completely contravenes the normative conversational rules for communicating refusal in the English language. Obviously this has direct implications for understanding women’s experiences of unwanted sex, and helps to explain why women like Pat might find it difficult to say no to a man who wants to have sex with them (at least in a way that that man takes notice of).<sup>6</sup>

The other set of cultural norms that direct refusals may well contravene are the norms of femininity. Typical valued characteristics of femininity include nurturance and a certain gentleness that are not embodied by actions that are too bold and forthright. Directly refusing unwanted sex by a clear verbal “no” potentially compromises the performance of femininity in ways that a woman may find extremely difficult to embody. Elsewhere I have described a degree of passivity that can be experienced by women as immobilizing, through their positioning in these kinds of conventional discourses of romance and femininity (Gavey and McPhillips 1999). In comprehending the task that can be required of women in declining unwanted sex, it is worth envisaging the kind of situation in which this act of assertive communication is required. While it is perhaps commonplace for quiet gentle “no”s to be listened to by men pursuing sex, it is clearly unremarkable for these to be disregarded as Anita and Rose’s accounts so graphically demonstrated (in Chapter 4). Here, not only were direct verbal requests to stop not listened to (in these cases because the woman wanted to introduce a condom, not because she attempted to stop sex altogether), but both of these women had to physically push aside the man they were having sex with in order to get their point across.

## Discipline through reward, and the bounty for identity

Foucault (1979) noted that disciplinary power works not only by punishing behavior that steps outside of discursively prescribed norms, but also through rewarding acts that are esteemed within a particular discourse. One way of receiving this kind of gratification and reward is through being the good sexual subject. As discussed in Chapter 3, subject positions are the various modes of subjectivity that are offered within any discourse. When we consider some of the subject positions provided through dominant discourses on heterosexuality, and the identities they give rise to (e.g., “good lover,” “frigid bitch”), we can get a better sense of the context in which women must make decisions about unwanted sex. This context presents subtle and not-so-subtle pressures and constraints that a woman has to weigh up in determining what decision or action to take (such as “consenting” to or going along with unwanted sex). Underlying the dilemmas she may face is a complicated terrain for choice. Choices have multiple implications for identity which, even in the absence of more overtly punishing consequences, may be aversive; or simply lacking (in reward).<sup>7</sup>

In some of the examples already discussed above, I have described a kind of compliance derived from conformity to “the normal” – that is, a kind of fitting in with what we understand to be the cultural expectations of us. Usually, this was described as taking place in the absence of any awareness or knowledge of alternatives. Here, by contrast, I will look at a somewhat more active and perhaps deliberate compliance, resulting from a woman’s prioritizing of other concerns. Again, these are another set of constraints that can operate in the absence of direct acts of male force. It is easy to imagine how some critics might dismiss the whole idea of this particular set of dynamics having any relevance at all to a discussion of sexual coercion, or even perhaps to unwanted sex more generally. Yet I would argue it is relevant because these choices operate against a cultural backdrop in which there are not equally positive identity positions available for women to be otherwise. The problem is that the range of choices (those, that is, that are not likely to meet with predictable negative responses) is so limited.

Recognizing the salience of identity provides another way of thinking about some of the dynamics that might underlie and shape the choices a woman makes when faced with encouragement, pressure or even outright force to have sex when she doesn’t want to. I use the term identity here to refer to the particular ways we describe how “we are positioned by, and position ourselves within” (Hall 1990: 225) discourse. In this sense, it is the actively crafted part of subjectivity that we consciously know and recognize; the shifting sense of who we are. From a poststructuralist perspective, this construct will be derived from the mingled mix of subject positions that we inhabit, and our sense of how we inhabit them. It is an accomplishment that is always simultaneously cultural and personal (where the personal is itself always formed within the possibilities and constraints for selfhood provided within any particular sociocultural and historical context).

Sarah is a woman I interviewed as part of a study on women and condoms (see Gavey et al. 2001). Like many women in that study, her account of her experiences in relation to condoms was closely tied in with her more general experiences of agency within sexual relationships. Sarah did not like condoms for many reasons, but it seemed that her reluctance to use them was also related to her sexual identity and her taken-for-granted assumptions about men's needs, desires, and expectations of her during sex. Sarah traced some of her attitudes toward sex to her upbringing and her mother's attitudes in which the male sex drive discourse was strongly ingrained. She directly connected her experience that "when I've started I never stop" to her difficulty in imagining asking a man to use a condom. As she said in an ironic tone:

SARAH: If a man gets a hard on you've got to take care of it because he gets sick. You know these are the mores I was brought up with. So you can't upset his little precious little ego by asking to use a condom, or telling if he's not a good lover.

Sarah was reflexive about her own ambivalence toward this male sex drive discourse, which she explained by drawing on a psychoanalytic distinction between the conscious and unconscious mind:

SARAH: I mean I've hopefully done enough therapy to have moved away from that, but it's still in your bones. You know there's my conscious mind can say that's a load of bullshit but my unconscious mind is still powerful enough to drive me in some of these moments, I would imagine.

Thus, despite having a rational position from which she rejected the male sex drive discourse, Sarah found that when faced with a man who wanted to have sex with her, her embodied response would be to acquiesce irrespective of her own desire for sex. Her reference to this tendency being "in [her] bones" graphically illustrates how she regarded this as a fundamental influence. It is evocative of Judith Butler's suggestion that discourses do actually live or lodge in bodies (in Meijer and Prins 1998; see Chapter 3). Sarah recalled an incident where her own desire for sex ceased immediately on seeing the man she was with undress, but she explained that she would not be prepared to stop things there:

SARAH: He's the hairiest guy I ever came across. I mean- but no way I would stop. I mean as soon as he took his shirt off I just kind of about puked (laughing), but I ain't gonna say- I mean having gone to all these convolutions to get this thing to happen there's no way I'm gonna back down at that stage.

NICOLA: So when he takes his shirt off he's just about the most hairiest guy you've ever met, which you find really unappealing,

SARAH: Terribly.

NICOLA: um, but you'd rather go through with it?

SARAH: Well I wouldn't say rather, but I do it.

Sarah also described another occasion where she met a man at a party who said, “do you want to get together and I said, well, you know, I just want to cuddle, and he said well that’s fine, okay.” She explained that it was very important to her to make her position clear before doing anything. However, they ended up having sexual intercourse, because as she said:

SARAH: I was the one. I mean we cuddled and then I was the one that carried it further.

NICOLA: And what was the reason for that?

SARAH: As I said, partly ’cause I want to and partly ’cause if ohh he’s got a hard on you have to.

Sarah portrayed herself as someone for whom her sense of herself as a “good lover” was an important part of her identity. This identity might induce women to have sexual intercourse to please a man whenever he wants it and, in Sarah’s case, to the point of anticipating this desire on the basis of an erect penis. For Sarah, this positive aspect of her identity had implications, not so much for having unwanted sex but for having safer sex. She implied that among people who know her she would have a reputation as a woman who had enjoyed sex with many men, and thus she would “subconsciously” expect a man to think she was “silly” if she suggested using a condom – “why make the fuss, you know.” These expectations, combined with her belief that most men don’t like condoms, were powerful enough to override any potential concern about the risk of contracting HIV through casual sex: “There’s a part of me that also says as long as I’m clear and not passing it on I’m not gonna worry. You know and if I get it, hey it was meant to be.”<sup>8</sup>

What stops Sarah acting assertively to avoid sex she doesn’t desire is not a lack of assertiveness, per se. Rather, it is deeply inscribed features of her own identity – motivations to do with the production of a particular kind of self. Well before she gets to the point of acting or not acting assertively, she is motivated by other (not sexual) desires, about what kind of woman she wants to *be*.

Pat described a similar situation, in which she had become discursively positioned within her long-term “affair with a married man” in ways that made it extremely difficult for her to turn down sex that she didn’t want or to stop sex that she was not enjoying. She explained how she had been consistently sexually “available,” because “sex is always frightfully, frightfully important to him,” “he can’t live without it.” This was something that she, as his lover, could provide even if his wife would not:

PAT: Now (pause) the sex was a, actually has been quite an important part of that.

But, I have often gone to bed with him when I haven’t really wanted to, when I haven’t felt that I wanted to. And I’ve (pause) what you do is, you simply, um, suppress your own needs, because what he wants is to go to bed with you and you tell yourself it really doesn’t matter much either way.

Because Pat described her sexual “availability” and responsiveness as central to her relationship with this man, she was in a bind that didn’t allow much room for her own sexual desire to enter into the equation. As she noted:

PAT: Oh, I’ve said no to him occasionally, but hardly ever, hardly ever. And ’cause, you see, he– That was absolutely wonderful to him. The fact that I never ever turned him down. I mean, it was of *major importance in his life*, that I never said no.

Taking account of the importance of identity helps to clarify some of the competing demands that a woman might be weighing up when faced with the prospect of unwanted sex. But it is important not to see this as solely the effect of a woman’s own (albeit socially produced) psychology. Within any particular sexual interaction there is always the potential for the operation of direct male force to intersect with (and take advantage of) these more subtle pressures. This potential is illustrated by Pat’s description of times she was forced to have sexual intercourse by this lover during periods in their long relationship when they had decided either to “just be friends” or to not see each other any more. Her lover was never violent but, in fact, he did not need to be in order to establish control over the situation:

PAT: Anyway (pause) he’d come in and he’d kiss me. Well that’s fine, but kiss– there are kisses and kisses and our kisses are always reasonably sexual kisses. So, you know, I would only let those go on for, sort of thirty seconds or so and then I’d back off, you see. Well, if he was feeling like being difficult about this he wouldn’t let me back off and he would keep on kissing me, and he would keep on touching me and he would maneuver me into the bedroom.

NICOLA: And so it– would you still be trying to back off during this time?

PAT: Well, I probably wouldn’t be trying that hard or, maybe I– but I mean, I, I, I mean I wouldn’t– I mean if I really got absolutely angry and furious and got into a physical struggle with him, he would simply never have persisted. So (pause) while I say, he’d, he’d (pause) he’d made love to me by force, if I had really yelled and screamed or even raised my voice or, or, or hit him, or – which I would never have done – he would have stopped. So, really, it’s probably, it’s– they’re just games we played.

[gap]

... when I think about it, um, I know perfectly well (pause) because of the sort of person he is that if I really said “absolutely no, no, no, not on any cir– under any circumstances,” then he wouldn’t have persisted, but then, you see, the other thing to that is, that maybe I wouldn’t actually say “absolutely no, no, no, not under any circumstances,” in case he never came back again.

So, although Pat believed that her lover would have stopped forcing her to have sex if she had clearly and unambiguously resisted him, this man would never have had to entertain the possibility of escalating the physical force he sometimes used to exercise power or control in these situations, because of the high improbability of

her ever resisting him to that extent. His force could be embodied in such a way that it could be captured (for the benefit of his identity, presumably) within a plausible conception of just sex, and escape definition as violence. Through the effects of disciplinary power, her resistance was weakened to the point of being prevented in any substantive sense. We could speculate that in part, at least, this was related to the way Pat's sense of herself within this relationship had been powerfully constituted as sexually "available," as the good feminine lover.

Pat's and Sarah's accounts of their experiences show how women can be positioned within either a permissive discourse or a male sexual drive discourse in ways that offer them positive identities. In Sarah's case this was as a mature woman who was known to enjoy sex with many men; and in Pat's case this was as a lover who was sexually available whenever her married lover wanted it. A Foucauldian discursive approach explains how a nexus of the dominant discourses on heterosex can constitute women's sexual subjectivity in complex ways that might result in the social production of "compliant" subjects. In some of these scenarios, this might be a more indirect form of coercion than in others I discuss, and may be different in its implications for understanding the particular man's role and responsibility in the encounter. As I have discussed, for some women situated within this discursive framework, their ability to "please a man" may be a positive aspect of their identity. In this sense, a woman can be recruited into anticipating and meeting a man's "sexual needs" (as they are constituted in this discursive framework) as part of her ongoing construction of a particular kind of identity as a woman. While this could be a perfectly viable identity for some women in some circumstances, it is easy to see how it could become burdensome and overly constraining in other circumstances – particularly given the lack of positively framed identity positions for mature women (as opposed to teenage girls and young women) choosing not to have sex. Another dynamic possibly operating in these situations is the role of female nurturance. Conventional notions of femininity represent (ideal, feminine) women as nurturing, giving, and kind. Clearly, this sets up a range of potentially negative constructions – which many women might be motivated to avoid – for the woman who does not give, or "withholds" sex.

### **Nurturance and pragmatism**

In arguing against normative sexual coercion, I don't think it is necessary to propose an ethic that holds that all sex has to be entered into because both people feel like having sex. It seems possible to imagine legitimate instances where a person chooses to have sex with someone as an act of giving – as a gesture of love or care for another person – even though they don't feel like the physical experience themselves. This is a complex arena in which there is the potential for all sorts of judgment calls about the ethics of such giving in relation to dynamics of power (especially as even the notion of a "free gift" has, following Mauss 1989, generally been argued to exist within a complex set of reciprocal obligations, even if they are vague and unstated). However, even at the most simple level, there is an obvious

distinction between acts of giving that at least feel “free” and “chosen” and those that feel necessary; between those that are experienced as pleasurable or reasonable and those that are experienced as aversive or oppressive.<sup>9</sup> As Ann, who was 29 at the time of our interview, summed it up:

ANN: Sometimes there is giving of, of your own accord and sometimes there is giving because you feel you have to.

NICOLA: Yeah, so that’s a distinction you’d make, too, between the giving thing.

ANN: Mm, giving spontaneously and giving begrudgingly.

While it would be ridiculous to imagine that all “giving of sex” reflects an act of submission in the face of relations of dominance, it is certainly possible that some does. Such giving may be couched in obligation and accompanied by resentment. Or it might be a strategic means to an end.

In the face of strong pressure for women to have sex with male partners irrespective of their own sexual desire, some women report acting according to a logic of nurturance or pragmatism, so that they are able to “go along with sex” in the absence of sexual desire. Such instances of women deciding to have sex with a man because he appears so “needy” or “pathetic,” or because she wants to give him something, or take care of him, or not hurt his feelings, can be seen to arise out of a discourse of male sexual needs and a discourse of femininity that promotes female nurturance. If sex is so important to men, and it can be experienced as “no big deal,” as a mundane or ordinary physical activity by women (see also, Gavey 1989, 1992), then the cultural context is ripe for making sense of a women’s “gift” of sex as something that is too small *not* to give (without appearing unreasonably mean).

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that some women may experience it as “easier” to “let sex happen,” than to keep resisting when they don’t want it. Thus, pragmatic ends, such as getting some sleep, can also enter into the decision. Take Lee, for instance, who was 33 at the time of our interview, and who described a time when she’d allowed a lover to stay the night when he was in town on business. She’d said to him, “I don’t want to make love, but come and stay,” and he said, ‘Oh, okay, that’ll be fine, I, I promise I won’t touch’ sort of thing,” but once he was there:

LEE: . . . he kept saying, just, just, let me do this or just let me do that and that will be all. And, and, I mean this could go on for an hour, sort of thing, and, I, I mean I just wanted to go to sleep really (amused) when I had a busy day the next day (both laughing). So, in the end, in order to do that, in order to both go to sleep and for him to um, to finally relax, I mean he, he seems to be an amazingly sexual person, and I can just feel that sexual sort of energy there and he, he’s no sooner going to go to sleep than fly to the moon. So, so after maybe an hour of, um, saying, me saying, “no,” and him saying “Oh come on, come on” (pause) um I’d finally think “Oh my, God, I mean, (laugh) for a few, for a few hours rest I may as- Peace and quiet, I may as well.” (pause) Um, I mean I’m not quite sure how I’d translated all those

sorts of messages, but I suppose, I suppose he knew when I was saying okay (laughing), we may as well. So we made love, if you can call it that.

So in the end, Lee found it easier to let sex happen, rather than keep resisting, even though her desire not to have sex had remained unchanged. Within this narrative, her ultimate compliance can be seen as a pragmatic decision related to an overriding desire to go to sleep. However, it also can be read in the context of accepting women's gift of sex as "a small thing to do" – a framework that captures the experience of sex in such a way that to continue to refuse becomes difficult to sustain in certain circumstances.

Perhaps cheerleaders for agency (see Bordo 1997) would have a less pessimistic way of understanding this dynamic. The decision to have sex out of altruistic desires offers a relatively powerful position for some women in some situations. But it is perhaps a *feeling* of power that does not cancel out other incitements to "give in" and act according to how she thinks she should or must. Lee vividly described how her partner's neediness, which was unappealing to her, made it difficult for her not to have sex with him:

LEE: . . . it wasn't that he was unkind, though. And I suppose that made it even worse. I mean if he had been, um, despicable, and power hungry and all those other sort of macho type things, then, I, I'd have no problems really in sort of metaphorically kicking him in the balls (laughing). But because he wasn't like that. He was actually quite cute, and, and pathetic- Ahh, that's what it is, and that's what used to turn me off as well. It was pathetic.

NICOLA: The way that he-

LEE: Pleading. And wanted to have sex with me. And so I'd land up feeling sorry for him. I'd certainly land up feeling turned off.

[gap]

It was me feeling sorry for him. Him, he had these big sort of puppy dog eyes and (laughs). You just imagine little sort of tears running out of them, "Oh, please, mummy."

Even though Lee felt sexually "turned off" by this man's neediness, her account of these situations literally evokes a sort of maternal power and responsibility that induced her to "take care of" him. These sorts of reasons given for having sex in the absence of (sexual) desire can arguably be seen as the expressions of women's agency; albeit an agency that is constrained by the narrow range of possibilities that are culturally weighted toward sex on men's terms.

As Lee said, in describing some of the things she would be saying to herself under the pressure of this lover trying to get her to have sex with him, "it's a nothing-":

LEE: One was that, um, oh, why don't you just say "yes," I mean it's, it's a nothing-it's like, having sex is like getting up and having breakfast . . .

[gap]

I think in a way that, um, I was going to say, that was a way of making it, making the *ordinariness* of it okay. I think it was just ordinary, it is just like having a cup of tea.

NICOLA: It's a way of making the *ordinariness* of it okay?

LEE: Mmm, so rather than it being really special and exciting.

This construction of sex as “ordinary” perhaps works to reconcile a felt need to do it in the absence of one’s own sexual desire. Yet, while it might be experienced as a “nothing” for some women on some occasions, unwanted sex is not always a matter of fact as having a cup of tea, or “brushing your hair,” as another woman Sue described it (see Gavey 1989). Marilyn and the women in Băban and David’s (1994) research, for example, recounted the terrible anxieties that can accompany the fear of an unwanted pregnancy. Another point that is often ignored in discussions of unwanted sex is what it actually feels like at a physical level. As Tracey, who was 30 at the time of our interview, said:

TRACEY: When people talk about having sex, it’s always sort of taken for granted that it *feels good*. But I reckon when you’re not in the mood it doesn’t feel good. When you’re not turned on it feels sore. It irritates your whole body. Arrrgh (pause) the thought of it makes a shiver go down my spine.

A number of women described the double-bind they experienced when they felt like they did not want to have sex with their partner within a context in which obligations of reciprocity deemed it the “right” thing to do. Ann, for instance, described her guilt about not feeling like having sex with her current partner, despite not feeling directly pressured by him:

ANN: I feel perfectly able to say no. I mean, I’m never pressured into it, but there is sometimes that feeling of guilt that, oh maybe I should, because, you know, it is, he is a lovely man, does these things, but you know, um. And I don’t know why I have that, “maybe I should.” It’s me more than him, you know, but there is that slight feeling of guilt.

Similarly, Lee said, “if we were still in contact now, I’d also feel, still feel um, prudish, and frigid and a bit unfair if I didn’t, um, if I wasn’t sexually responsive to him.” Chloe described the impact of declining sex in circumstances where the obligations of reciprocal giving were particularly salient – her boyfriend had taken her with him on an overseas trip he had won:

CHLOE: I remember sitting on the bed and him sort of making some suggestion that we made love or something and just not wanting to, just knowing that I didn’t want to and just absolute- this feeling of absolute gloom sinking over and feeling really bad about myself too, because I didn’t want to, and knowing that I wasn’t actually prepared to, or able to, override it this time or any more,

or whatever. And being there for ten days and going to this- oh, that made it really hard again because, this fantastic island, and fruit for breakfast, and sort of staying at the most expensive hotel . . .

[gap]

Feeling like I'd come on this holiday with him and that somehow I wasn't doing my bit. . . . Um, that I was spoiling it for him. Yeah, just somehow that I wasn't doing what I should be doing. And just, yeah, just feeling like, even when I talk about it now, I sort of feel like I've got concrete in my legs. It's that sort of feeling of, um, (pause) it is, it- like it's a choice, sure, I'm saying I don't want to have sex, but it isn't a choice because I didn't have anywhere to go from there.

Clearly, it was understood by them both that the implicit form of exchange required of Chloe was sex. Again, her account highlights the limits of choice, and nods to the absence of a legitimate and positive position from which a mature woman in a relationship might choose *not* to have sex in certain contexts where it would be expected.

### The cost of real choice

Not all choices are equal. Choices about what we say and do are laden with social and personal meanings and consequences. It is a truism that many of us in the West are saturated with choice – especially relatively trivial choices about what to consume – and theoretically free to indulge choice at so many different points in our daily lives. Yet at the same time the notion of free choice is overlaid in a way that obscures the cultural constraints on many of our choices. If we properly take account of the kinds of consequences that might follow some choices compared to others then the whole notion of free choice gets quite muddy. In the chapter so far I have discussed mainly the ways in which women might unknowingly conform to social norms through the “positive” pull of normality or as an outcome of prioritizing other values – such as a particular kind of positive sexual identity or sense of self as feminine, nurturing, and giving. In these ways, a woman's behavior can be seen to be regulated by implicit and explicit norms, in the absence of particular insights into the “coercive” power of these norms. In such situations, a woman's “compliance” might even be produced without any conscious awareness of the effects of transgressing these norms. This is not to imply that the man's actions in these sexual contexts are irrelevant; of course they are vitally important in contributing to a relational context in which the woman must act. But through not encountering resistance of a kind that cannot be captured within a normative conceptualization of heterosex (as simply part and parcel of sex), the man and his actions can inhabit innocence. A woman's compliance with unwanted sex can also, of course, be the outcome of an engagement not only with these norms, but also with the direct policing of them by the man she is with. Her choice in this case comes from actively weighing up the pros and cons of alternative courses of action, with the knowledge and experience of what the consequences might be. While

this distinction is obviously overstated, as in practice these two possibilities may fuse together, it is essential to recognize how noncompliance can be directly punished by men in ways that either make it aversive or intensify its aversiveness and make it potentially untenable.

At the relatively subtle end of this spectrum of coercive sexuality are interactions that have been classified as “interpersonal coercion” by Finkelhor and Yllö (1983, 1985).<sup>10</sup> In these kinds of situations women receive direct censure for violating the norms of an implicit sexual contract. Chloe described arguments over sex in a long-term relationship of about four years’ duration:

CHLOE: And, um, really getting, like getting into major arguments because I didn’t want to have sex. Like, that– not actually being forced to have sex, but sometimes saying yes when I didn’t really want to–

NICOLA: To avoid the argument?

CHLOE: Yeah. And the argument standing out as the most unpleasant thing. Things like actually being called a fucking bitch and having the door slammed. And trying always to explain that it didn’t mean that I didn’t care because I didn’t want to have sex, but never ever succeeding.

These kinds of interpersonal consequences of declining unwanted sex position women in highly unfavorable ways. If a woman is able to shrug off these labels (and not believe that she is “really” a “fucking bitch,”) then perhaps she can stand up for her own desires without great cost (although it is hard to imagine this kind of interaction going on in a relationship without an erosive effect on well-being). But, the greater the extent to which a woman’s reality is shaped by dominant discourses of sex and gender, the less likely it is that she will have an alternative framework from which to more positively interpret her actions. This will be affected both by the features of her relationship (what he expects, says, does) as well as her own understandings and values.

In the next part of this chapter I will discuss some situations in which we need to consider how the kind of power Foucault calls disciplinary or bio-power coexists with, and is at times enmeshed with, not only more conventional notions of repressive power but also with violence. Foucault (1982: 220) distinguished between relationships of power and relationships of violence (see also Chapter 3). He characterized a relationship of power as “a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others”; whereas a relationship of violence “acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities.” “Its opposite pole,” he went on to say, “can only be passivity.” In the case of rape and sexual coercion, the entanglement of power and violence is often difficult to partition because the presence of violence and force is ambiguously present even in some situations that are not marked by direct force or the explicit threat of violence (see also Deveaux 1994). The potential for male violence against women is arguably ever present in at least some relationships and contexts, in ways that might invoke fear and passivity and reduce the options for acting otherwise – for example, in a relationship where a woman has been repeatedly

violently assaulted by her partner, or in an encounter with an unknown man acting with overfamiliarity and sexual innuendo in an isolated setting. In these contexts, cultural knowledge about the risks of sexual violence may reasonably instill fear and caution in a woman, such that a haunting possibility of violence comes to occupy a powerful substitute for actual force. In fact, as Elizabeth Stanko (1996) has suggested, well-meaning advice encouraging women to be vigilant about their (sexual) safety instills the message that women must always be alert to the potential for sexual danger:

Questions about how women err and miss the signs of potential dangerous sexual encounters with men arise commonly during the questioning of women alleging rape during trials. Women are asked: why did you think that this man would *just* take you home, unmolested after meeting him at a pub? Why did you not think about men's sexual intentions when you interact with casual acquaintances? former partners? colleagues? Women are considered cultural dopes if we miss the cues which, as women, we are expected to *know* simply because we are women.

(Stanko 1996: 56–7; *emphasis in original*)

Indeed, early empirical research found that many women report that they feel fear about sexual attacks and a sense of sexual vulnerability (Burt and Estep 1981a), and that women are in general more afraid than men when they are out alone at night (Riger and Gordon 1981; Riger, Gordon, and LeBailly 1978). Gordon and Riger (1991: 21) concluded that rape was a significant concern for most women, and that the fear of rape was “central to the day-to-day concerns” of around one third of the women in their study. A subsequent study also concluded that fear of rape is widespread among women, to the point that it restricts women's activities through their taking precautions to avoid it (Hickman and Muehlenhard 1997; see also Ferraro 1996).

### Consenting to (avoid) rape

Earlier in this chapter I discussed one aspect of the social processes that might lead a woman into participating in sex she does not want – that is, the absence of a reliable language in which to say no. Ann was one woman who identified a problem in finding a way to turn down unwanted sex. She spoke of the pressure on girls when she was younger to be “promiscuous.” In accounting for the effects of that pressure, part of her answer referred to this absence of a language with which to say no.

NICOLA: Where was that pressure coming from?

ANN: [gap] . . . it's partly having the language to say no. Like, this sort of amorphous feeling of, “Ooh, I'm not sure about this,” but [not] having the language to say it, and, and, and also I guess, feeling that if you said it, it would[n't] have any effect. Because there is always that fear that you could say no and it would carry on anyway, and, and being physically less, and then you'd be raped sort of thing, and then it would be terrible.

In Ann's account, however, her recruitment into sex she didn't desire was not simply the outcome of lacking a way in which to refuse it – although that appears to have been part of the problem. Her decision to go along with this sex was also apparently produced through her fear about the consequences of refusal. In this extract, Ann highlights a more sinister factor that might be involved in complying with unwanted sex in some circumstances. If a woman's more subtle forms of conveying a lack of interest in having sex are not attended to and respected by a man, then this possibly raises for her the specter of how far he might be willing to go to get what he wants (i.e., the potential of rape). That women in such circumstances might consider this potential for rape when deciding to "go along with" a man's unwelcome sexual advances perhaps illustrates what was meant by earlier feminist rhetoric that "all men benefit from rape."<sup>11</sup>

Ann mentioned that she had recently been talking with a friend about these experiences of unpleasant sex with boys that they had experienced together as teenagers; and how (perhaps in anticipation of our interview) she had reconceptualized them as sort-of-rape:

ANN: I was saying to my friend, Kelly, the other day, it was amazing how . . . we weren't raped as teenagers, you know, like the things we used to do. And then I thought, well we were sort of raped, really, when you think we were driven off in cars and we would end up in the park somewhere and we would have sort of boys having sexual experiences with us that we didn't- We often- like it was quite disgusting, like "wasn't he revolting, his body was so awful," mmm and a sense of, um, being isolated too, like not knowing, you know, you are by yourself with this boy and there is always that physical difference in strength, you know . . .

This difficulty, or near impossibility, of saying no can render women almost "unrapeable." But, as Ann noted, part of her difficulty in having the language to say no was related to her fear that it may have no effect. A similar point was made by Pat in describing an occasion with a relative stranger, in which she did not emphasize her nonconsent. Through not saying "no" and not resisting physically as hard as she could she was thus rendered technically unrapeable. In the context of these sorts of experiences, we can understand Pat's and Ann's inability to say no as forms of strategic agency that prevented them from being "raped" but which were limited to the extent that they did not prevent them from being forced to have sex against their will (this distinction will be unpacked in Chapter 6).

In the incident with the relative stranger, Pat had gone to his home and he had used what she described as "emotional blackmail" to pressure her to have sex with him:

PAT: He actually said, you know, "you've come over here and, if you didn't want to make love, why did you come," and, a lot of stuff like that. That actually probably stunned me a bit because it was really the first time anyone's put it on to me in such a heavy way in words.

In this way, we see how a man can assert a moral framework in which he is able to establish the high ground through exploiting traditional discourses about female sexuality. From this vantage point, a woman's actions that can be seen to transgress some very rigid boundary of chastity (such as "over" friendliness toward a man) can be interpreted as "asking for it" or leading a man on. If a woman reneges on sex beyond that point she can easily be cast as unreasonable and unfair within this conventional set of discourses (which are, of course, saturated with rape myths).

Pat ended up having sex with this man because "he said all these things, and he, you know, started undressing me and I just, you know, gave up, I suppose." He was physically rough toward her: "He bit my thighs and he bit my breasts and (pause) um (pause) I had finger marks on me as well and, and my legs and, and breasts were terribly bruised for two or three weeks." Unsurprisingly, Pat said that she had been frightened during this encounter: "I was terrified. I was really quite scared, because he was quite violent." Even so, she did not consider this event to be rape:

NICOLA: So when you look back on that do you consider that to be sexual assault,

PAT: Oh yeah,

NICOLA: Yeah, or rape?

PAT: Well I wasn't raped, raped, because I did- I- See, I've actually never been raped, but I mean really it's a fine line, isn't it, between saying yes, whether you want to or not, to somebody like that, that I didn't really want to go to bed with. Ah, I've, I mean I suppose I've been (pause, sighing) sort of pushed around (pause) but, but not hurt. Just (pause) manhandled (long pause) but not (pause) violently. [gap] He, he didn't rape me, because I really more or less consented.

NICOLA: And how did you consent?

PAT: I (pause) acquiesced, in my actions, but not my words. I didn't say "oh, okay," I just let him get on with it.

NICOLA: So what would have been, what would have made that rape in your mind?

PAT: Well, if I'd sort of- a- If I had tried to keep my clothes on (pause), and he'd taken them off, or if he'd simply forced his way into me without even bothering to take my clothes off. (pause) I, I can remember the odd occasion when, (pause) when, I've been forced into having intercourse, (pause) but (pause, sighs) I've never really felt as though I was raped. I mean I didn't even really feel I was- I didn't feel as though I was raped then. I'm- my (pause) um, my feelings on that occasion, were (pause) I'd had a very narrow squeak. Because I really- (pause) he (pause) I was, (pause) I, I do think, I remember feeling I had actually overreacted, because probably he wasn't going to do any more than he did.

This final phrase in Pat's account is extremely telling. In the context of an experience in which Pat described the man as being "quite violent," and herself as being "terrified," the suggestion that she may have overreacted because he "probably wasn't going to do any more than he did" begs question. Pat said she was not raped because she "acquiesced"; she "let him get on with it." She was still subjected to intercourse against her will – and it could be argued that this was forced or, at least,

carried out through threat of force or implied threat of force. But her strategic decision to “more or less” consent (in the most passive of ways – by not putting up a fight) somehow saved her from the same experience of forced sex, constituted *as rape*. Perhaps the ultimate pragmatic reason for apparently “consenting” to (i.e., not actively resisting beyond a certain point) unwanted sex, is to avoid being “raped.”<sup>12</sup> Of course the experience may not have been exactly the same had she attempted to resist this man more strenuously. It is possible that his violence might have escalated and she might have experienced even greater terror and suffered more harm. It is always possible, of course, that she might have successfully thwarted his sexual violence. This account, I believe, highlights the fine line that can exist between rape and nonrape, from the point of view of a woman’s experience. It also raises a question about what features of an encounter make something mean that it was “rape” rather than something else to the woman involved (as opposed to an independent observer’s judgment about what took place, perhaps). In Pat’s case, above, it seems that the critical element to be avoided was the potential to be in a situation in which it was *unambiguously clear* that she had *absolutely no* control. If she could retain enough control to avoid getting to that point, even if it meant strategically going along with forced sex, then it was somehow probably preferable. Where this gets very tricky is in terms of how we think about it in relation to the man who violently forces sex, and how he can be brought to account for his actions. Criminal justice system methods of punishing men for rape or even sexual assault currently rely on the women who are the targets of the violence and coercion becoming “rape victims” when, in various ways, this may not always be what they become. This is a challenge, I think, to bear in mind when formulating moral arguments against rape (see Chapter 6).

While women might acquiesce to forced sex in order to avoid “rape,” they may also avoid labeling an experience of violently forced sex as rape through confusion wrought by other people’s reactions to the event, and in part because of the complications that such a construction would bring to their lives. Ann told me about having been raped when she was 19 (ten years prior) by her 30-year-old flatmate (room mate) (with whom, she said, there had been no prior sexual contact, or even “flirtatiousness”). She woke up to find him in her bed:

ANN: . . . he was in the bed with me, and I was being woken up with him sort of groping me, as it were, and I was quite disorientated, and thinking God, it’s Ralph, you know, he’s in bed with me . . . [gap] I mean it all happened quite quickly really, but I remember thinking quite clearly, “Well if I don’t- If I try and get out of the bed, perhaps if I run away or something . . . he might rape me (pause) so I had better just . . .”

NICOLA: If you try and run away you mean?

ANN: If I tried it, if I’d resisted, then he might rape me, you know. So he did anyway, sort of thing, really, when you think about it, when I look back.

Although she did not conceptualize the experience as rape at the time, Ann said that he had been rough, and had left her bleeding and, later, frightened, “confused,” “nervous within the house,” and hypervigilant about making sure she was never asleep before he’d gone to bed. However, it was not just the direct consequences of the rape that she had to contend with. Ann said that Ralph asked her on subsequent nights if she wanted to “come and sleep with me tonight?”, to which she refused. In the aftermath, she was constructed and positioned, by Ralph, the man who raped her, as well as her other male flatmate, as “sexually uptight”:

ANN: And then what happened after that was that I got this image of being this uptight (pause) bitch and this, uptight little pain. You know, I got the image of being quite- I got the reputation within the flat with him and David because it had- I think it had been a bit of a joke between them, that I was a sort of uptight, I was pretty uptight. And I did get quite uptight, I did get quite uptight.

[gap]

NICOLA: Do you remember, um, you know, you said the next morning you felt like you- couldn’t, it’s not something you wanted to talk about. Do you have a sense of why that was, you know, what was about it?

ANN: I remember thinking it was me. Like (pause), ’cause this guy, Ralph, used to have lots of women around and used to sleep with lots of women, and I always knew that, and so did David, the other flatmate, and I remember thinking “it’s me not understanding how things work in Melbourne or how things work with older people, or how I should be if I wasn’t uptight.”

[gap]

But our relationship, like I say, changed. I became quite, um (pause), he used to call me, they used to say “Miss Prissy,” “Here’s Miss Prissy,” “Here she comes in,” and you know, “Here’s Miss Prissy,” and it’s like, “Oh for God’s sake, it was just a, just a bit of nothing.” And I didn’t ever confront him about it.

Ann’s experience here shows how norms – or, at least our understanding of what is normal – can even capture an obviously rape-like experience within some notion of “normal” sex. What is particularly salient in this model of sex is, once again, the complete absence of any necessity for establishing a woman’s desire or interest in order for the sex to pass as “consensual” from (this) man’s-eye point of view – a state of affairs that was also clearly evident in Pat’s experience with the aggressive relative stranger.

In Ann’s case, this rape-like experience was constructed within her immediate social milieu as “just a bit of nothing”; she was an “uptight bitch,” overreacting to the normal ways of the world (“I remember thinking ‘it’s me not understanding how things work . . . with older people, or *how I should be* if I wasn’t uptight” [emphasis added]). She identified ongoing threads of this framework for making sense of unwanted sex – based on these messages that a woman should always be

up for sex, and blaming herself for any lack of desire – in her less dramatic everyday experiences within her current heterosexual relationship:

NICOLA: Do you think that that was significant in terms of like the way you saw yourself and the way you felt about yourself?

ANN: Yeah I do. It's funny that, I've never thought about that before. But I still have that feeling sometimes that it's me, it's my fault if I don't want sex or I'm being uptight, or um (pause). If there's, ah maybe, another relationship since then if there has been things I haven't wanted to do I've often felt like (pause) I shouldn't be uptight, you know, I should be more- I think that thing of me being a bit uptight. That was the big thing, the big word that was labeled on me, that was exactly how I was seen after that.

Ann went on to theorize the implications of not constructing that rape-like experience as rape at the time. As she said, it ended up protecting her flatmate from any negative consequences of raping:

ANN: We just make it easier, it's like- and he doesn't have to think of it as rape. It's just what he does to women that he wants to sleep with, you know, he wants to fuck with, I mean, you know, but- He doesn't ever have to confront his behavior, or the effects of it, um, and because, you sort of protect them from it. You know. And you internalize the distressing effects of it as well so that they don't – as the victim or whatever – have to see you as the victim or whatever, so they don't even have to see the distressing effects.

[gap]

I remember thinking, oh well, maybe I wore my nightie around the house a bit too often, or maybe I encouraged him in some way or, you know, he was just being friendly, he was drunk and, you know. I really did think about it in such a way as to not blame him although I acted, my behavior towards him and my attitudes certainly conveyed that, that I was pissed off. And I remember thinking I shouldn't be so uptight, I must be nicer to them, but it was like I just couldn't stop myself, I just couldn't, my body just couldn't bring itself to be-

She described how she would react differently now, in a way that would clarify it as rape, if the same thing happened. In this hypothetical situation “rape” is reformulated as something that is not inherently worse than the same act of forced sex enabled to some extent through passivity born of fear:

ANN: If it happened now, if he got into my, if somebody got into my bed like that, a flatmate, and I said- I would be a lot stronger for a start. I wouldn't say “What are you doing Ralph, you are in the wrong bed, I think maybe you should go back to your own bed,” or whatever, I would say “Fuck off.” And um, I, I think I'd really- it's funny, I don't know if, I, I mean I can imagine I could get raped

now, but I would *really* fight it. I'd just fight it every, every- I mean I'd physically fight it much harder. I mean I really would. I wouldn't just go rigid and say nothing and- . . . if that happened I, I would have done anything, pinched him, bitten him, scratched him, scraped him, anything. And if it still had have happened, I would have pressed charges, you know, I would have, yeah. And I guess part of that in a way, by resisting so strongly it would have built it up to the point which I, then made it easier to conceptualize as rape.

It is important to bear in mind the sobering message from Gregory Matoesian's (1993) and Susan Ehrlich's (2001) analyses of the language of acquaintance rape trials before drawing any conclusions about the validity of a woman's way of labeling a rape-like experience. They have described how the processes of rape trials work to transform a woman's experience of sexual violation into "routine consensual sex" (Matoesian 1993: 1). Of particular interest, in relation to experiences like Pat's and Ann's above, Ehrlich (2001) has shown how the principle of "utmost resistance" can still be required in these contexts to prove that a woman's reported experience of unwanted forced sex is rape and not just sex.

## Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Tim McCreanor for drawing my attention to this novel, and I acknowledge Emily Martin's (2003) prior use of this same excerpt.
- 2 Some feminists like Catharine MacKinnon would emphasize that even this distinction is not clear cut in a context of gender inequality (*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: and see also Przybylo 2013b). I agree that this distinction is not always clear cut; at the same time, I think it is important to retain the option of discriminating between these different possibilities.
- 3 This is illustrated quite literally in current promotions for drugs like Viagra, in which "erectile dysfunction" is portrayed as keeping couples apart and potentially destroying relationships ("Do something about it now before it's too late." [e.g., *New Zealand Listener*, March 3, 2001: 96). In advertisements directed at the New Zealand public, slogans like the following have been used: "She kept us together when everything seemed to be falling apart" (e.g., *New Zealand Listener*, March 3, 2001: 96) and "Because of his courage we're even closer together" (e.g., *New Zealand Listener*, March 17, 2001: 15).
- 4 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Elements of this dynamic continue to be reported in more recently published research, and are not only restricted to *young* people (e.g., Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras 2008; Braksmajer 2017; Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Cacchioni 2015; Jeffrey and Barata 2017; Jozkowski and Peterson 2013; Marston and Lewis 2014; Thomas, Stelzl, and Lafrance 2017; see also Hlavka 2014).
- 5 See Weatherall (2002) for a discussion of conversation analysis from the point of view of a feminist discursive psychologist.
- 6 Kitinger and Frith's (1999) argument extends beyond this observation to suggest that the assumptions embedded in the "just say no" message elevate one particular way of refusing sex – that, is the direct verbal "no" – above other legitimate and culturally normative ways of "doing refusals." They argue that these other ways of doing refusal – such as using silence or even weak acceptances – are widely understood and are more normative ways of declining an offer than directly saying no, which would typically be understood to be heard as rude. Ironically, then, the promotion of a "just say no" message might work to instate and authorize a method of declining unwanted sex that is likely to be supremely difficult for all English-speaking cultural members in a wide range of delicate interpersonal situations. Moreover, they suggest, it supports rapists' claims that if a woman hasn't said

“no” in the prescribed way then she hasn’t refused sex. As Ehrlich’s (2001) analysis has pointed out, the “just say no” message could simply just reinforce legalistic institutional characterizations of women’s best attempts to minimize the violence of a sexual assault by submitting to coerced sex as “deficient” refusals (see also Leader–Elliott and Naffine 2000). Yet an alternative interpretation, as Kitzinger and Frith (1999: 310) argued, is that “men who claim not to have understood an indirect refusal (as in, ‘she didn’t actually say no’) are claiming to be cultural dopes, and playing rather disingenuously on how refusals are usually done and understood to be done.” Admittedly, the picture is possibly more complicated than this analysis suggests at face value. As Kitzinger and Frith parenthetically concede, it is possible that women’s acceptances of sexual offers and invitations by men are performed, at least sometimes, in ways that are more hesitant and diffident than other conversational acceptances, which are typically immediate and direct (in the cultural context of a sexual double standard). This might mean that the interpretive task required of men does require a tad more skill and sophistication for reading slightly more nuanced distinctions. Nevertheless, as Crawford (1995) has also argued, this kind of miscommunication model for explaining rape not only deflects men’s responsibility for rape, but it can be deployed in such a way that women are directly blamed for not preventing rape. Consistent with my overall argument, the problem can still be seen to lie in the cultural arrangements that legitimize heterosexual sex in the absence of clear signals of women’s desire and pleasure.

- 7 Of course, they also have potential implications for much more besides identity – such as for the interpersonal ambience of a relationship, the ongoing existence of a relationship, economic consequences, and other emotional and social disruptions – some of which I go on to discuss later in the chapter.
- 8 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Sarah was interviewed for a study oriented to condoms in relation to HIV prevention – similar expectations and beliefs might also work to override concerns about contracting STIs in general, or even unwanted pregnancy.
- 9 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Ela Przybylo (2013b) rightly points out that my distinction between sex that is unwanted “only in the sense that it takes place in the absence of sexual desire” (p. 128) and sex that is unwanted because women don’t feel like they have a choice, is far too ambiguous. For me, it becomes clearly unjust as soon as she feels like she does not have a choice; and that is emphasised if it happens regularly and unevenly. But even this is a slippery and imperfect line. When norms are so powerful that they create a shadow over other possible ways of being and acting, then how do we get to the point of identifying that we feel we don’t have a choice? If we don’t even see other alternatives, then how do we get to understand that our behavior is constrained (in unjust ways)?
- 10 Finkelhor and Yllö’s (1983, 1985) typology outlined four basic types of sexual coercion that occur within marriage, but which equally apply to other heterosexual relationships. At the more extreme end of the spectrum are the threat of physical force and physical coercion itself. At the even more subtle end of their continuum is “social coercion.” This refers to the kinds of compliance with social norms that I have been discussing so far in this chapter. In some analyses, this would include the originary pressure to be heterosexual in the first place, through the political erasure of “lesbian existence” (Rich 1980). As Adrienne Rich (1980: 648) argued in her classic analysis of “compulsory heterosexuality”:

to acknowledge that for women heterosexuality may not be a “preference” at all but something that has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force, is an immense step to take if you consider yourself freely and “innately” heterosexual. Yet the failure to examine heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including both physical violence and false consciousness.

Muehlenhard and Schrag (1991), for instance, have argued that the pressure on women to be in a heterosexual relationship is itself a form of indirect sexual coercion.

- 11 I would not endorse this claim, however, in part because it buys into accepting that the male sexual drive discourse is overdetermining of all men's sexuality, such that all men are always-already ready for sex. Not only is this assumption unhelpful, but it is not well supported empirically (see Chapter 7).
- 12 Pat did say that she would call that experience "sexual assault," but this was almost a technical concession rather than an emphasized point of view (and it is relevant to note that sexual assault is not a legal term in New Zealand). For other women, who clearly do label such experiences "sexual assault" or "rape," their actions, as Susan Ehrlich (2001: 144–5) has suggested, might be thought of as strategic resistance to potentially escalating violence:

Weighing the relative dangers of highly restricted options – being sexually assaulted, being hit, being beaten, being killed – the complainants and their witnesses acted in ways that (they believed) would prevent more serious and prolonged instances of violence.



## PART 3

# Going too far, not going far enough

My role – and that is too emphatic a word – is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed.

*(Michel Foucault 1982; quoted in Martin 1988: 10)*

In the final decades of the twentieth century, rape got noticed as an important social issue, and date rape became big news. In the first part of this book I examined the recent history of this massive overhaul in our understandings of rape. I looked at the social science research, which supported feminist analyses of rape – both about its extent and its place within mainstream culture, not as a product of deviant psychology, but as something more normal and more closely related to the wider oppression of women. Unsurprisingly, this new take on rape met with controversy right from the beginning. I considered the so-called “backlash” critics, who have attempted to undermine what they call the victim-advocacy research that has drawn attention to the scope of the problem of rape, and date rape in particular. In Part 2, I traversed a critical feminist analysis of normal heterosexual practice, including an analysis of women’s experiences of sexual coercion within heterosexual relationships. In this section of the book, my concern was to reveal some of the hidden limits on choice within normative heterosexuality. In doing so, I hope to have disrupted any complacency that backlash criticism might generate in response to feminist claims and social science research about the problems of date rape and sexual coercion. Even where critics might be right to challenge the definitions of rape (but mostly they’re not) or to question the portrayals of women and men in feminist anti-rape activism (although often they are themselves equally black and white), the persistent weakness of their arguments rests in what they are willing to accept as “just” sex.

In this third section of the book, my focus changes to a critical reflection on our own feminist approaches to rape. I will revisit debates over the meaning of the new research on rape that shows it to be far more widespread than was previously thought, and reveals that women are mostly raped by men they know. In my view, this research is extremely important for its role in spotlighting unjust practices that were not long ago considered either impossible or merely part and parcel of normal sex. Yet at the same time, I want to unpack what have become orthodox views on rape and sexual coercion within feminist social science. I pursue these lines of questioning in the spirit of a both/and logic. I respect this research and these views, and see myself as aligned with this whole paradigm of work. However, I believe it is timely to pause and consider some of the assumptions that underlie our approach, and what the implications might be for understanding both sexual victimization and normative heterosexuality and, ultimately, stopping rape.

# 6

## CAN A WOMAN BE RAPED AND NOT KNOW IT?<sup>1</sup>

[F]eminist theory [must] . . . not leave a wide open space in which a backlash can become established.

*(Wendy Hollway 1995: 129)*

When a woman says she wasn't raped, but describes an experience of forced unwanted sexual intercourse, what are we to think? Was she "really" raped, despite disowning that label for her experience? Or, does her refusal of that label suggest that her interpretation of the experience as other than rape made it so? And, what does it say about our culture(s) that there can be so much ambiguity over the differential diagnosis of rape versus sex? How should we conceptualize and judge the myriad coercive sexual acts that lie somewhere between rape and consensual sex? And finally, is being the target of violence or coercion always the same thing as being the *victim* of such violence or coercion?

Such decisions, about what to label as rape, and who to regard as rape victims, are embedded in a conceptual minefield. In this chapter I will begin to explore some of the convoluted layers of issues from which such questions arise. My position on these matters is not an entirely stable one. In thinking through and around these questions, I am unable to settle comfortably into a straightforward unitary position from which to craft an argument. Yet in many ways this ambivalence seems important as a way of not foreclosing on the complicated murky issues at the interface between (hetero) sex and sexual victimization. Even at the most basic level, I want to talk about and against rape and sexual victimization (as though these are straightforward terms) at the same time as destabilizing these very categories, in the belief that this is an important part of the same fight at a different level.

I will re-trace some of the changes in research on rape and sexual victimization over the two decades from the early 1980s, and consider some of the implications of the new feminist social science approach from that time. In particular, I will

consider three points that raise the need for re-examining current conventions for conceptualizing sexual victimization. These are the concept of the unacknowledged rape victim, the loose distinction between rape and attempted rape, and the use of the term sexual victimization to refer to a broad range of arguably normative coercive heterosexual practices. In working from an assemblage of my shifting positions I will simultaneously tell at least two, potentially opposing, stories about feminism and sexual victimization. When either of these stories are told on their own as unproblematic accounts, I think there is a risk that we may either leave open a fertile space for backlash to take hold, or that we may unintentionally become part of the backlash ourselves.

### **A starting point**

In a timely and convincing article, Martha Burt and Rhoda Estep (1981b) mapped the nascent influence of 1970s feminism on a redefinition and reconceptualization of sexual assault. As social scientists, they endorsed the more inclusive definition of sexual assault that was emerging from feminism at the time, drawing attention to the similarity between rape and other coercive sexual practices. Moreover, they argued strongly for the benefits for all women who have been sexually assaulted claiming the victim role. Although aware of what they called the “negative social value” and the “obligations” of the victim role, they proposed that the benefits would include “the right to claim assistance, sympathy, temporary relief from other role responsibilities, legal recourse, and other similar advantages” (Burt and Estep 1981b: 16).

Burt and Estep (*ibid.*: 25) suggested that the analyses of the feminist movement increased the visibility of all forms of harassment, brutality, and violence against women by men. They further claimed that:

In each instance, that analysis leads to challenges to the ways in which the dominant ideology has privatized, psychologized, and denied the victimization of women. “Victimization” is political. Power dictates who victimizes and who gets victimized, and power dictates what will be viewed as victimization. A person recognized, legitimated, as a victim is recognized as someone who has received a wrong, who has been treated unfairly and unjustly.

In this way, the language of victimization was proposed as a way of making sense of and opposing the moral injustice of women’s oppression through violence and harassment; injustices that had for too long been routinely denied and minimized within what they referred to as dominant ideology.

### **The “new” feminist research on sexual victimization**

Since 1981 much has changed on the landscape of sexual politics and cultural politics more generally. As I discussed in Part 1 of this book, both feminist activism and

feminist social science have been instrumental in promoting a major re-think of rape and sexual victimization in many Western societies. Many of the sentiments expressed by Burt and Estep have been echoed and developed in feminist-influenced<sup>2</sup> social science research, which has itself become one of the most dominant paradigms for researching rape and sexual coercion within psychology. Within a very short time we moved from a climate in which rape was widely regarded as rare to one in which rape is regarded as a widespread social problem. For example, in the late 1970s and early 1980s Deming and Eppy (1981: 374) referred to rape as “a statistically rare event,” and Shorter (1977: 481) surmised that “the average woman’s chances of actually being raped in her lifetime are still minimal.” However, in the 1980s, new research was being published which suggested that up to 15 per cent (Koss *et al.* 1987) or 24 per cent (Russell 1984) of women have experienced rape at some point in their lives. Moreover, these estimates of rape prevalence have been regarded by some researchers as likely underestimates of the extent of the problem due to the unwillingness of some women to disclose their experiences to a researcher (e.g., Russell 1982, 1984).

This new feminist empirical research was specifically designed to overcome the limitations of previous estimates of rape prevalence (which relied on reports of rape to the police or reports within national crime surveys; see Chapter 2). In doing so, this work introduced an important methodological point of departure from any previous attempts to measure the scope of rape. Women were not just asked whether they had been raped,<sup>3</sup> but rather whether they had had any experiences that matched behavioral descriptions of rape. For example, they were asked whether they had ever had sexual intercourse when they didn’t want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force to make them (e.g., Koss *et al.* 1987). Moreover, this question would be one among many such specific questions women were asked about a range of coercive sexual experiences. Such methodological refinements were designed to be sensitive to women’s reluctance to report rape. They were seemingly successful, and the body of research produced shocking new data showing widespread rape and sexual victimization.

At the same time, as I have already discussed in Chapter 2, two other important changes to the picture of rape emerged from this research. First, Diana Russell (1982, 1984), and later others, showed that women were far more likely to be raped by husbands, lovers, boyfriends, and dates than by strangers. Not only were the cultural blinkers lifted which had enabled this to be regarded as just sex, but it was found that such rapes were far more common than the stereotypical rape by a stranger. Secondly, a dimensional view of rape and sexual victimization replaced a typological view in much of the research. That is, while rape is the extreme act, it is regarded as being on a continuum with more subtle forms of coercion from an unwanted kiss to unwanted sexual intercourse submitted to as a result of continual verbal pressure. The research by Koss and others (myself included – e.g., Gavey 1991a, 1991b) claimed that over 50 per cent of women have experienced some form of sexual victimization on this continuum.

The dimensional view of rape combined with data showing the high prevalence of all forms of sexual victimization, especially within legitimate heterosexual

relationships, had two important effects: (1) it construed experiences that would have previously fallen within the realm of sex as forms of sexual *victimization*, and (2) it implicitly invited a critical examination of the whole domain of normative heterosexual practice (although this tends not to have been explicitly discussed within the empirical literature).

It is perhaps not surprising that these feminist-influenced shifts in the meaning of rape and sexual victimization have been resisted on many fronts. In drawing attention to some of the more subtle forms of sexual coercion, and theorizing their relationship to rape, this work has provided a troubling framework for making sense of what previously could be considered “just sex.” In dominant representations of normative heterosexuality, women are portrayed as the relatively passive recipients of an active male desire; moreover, they are assumed to have the dual roles of responding to men’s (appropriate) sexual initiatives and restricting inappropriate male “access.”<sup>4</sup> Although traditional ideals of heterosexual romance suggest a woman’s quiet desire waiting to be awakened by a man’s expert seduction, this sort of representation of heterosexuality nevertheless *permits* forms of heterosexual relating in which a woman’s desire and interest are absent. Male seduction can be enacted on a woman whose willingness is always in question.

Against a backdrop where rape was considered to be rare, and where complaints of rape were commonly regarded to be lies, distortions of normal sex, harmless anyway, and/or provoked by the victim, the call to broaden the scope of what is considered to be sexual assault and victimization has been an important feminist move. Similarly, the way that we have elaborated on the understanding of rape as a form of *victimization* has no doubt contributed to more widespread concern about rape as a serious social problem. These moves were one part of increased focus during the 1980s on many forms of victimization and widespread social concern for understanding their extent and dynamics, and for ameliorating and preventing their harm.

### “Victimization” in crisis

By the mid-1990s, the concept of victimization was arguably in crisis. Joel Best (1997: 9) opened a commentary in *Society* with the unfavorable verdict that “Victimization has become fashionable.” As Feldstein (1997: 10) observed, the term “victim” is just part of the “lexical string” that has been targeted for critique, along with “political correctness,” by neoconservatives in the United States. A similar, if not identical, trend of backlash derision of the whole concept of victimization was also evident in New Zealand. As part of more general conservative campaigns against research and services relating to victimization, there was critical dispute over the new feminist research on rape – especially that on “date rape.” As I discussed in Chapter 2, it was claimed that the issue had been exaggerated and/or that it had no validity as a concept (e.g., Gilbert 1994, 1997; Paglia 1992; Roiphe 1993; see also Denfeld 1995; Sommers 1994; Newbold 1996).

It is difficult to know how such trends will be captured into evolving public discourse about victimization. Representations of victims have always been double-

edged, and there is some danger that understandings that invoke sympathy and support may again be overshadowed by those that invite disbelief and derision. As this happens the concept of victimization will lose some of its explanatory and political efficacy. These social changes sharpen the need to reassess contemporary feminist conceptualizations of sexual victimization – if only to consider them in light of their ongoing strategic value.

### **Are victims created by a victimization framework?**

There are many ways to victimize people. One way is to convince them that they are victims.

*(Karen Hwang 1997: 41)*

One strand of public concern has been the fear that talk about victimization is needlessly creating victims. Moreover, critics of the movement against date rape have implied that it violates “assumptions of [women’s] basic competence, free will, and strength of character” (Roiphe 1993: 69; see also Paglia 1992).

Burt and Estep (1981b) were not unaware of the potentially negative aspects of the victim role, such as its denotation of dependency. Similarly, Muehlenhard et al. (1992) acknowledged the connotation of powerlessness associated with using the word “victim” to refer to someone who has been sexually coerced. However, within a positivist mode of social science these potential reservations almost have to be overlooked in the interests of maintaining scientific precision. From the perspective of a poststructuralist feminism these sorts of connotations of words like victim and victimization are not so easy to overlook. That is because, as I discussed in Chapter 3, language and discourse are held to be “constitutive” of meaning – culturally shared linguistic resources (and social practices and procedures) constrain and enable particular ways of seeing and experiencing the world. In this way meaning is socially constructed.

There are various ways in which the language of sexual victimization can have material cultural effects.<sup>5</sup> It may work at the broad cultural level to actively uphold discursive support for ways of being and acting that make sexual coercion and rape more possible. For example, it may reinforce and perpetuate images of women as weak, passive, and asexual, and images of men as sexually driven, unstoppable, and potentially dangerous. These gendered ways of being may be further enhanced by the exacerbation of women’s fears about rape through media reportage and warnings about violent sexual attacks, which emphasize women’s vulnerability to rape over their potential for resistance. Moreover, the hegemonic interpretation of sexual coercion (it is difficult to find a term that now doesn’t already contain metonymic associations with victimization) as a form of victimization specifies identities for those who are subjected to these kinds of acts. A rapist’s moral infringement prescribes an experience of victimization for the rape *victim*. And, the ever-present tentacles of the “psy-complex” ensure that we currently understand victimization as a process that acts on and changes individual psychology (Gavey

2003). While it is not inherently the case, a particular predictable psychological outcome can become preconfigured by calling sexual coercion victimization.<sup>6</sup>

While these sorts of constitutive effects of the language of victimization need to be addressed, how valid is the sort of seductive public warning in Hwang's point? Are victims really created out of thin air? When feminists and other social critics name certain practices as victimization they are drawing attention to relationships of power which systematically privilege some groups of people's experiences over others. Is the hysterical anxiety behind the suggestion that talking about victimization creates victimization a sort of head-in-the-sand approach to unpleasant social conditions; that is, a naive hope that if a phenomenon is not seen and not heard, then it does not exist? As Linda Martín Alcoff (1997: 16) noted, commentators like Katie Roiphe suggest that "prior to the discourse of date rape, the experience itself did not occur, or at least not with such traumatizing aftereffects as we now associate with rape." Although there could seem to be superficial affinities between poststructuralist feminism and the simple determinism offered in this argument, there are important differences. While poststructuralism problematizes notions of essential fixed identities, it does not leave us as a *tabula rasa*; at any one point in time we are some complex and fluid product of embodied-biography-in-cultural-history. We may be socially determined in some sense, but this does not imply we are blank spaces able to be totally shaped by discrete discourses. The legacy of our positioning in the sorts of multiple and competing discourses which are currently in circulation is a moral subject who is likely to experience the "wrongness" of rape in some way. This is because contemporary Western moral values – such as equality, love and respect, not harming others, and so on – provide a discursive context for interpreting many acts of sexual coercion and assault as morally wrong and potentially harmful. Thus, even from a discursive perspective, which emphasizes the constitutive power of language, we do not need access to a specific language of victimization or the particular notion of date rape, for example, for the sorts of practices described by these terms to be experienced as unjust and injurious. However, in the absence of a discourse of rape as victimization, these meanings of rape might be submerged by other dominant constructions (such as those that naturalize heterosex as an aggressive pursuit by the man). Within contemporary Western society we might expect this could generate the kind of discursive dissonance I have mentioned in Chapter 5, which might produce feelings of hurt, bewilderment, and fear. There is no reason to think that a woman would be any more likely to be unmarked by the acts we call rape if there was no critical discourse of rape; rather she may suffer in silence, possibly experiencing trauma in the absence of any rationalizing framework that helps make sense of and through that experience.

In light of the backlash crisis of representation of victimization, and the different insights of poststructuralist feminism, it is perhaps time to reconsider Burt and Estep's (1981b) contention that it is in a woman's best interests to be perceived as a victim when she has experienced sexual coercion or violence. Given the social and historical context in which the anti-rape movement emerged (see Chapter 1), it is clear that this insistence was crucial for the movement. The question now is how it

works several decades in to this campaign, when the meanings of rape have changed. It is difficult to know how their claim holds up in a different context – some empirical analysis of women’s accounts of their experiences of coercion, abuse, and violence may shed light on this question. Few would deny that what we refer to as rape, sexual assault, sexual coercion, and sexual abuse can be victimizing. That is, they can be horrific events which traumatize women (and others) and produce victims. Moreover, abusive and coercive practices can produce victims in more subtle and less (obviously) horrific ways through undermining a woman’s confidence and eroding her agency over time. In the fight against rape, public rhetoric has tended to privilege one of the many contradictory broader cultural meanings of rape – that is, its power to cause severe and irrevocable psychological harm to the victim.<sup>7</sup> Those of us drawn to activism against rape often have first-hand knowledge of the effects of rape on friends, family members, women we have worked with, or on ourselves. The potential trauma and devastating harm of rape, silenced and hidden for so many years, has now come to be almost automatically signified by the term rape (although not without exceptions).<sup>8</sup>

There are three conventions which have developed in the sexual victimization research that, in light of the above discussion, deserve further consideration: (1) Women are classified as rape victims when they have experienced events which meet researchers’ (and often legal) definitions of rape and/or sexual assault, irrespective of how they themselves identify their experiences. (2) The categories of rape and attempted rape are sometimes presented in an unproblematic conjunction as the most serious forms of sexual victimization. (3) The term victimization is used to refer to a broad range of coercive sexual practices. In the next sections I will critically revisit the first two of these current conventions, and briefly consider the third.

### **Unacknowledged rape victims**

As discussed in Chapter 2, the new research on rape tended not to rely on asking women whether or not they have ever experienced “rape.” Some studies included this direct question along with the more specific behavioral questions about forced unwanted sex. It was found only around 30–50 per cent of women who affirm that they have had an experience which meets a narrow definition of rape identify that they have experienced something they call “rape” (e.g., Koss 1988b; Gavey 1991a, 1991b). The protocol in this research paradigm has been to categorize women as victims of rape if they report having had an experience consistent with the predetermined behavioral description that researchers define as rape when the questionnaire or structured interview data are analyzed. If these same women do not report that they have experienced “rape” (when asked directly), then they are considered “unacknowledged” rape victims by the researchers (e.g., Koss 1985; Kahn and Andreoli Mathie 2000; Kahn *et al.* 1994; Layman *et al.* 1996).

There are very good reasons for this method of detecting rape. The strategy recognizes the power of what Martha Burt (1980) termed “rape myths” to cause even women who have had an experience consistent with narrow legal definitions

of rape to not view what happened as “rape.” These “myths” are part of dominant discourses about women, men, power, and sexuality which help to construct views about the likelihood of rape in particular situations, about the sorts of women who get raped, and about men who rape. From a feminist perspective they were referred to as myths in recognition of the ways that they worked to obscure rape and minimize and justify forced sex by men who are white, “normal,” and “respectable.” These myths are part of discourses about normal heterosexuality as much as they are about rape. For instance, the saying that “when a woman says no she really means yes” embodies and inscribes traditional cultural norms for heterosex which make it difficult to perceive rape within heterosexual relationships. In this way, these rape myths obscured much rape within marriage and other intimate heterosexual relationships, as well as in more casual heterosexual encounters (such as dates).

Despite this methodological rationale for not relying on women’s own adoption of the label “rape,” this feature of the feminist empirical work on rape prevalence has been targeted by critics as one major weakness of this whole body of research.<sup>9</sup> Neil Gilbert (1994: 23), for example, cited as a problem of Koss’s rape prevalence estimates that “almost three-quarters of the students whom Koss defined as victims of rape did not think they had been raped.” Following Gilbert, Katie Roiphe (1993: 52) was similarly unimpressed with Koss’s categorization of women who were “not self-proclaimed victims” as victims of rape. However, this methodological approach is totally consistent with the positivist conventions of social and behavioral psychology more generally, where it is considered good research practice to use operational definitions for specifying precise categories of behavior which can be reliably measured. Similarly, in most areas of psychology where attitudes, moods, and so on, are classified, it is done in indirect ways not dissimilar to those used in the feminist empirical rape research. For instance, it would be considered completely appropriate and valid to classify a person as “depressed” if they answered a range of questions on a depression inventory in the predicted ways, even if they did not affirm the statement “I am depressed.” This is because there is a scientific assumption that various states, conditions, and events have particular ontological forms that may not precisely match (less informed) lay understandings of that same state or condition.

Let me consider an example of the sort of experience that could be described as an unacknowledged rape. In Chapter 5 I discussed the incident described by Ann when, at the age of 19, she awoke to find her 30-year-old male flatmate (roommate) in her bed, “groping” her. She had had no prior sexual or romantic relationship with this man, but on this night he got into her bed while she was asleep and had intercourse with her with no apparent consideration of her lack of interest. As she explained:

ANN: . . . it all happened quite quickly really, but I remember thinking quite clearly, “Well if I don’t- If I try and get out of the bed, perhaps if I run away or something . . . he might rape me (pause) so I had better just . . .”

NICOLA: If you try and run away you mean?

ANN: If I tried it, if I’d resisted, then he might rape me, you know. So he did anyway, sort of thing, really, when you think about it, when I look back.

This man was rough and left her bleeding. Later, she was frightened, “confused,” “nervous within the house,” and hypervigilant about making sure she was never asleep before he’d gone to bed. Moreover, she felt that she got a reputation within the flat as being an “uptight bitch” because she wouldn’t take up this same man’s offers on subsequent nights to “come and sleep with me.” Nevertheless, Ann did not conceptualize this event as rape at the time.

Technically, this encounter may not count as rape in a narrow legal sense in most jurisdictions because it is unclear how explicitly Ann communicated her nonconsent. Most feminist analyses, however, would point out the restraints on her being able to do this, such as being only just awake, and fearing that her resistance might lead to worse treatment. Feminists would also want to highlight the absence of reasonable grounds for this man assuming consent (e.g., Pineau 1989). That is, even the most androcentric norms of heterosex would not hold that it is reasonable for a man to assume that a woman approached when she is asleep in her own bed by a man with whom she had had no prior sexual or romantic relationship would be consenting to sex in the absence of some active communication of this consent. Consequently, many feminists would want to describe this incident as rape or, at the very least, sexual assault. Clearly, in spite of her resistance to the identity of rape victim, the experience did have a negative psychological impact on her. It is impossible to know how, if at all, the effects would have been different had she viewed what happened as rape. There is some indication in her account that to have had an experience she would have called rape would have been worse – “if I’d resisted, then he might rape me.” Indeed, it would have been a different experience and one which may have more powerfully signaled her lack of control and her vulnerability. Psychologically, she perhaps maintained more control (a meager but significant amount) and risked losing less by choosing not to “run away or something,” than if she had resisted as hard as she could and been raped anyway.

During our interview, several years after this incident, Ann moved toward retrospectively understanding it as rape – after explaining that she did not resist because “he might rape me,” she said, “so he did anyway, sort of thing . . . when I look back.” Nevertheless, from the point of view of a feminist research ethic, I would struggle with the validity and ethics of labeling Ann as a rape victim at the time when she did not choose this label herself. However, the very ambiguity that arises in talking about Ann’s experience, and how to make sense of it in the research context, itself invites cultural critique of the realm of heterosexual possibility that can contain such offensive, disrespectful and, in this case, hurtful male acts (for other similar examples, see Chapter 5). If this woman’s experience is not considered to be rape or some form of sexual assault very close to rape (by her *or* by the man involved *or* by police, judges and juries *or* by researchers and social theorists) then what is it? Sex? If it can be accepted as just part of the realm of sex, then it redirects a critical spotlight onto heterosexuality itself.

It is worth noting that although Ann “resisted” seeing herself as a rape victim, this did not enable her to physically resist the assault. This illuminates how it would be misleading to assume that *not* being positioned in an overt discourse of rape or

victimization somehow protects a woman from sexual assault. In a situation like Ann faced, sexual difference marks what kind of physical contest is possible or likely, in ways that can aid a rapist in his attack. This happens through the way responses like immobility and fear are often distributed on/in the gendered bodies of those involved. To me this suggests that in addition to directly challenging the overt discourse of rape, we also need to create and promote discourses (both in language and in the normative practices of heterosexual interaction) that indirectly challenge the possibility of rape. That is, for example, encouraging ways of understanding heterosex that don't leave room for ambiguity over a woman's entitlement to refuse unwanted sex.

### **A feminist response – the methodology**

With critical reflection on the research strategy of classifying some women as unacknowledged rape victims, what do we want to say, both in response to the critics but also as part of ongoing reflexive research practice? While there may be no straightforward answer, I think it is important that we approach it as an open question rather than with formulaic answers. Why do so many women who have had experiences consistent with a legal definition of rape resist the label of rape victim (e.g., Koss 1985; Gavey 1991a, 1991b)? And, how should feminist research respond to these women's rejection of the rape label? These questions raise complicated issues which are at the heart of feminist theory of research practice. If we see our role as giving women voice then it may not be legitimate to "put words in their mouths," to describe experiences as rape that women themselves do not describe in that way. However, feminist research increasingly seeks to go beyond giving women a voice and reporting on women's experiences; to offer analyses and critiques which help make sense of women's experiences as they are shaped and constrained by power relations in social contexts. When women's voices don't always tell this critical story, directly, it can be troubling to know how to proceed (see also Fine 1992; Kitlinger and Wilkinson 1997; Weatherall, Gavey, and Potts 2002).

Evaluated in this light, the feminist empirical research on rape prevalence occupies an interesting position. In using conventional scientific methods rather than feminist politics to produce "hard data," it has been an important part of wider feminist action, arguably helping gain traction toward wide public and institutional recognition of the wrongs of sexual violence. This action has had some important successes – notably, changes to rape laws in many (but not enough) places to recognize rape within marriage as a crime. Widespread publicity about date rape has also led to rape prevention programs on many university campuses, and other kinds of preventive initiatives elsewhere. Despite the limited effectiveness of these changes so far (there's no evidence to suggest that the rate of rape is dropping and, more particularly, evaluations of preventive interventions suggest they are largely ineffective, Bachar and Koss 2001),<sup>10</sup> this body of research has nevertheless had a subversive and transformative role in the changing representations of rape. It has generated a profound shift in the meaning of rape to the extent that it is no longer

impossible to think of a man raping his wife or a sporting hero or other public figure raping a woman he dated (although this possibility is still possibly more readily accepted if the man is Black<sup>11</sup>). Moreover, the research has subtly and covertly challenged normative heterosexuality. While this critique is often not explicit in the research, its message is obviously received by critics of the research, as evident in one of Neil Gilbert's (1994: 23) criticisms of Koss's work on rape prevalence:

Seeing rape not as an act of deviance, but as typical behavior of an average man, Koss notes that her findings support the view that sexual violence against women "rests squarely in the middle of what our culture defines as 'normal' interaction between men and women."

Gilbert offered no further critical analysis of this view, presumably in the belief that its flaw will be obvious to his imagined audience. Within the context of his article, Gilbert's point here can be read as an attempt to affirm the innocence of normal heterosexuality and cast as ridiculous any connection between it and rape.

## Research and complexity

The positivism of the empirical psychology research, however, has yielded these findings at a cost. It has forced closure on definitions of various forms of victimization and classified women's experiences into ready-made categories of victims. This style of methodology necessitates disregard for nuanced and possibly contradictory meanings. Moreover, researchers are forced into treating it as reasonably unproblematic that answers to such basic questions as whether or not a particular experience counts as "rape" are constructed through the research process. The resulting certainty that can be projected about the extent and nature of rape and sexual victimization may eventually undermine the authority of the findings when it is found that the reductive and universalizing features of this style of research don't "speak to" the experience of all women it ostensibly represents. Not only are decisions about who is and who is not a rape victim not always straightforward, but the partiality of new truths about the effects of rape is sometimes overlooked.

In some instances, women's reactions may be contradictory and not consistent with either dominant traditional or dominant feminist constructions of rape. One woman participating in my research (Gavey 1990) described a situation with her boyfriend whereby she said she wanted to say to him, "the very first time we had sex you raped me." However, she didn't always view the forced sex as rape, and continued her relationship with this man for more than two years. She detailed a complex set of contradictory, ambivalent, and changing reactions to this and other coercive sexual experiences in the relationship. She also discussed how the usual feminist analyses of rape, such as those she later encountered at a Rape Crisis center, were not entirely helpful. Her reactions were not consistent with what she was hearing about how women respond to rape – because she loved the man who

raped her, remembered some of their sex as “wonderful,” and so on, she went through a stage of feeling that she must be a “sick” and “masochistic” person. Sharon Lamb (1996) described the situation of a woman who eventually ended her relationship with her boyfriend, not because he raped her, but because he couldn’t later acknowledge that what he’d done in forcefully holding her down and having sex with her was rape. Feminist accounts of rape need to be able to take account of such women’s experiences, without in effect dismissing them as the result of false consciousness. Carefully listening to and theorizing such ambivalent and confusing experiences may illuminate the complex relationship between heterosexuality and rape. It may also produce feminist analyses of rape that are sympathetic to all women who are raped, no matter how they experience it.<sup>12</sup>

In asking why some women don’t label their experiences of forced sex as “rape,” as the psychology literature on “unacknowledged rape victims” does, there seems to be a subtext that women *should* label these experiences as rape.<sup>13</sup> But as I have already suggested, this invites at least two questions: Is the experience of forced sex that is not described as rape the same thing as rape, from the woman’s point of view? And, is it always in a woman’s interests to see it as rape (see Chapter 5). Research comparing women’s accounts of “unacknowledged rape” and “acknowledged rape” does not provide an entirely clear answer to the first question, but is at least suggestive that both kinds of experiences are likely to be highly aversive, although there is some indication that “acknowledged rapes” might be worse (see Kahn *et al.* 2003). Koss (1985) found few differences between women who called their experiences rape and those who did not. She concluded that it looked like the experiences were of comparable severity, with women encountering similar levels of physical force and violence used by men, and experiencing similar levels of emotional distress at the time. Subsequent research, however, found that “acknowledged” rapes are more likely than “unacknowledged” rapes to have involved the use of physical force (Bondurant 2001; Layman *et al.* 1996; see also Kahn *et al.* 2003; Schwartz and Leggett 1999). Kahn and Andreoli Mathie (2000) found that women who acknowledged having been raped were more likely to report having experienced higher levels of “negative affect” and more “feelings of victimization” than women who did not see themselves as having been raped (see also Kahn *et al.* 2003). While the mean (average) differences in the specific reactions reported by the women in these two groups were not always huge, one difference in particular stands out. When asked to mark on a seven-point scale whether they had felt afraid, the mean reaction of women who said they’d been raped was 5.77 (i.e., toward the top of the scale), and the mean reaction of women who did not label the experience as rape was 3.78 (i.e., just below the mid-point). Within the terms of this kind of methodology, this is a highly significant difference. It is also consistent with Layman *et al.*’s (1996) research that found on average higher levels of rape-related stress and experiences consistent with “posttraumatic stress disorder” for women who identified their forced sexual experiences as rape. It is possible then that when forced sex takes place in a context that produces high levels of fear and terror women might be more likely to conceptualize it as rape. In

interpreting these kinds of research findings, however, it is always important to keep in mind that these data describe *patterns* of reaction across *groups* of women. They can not be used to predict with any certainty how a *particular* woman might experience forced sex that she does not call rape (or, for that matter, forced sex that she does call rape).

Although there could be short-term political costs, embracing a more complex and less certain position on the ways in which rape can and does affect women may ultimately be a more effective strategy against rape. By this, I mean that psychologists, therapists, and activists should continue to work on understanding, helping, and speaking about the trauma of rape, but at the same time be open to accepting that not all women are enduringly traumatized by rape (for example). While many of us have accepted these complexities in private, we have perhaps been reluctant to emphasize these kinds of possibilities in public because of the perceived political dangers of misrepresentation. Conventional empirical psychology research does suggest that while there are several common negative psychological reactions to rape, not all women who are raped experience them. Moreover, it has been claimed that “many differences [in psychological symptoms] between victimized and non-victimized women disappear after three months, with the exception of continued reports of fear, anxiety, self-esteem problems, and sexual dysfunction. These effects may persist for up to 18 months or longer” (Resick, 1987; quoted in Koss 1993b: 1063). However, the notion that it may be possible to experience rape and suffer no lasting devastating psychological effects is less often articulated than is the discourse of harm. On the other hand, this “finding” about the effects of rape does beg the question of whether such research, which once again must compress and order experience into finite categories, is adequate to perceive more subtle, idiosyncratic, and unpredictable ways in which rape might impact on a woman (see also, Koss n. d.). Moreover, even within medical model conceptualizations of psychological problems, a contrary suggestion about the effects of trauma holds that “It is not unusual for the symptoms to emerge after a latency period of months or years following the trauma” (American Psychiatric Association 1980; quoted in Koss et al. 1987: 169).

We must be careful, however, in voicing such questions to not allow them to overtake and erase the hard-won gains of recent decades in achieving recognition of the traumatic potential of rape. While backlash critics like to trivialize date rape, it is certainly not clear that the psychological impact of rape by a nonstranger is any less severe than rape by a stranger (e.g., see Frazier and Seales 1997; Katz 1991; Koss, Dinero, Seibel, and Cox 1988).

### **Is attempted rape sometimes very different to completed rape?**

Just as some experiences of sexual coercion (and presumably most, if not all, that fit a narrow definition of rape) are surely victimizing, some possibly are not. Is it possible that our framework for conceptualizing *all* instances of sexual assault and many instances of unwanted sex automatically as victimization, rather than say forms of injustice, actually helps to constitute some of these experiences as

victimizing when they might otherwise be seen as having effects which are less (personally) disabling? Although this question shares the sort of anxiety of the backlash positions, it is also an important question for feminists. In particular, for example, are experiences of attempted rape and attempted sexual assault *sometimes* very different from actual experiences of rape and sexual assault?

I can think of a personal experience when I was 16, which could be described as attempted rape. This episode involved being tricked into stopping at an older male co-worker's place on the way to a party after we had finished work past midnight on New Year's Eve. I was thrown onto a bed, which was just across from the front door of the flat, and he proceeded to jump on top of me and attempt to remove my pants. He was a relatively small man, and I was relatively physically strong from sport, and I remember having to struggle as hard as I could to prevent him removing my pants, with the intention (it seemed to me at the time) of having intercourse with me. (This point also reminds me how it is difficult to judge when a man's actions become "attempted rape" when a man and woman are acquainted and, at some stretch of the imagination, a mutual sexual encounter could be appropriate.) Despite having been drinking alcohol at the restaurant where we both worked with other workers before we left, I was never in any doubt as to my lack of sexual interest in this man – at all, let alone on this occasion. I was not ambivalent in my communication with him, and told him clearly verbally that I did not want to have sex with him and resisted him physically as hard as I could. Yet he seemed to have one goal on his mind that was unchanged by my refusal. I think it was my relative physical strength which enabled me to vigorously and successfully resist him, to the point that he possibly decided not to keep trying.

Ten years later when I was working at a sexual abuse counseling agency, I was encouraged by the sub-cultural milieu to think back on and identify this experience as attempted rape, and to wonder about its effects on me. While this was not a totally new way of interpreting this experience, it did sediment it with more certainty. And it did induce me to scrutinize my past to look for psychological effects of this experience. I could recall that I was subsequently worried about this man's "interest" in me, and arranging for my mother to pick me up from work on some of the following nights. I can also recall that it left me feeling strong, determined, and invulnerable for being able to successfully interrupt a man's attempt to force me to have sex with him that I did not want. Although I can't remember enough of the detail of what followed to be sure about whether there were not also subtle negative effects on my identity and sexuality, it strikes me that such experiences of attempted rape which are successfully repelled are extremely different from experiences of completed rape, in terms of their effect on women. (Of course I'm only referring to those experiences of attempted rape that are not accompanied by other physical violence and are not experienced as in any way life-threatening.) In my case, I did not feel like a victim. I despised his actions, but I did not feel I had been harmed. To the contrary, its effects had probably been as empowering (no thanks to him) as they had been disempowering. Was what happened "victimization"? Or, is there a better way of describing it that recognizes

and celebrates the power of this kind of physical resistance, of fighting back, rather than understanding the process and its impact on me in terms that are defined by being the object of that man's aggressive acts and selfish and disrespectful intent?

Lois Pineau (1996: 104) has also written about her personal experiences of attempted sexual assaults. She wrote:

By defeating the actual ends of an attack, I avoided feeling a submission which I by no means felt in the unwanted touches I endured while the battle was still going on. Insofar as the assault remained only an attempt, I was able to avoid the psychological implications of having lost the battle. I was thus able to screen out *the actual fact that the attempt itself was already a loss of integrity*. From the standpoint of my psychology it was just as well.

*(Emphasis added)*

Later she wrote:

While the sexual assaults I experienced served the purpose of general intimidation and forced me to the realization that I must maintain a higher state of alertness and caution, I was actually quite proud of myself for preventing the actual rapes. I developed a tough attitude, which I confess I still hold. . . . But this tough attitude masked an extreme vulnerability concerning my sexual integrity. I would have been totally devastated, unbearably humiliated, had any of the rapes succeeded. I am sure I would have needed serious psychiatric care. It is this very incapacity for enduring such humiliation that made it necessary for me to threaten my assailants with murderous intent.

*(ibid: 105)*

The contradictory aspects of Pineau's experience resemble my own. However, while Pineau speaks of pride, toughness, and her lack of submission, she nevertheless accepts that these experiences were "already a loss of integrity." She implies that her nonexperience of this loss involved some sort of denial (she was able to "screen [it] out"), a defense mechanism to protect her from experiencing the harm she had received. Similarly, her "tough attitude" was the veneer which "masked" her real vulnerability. Through this way of writing, Pineau tacitly endorses a position that attempted rape (always) causes irrevocable psychological damage (even though she makes it clear that to have been raped would have been seriously worse).

I know that at the time I was imagining the possibility of identifying as an attempted rape victim it seemed important to join together with women who had been sexually victimized by men, in part to make a political show of solidarity in the face of oppressive acts of aggressive male sexuality. Yet I never really felt like I properly belonged in the sense that I didn't share the legacy of pain that some of the women around me had suffered. Moreover, it backed me into a speaking position which did not fully represent my recollected experience. That adopting an

identity as an attempted rape victim would have silenced my different kind of story which included traces of empowerment seemed (and still seems) a relatively trivial concern in relation to the political and interpersonal importance of standing alongside women who *had* been harmed. However, perhaps there is more at stake here than some notion of making room for the “authenticity” of experiences like my own. Perhaps there is some political advantage in being able to tell many different stories about diverse experiences of sexual violence. In making room for a respectful plurality, we may be able to acknowledge the oppressiveness and potential pain of rape at the same time as igniting discourses which disrupt the possibilities of rape.

As a relevant aside, radical feminists have a long tradition of encouraging women to fight back against rape.<sup>14</sup> Women’s self-defense classes, for instance, have at times been an important component of feminist anti-rape activities. Pauline Bart’s early research on rape avoidance strategies, which found that women who fought back, struggled, screamed, or attempted to run away were more likely to avoid rape than women who used only verbal strategies or what was referred to as “no strategies,” has been cited as a vindication of the danger of advice that recommends women adopt stereotypically feminine responses to a rape threat (Bart 1981; Bart and O’Brien 1984). Subsequent research, also primarily relating to sexual attacks by strangers, has confirmed this general pattern of the relative effectiveness of fighting back in avoiding rape, compared to responses like crying, pleading or attempting to reason with an impending rapist (e.g., Ullman and Knight 1991, 1992, 1993). However, my impression is that we have been cautious and ambivalent about telling the stories of women who do fight back. Partly, I think this has arisen out of ethical concerns about how such stories might be read in ways that contribute to self-blame by women who have been in circumstances where they were not able to fight back and were raped or sexually assaulted. As Sarah Ullman and Raymond Knight (1993: 37) cautioned about interpretations of their study:

Each woman’s personal capabilities and rape situation is unique in multiple ways, and only the woman herself can ultimately decide what is the best course of action for her in this threatening situation. In focusing on such resistance strategies and in communicating this information to women, we must always be careful not to impute them responsibility or blame for the outcomes of rape attacks.

Patricia McDaniel (1993) in advocating for self-defense training for women has noted similar concerns. The promotion of self-defense for women must not, she warned, become another way of holding women responsible for preventing rape, and blaming those who are raped for not being able to protect themselves.

Clearly, not all attempted rapes are the same. Some experiences will involve violent and terrifying attacks, where a woman may literally fear for her life. However, the use of behavioral descriptions in surveys to measure the extent of sexual victimization does not distinguish these discrepant possibilities.

## Emphasizing women's strength

In writing about therapy for women who have been sexually abused as children, Amanda Kamsler (1990: 34) challenged what she saw as the traditional cultural story about childhood sexual abuse – that is, that it leaves the child psychologically damaged for life. She argued that “there are many unhelpful, limiting and potentially oppressive ideas being applied in the service of therapy with women who were sexually abused as children” (see also O’Dell 2003 and other chapters in Reavey and Warner’s 2003 collection; Marecek 1999). Instead, Kamsler proposed a narrative therapy approach that enables women to develop new, more empowering stories about their lives, which emphasize their resourcefulness and survival<sup>15</sup> rather than their pathology.<sup>16</sup> Kamsler’s approach to therapy recognizes the power of particular constructions of an event to determine how a person copes with its legacy. This analysis at least hints at the possibility that acts of child sexual abuse – and by implication, sexual abuse of adult women – do not have to coincide with a process of victimization where this means the making of a victim. The fact that the potential for harm and victimization exists strengthens the moral argument against sexual abuse, although the inevitability of harm should not be a requirement of this argument. By extension of Kamsler’s argument, we can consider how the normative practices of therapy for rape and sexual abuse victims may sometimes work to inadvertently reinforce some of the effects of victimization through a focus on trauma, recovery, and healing. Of course, this is a delicate suggestion, because there are, of course, many instances where these metaphors are both appropriate (see for example, Brison 2002) and employed in a sensitive and nuanced fashion. However, it is important to recognize that a particular kind of psychological subject is assumed by most approaches to therapy, and arguably this “recovering” subject is always-already constituted as lacking and in need of “betterment.” When applied in a careless and/or overdetermining fashion (through, for example, reducing the complex picture of a woman’s life to the story of “her abuse” and trauma alone) the potential for harm must be considered.

Similar concerns, at a more general level, were already being expressed early on in the feminist literature. In *Female Sexual Slavery*, Kathleen Barry (1979: 44) cogently argued the risks of “incorporating the rigidity in the new that exemplified the old” within the emergent recognition of women’s victimization through rape. Specifically, she was concerned with how what she called “victimism” “creates a framework for others to know [a woman who has been raped] not as a person but as a victim” (ibid: 45):

The assigned label of “victim,” which initially was meant to call awareness to the experience of sexual violence, becomes a term that expresses that person’s identity. Once one has been raped, one is not ever again a nonvictim. Victimism is an objectification which establishes new standards for defining experience; those standards dismiss any question of will, and deny that the woman even while enduring sexual violence is a living, changing, growing, interactive person.

(Barry 1979: 45)

Where Kamsler, and Barry in a different way, have drawn attention to how particular constructions of sexual abuse can affect an individual's psychological well-being, Sharon Marcus (1992) has considered how particular constructions of rape affect the very possibility of rape. In developing a postmodern feminist analysis of rape prevention, Marcus (1992) argued that in order to resist rape culture we need to deny a necessary conflation between the act of rape and irrevocable harm. Marcus (1992: 387) posited her feminist approach to rape as radically different from Brownmiller's (1975) classic feminist analysis of rape which, she claimed, "takes violence as a self-explanatory first cause and endows it with an invulnerable and terrifying facticity which stymies our ability to challenge and demystify rape." She maintained that:

In its efforts to convey the horror and iniquity of rape, such a view often concurs with masculinist culture in its designation of rape as a fate worse than, or tantamount to, death; the apocalyptic tone which it adopts and the metaphysical status which it assigns to rape implies that rape can only be feared or legally repaired, not fought.

Marcus, instead, argued for the need to "envision strategies which will enable women to sabotage men's power to rape, which will empower women to take the ability to rape completely out of men's hands" (ibid: 388; see also Heberle 1996). It is not entirely transparent exactly how this sort of transformation could take place, but Marcus's complex argument is at least suggestive that it may be possible to conceptualize rape differently in a way that somehow renders it less powerful without trivializing it.

I would suggest that a small step in this sort of transformative direction would be the opening up of all sorts of narratives of resistance – that is, by making room for stories about how potential rape was successfully fought, about how some women who are raped do not experience overwhelming psychological despair, and so on. As I suggested earlier, the potential cost of this strategy is that it may do violence to the experience of women who are victimized and traumatized by rape; that is, by conveying disrespect for their experience or even implicitly blaming them for not having been able to avoid rape. Sensitivity to this possibility is necessary so that stories of particular kinds of resistance don't come to be privileged in ways that contribute once again to a silencing of women's experiences of victimization.

Apart from concern about the constitutive effects of the language of victimization, there are other questions that should be of concern for feminists. As I signaled earlier, we may need to critically observe the effects of backlash discourse around "victimization." In the ensuing battle over the meaning of victimization, we may need to question which sorts of tactics are most likely to be effective in the political fight against rape. For instance, will the oppositional strategy of simply speaking a victim-advocacy position more loudly be sufficient, or will we need to engage in social deconstruction to contest the very terms of the debate? Aside from this direct pragmatic concern, is another question about the political effects of a framework that construes the full range of sexually coercive acts, including very subtle ones, as

victimization. I would suggest that an unwanted kiss or touch doesn't always make a *victim*, and the effect of this rhetorical excess in the context of backlash activity may be to weaken the whole struggle against rape by acquaintances, dates, husbands, and so on. This point has been made by "post" (so-called) feminist writers, but where they stop short of *feminist* analysis is in their willingness to forgo a critique of the conditions that foster ambiguity between rape and sex; that is, a culture of heterosexuality in which power is allowed to infuse sex in different ways for women and men – ways that consistently foreground men's rather than women's rights and desires. This is a cultural context in which even physical force can be ambiguously present – such as when a man's "heavy caress" is felt by a woman as "light choking" (Adams 1996). It is a context in which women's consent can be assumed despite the presence of tears and protest – as some commentators and even judges continue to insist (see Chapter 5). The concept of a continuum of sexual victimization can (but need not) work to obscure the critical work needed in changing heterosexuality, by implicitly posing it in its "mutually consenting" form as the good Other to sexual victimization. This implicit construal of an innocent heterosexuality renders it as something which can exist untarnished by the ever-present possibility of sex and violence being fused. In practice, this occurs whenever it is insisted (as it often is) that "rape is about power and violence," and "not about sex," as one self-help book instructed (Coppin 2000: 7).

Another problem with the way the framework of victimization is used is that it may end up locking us into a position in which we are (implicitly or explicitly) required to establish psychological harm in order to take a moral stand against sexual violence, as well as against heterosexual practice that is offensive or disrespectful without necessarily being violent (in the usual sense). That is, the recognition and acceptance of the injustice of sexual coercion and sexual violence may become too closely tied with the "proof" of psychological damage. In New Zealand, for instance, state-funded lump sum compensation for victims of rape and sexual abuse, which was available between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, required a counselor's report and/or a specifically commissioned report by a psychologist or psychiatrist to establish that there had been mental pain and suffering and loss of enjoyment of life (Gavey 2003). I wonder if this restriction of financial compensation to those with expert "proof" of psychological damage is a reinstatement of a new kind of "psychologization" of sexual violence that Burt and Estep (1981b) hoped a victimization framework would avoid? These concerns too, were actually alive within the early second-wave feminist anti-rape movement. In arguing for a feminist rather than a liberal approach to rape, Ann Leffler was critical of an approach that focuses too closely on emphasizing the susceptibility of all women to rape with the insistence that "since rape victims suffer, rape is bad." Instead, she said the focus should be on looking at rape as an illustration of the more general problem of sexism. This approach, she argued, "has the virtue of proving injustice, which angers us, rather than suffering, which merely depresses us" (Leffler 1973; quoted in *New York Radical Feminists* 1974: 173–4; see also Chapter 8).

## Supplementing the language of victimization

The new feminist research has come a long way, since Burt and Estep's (1981b) article, in describing the widespread problem of sexual victimization. But has it both gone too far and not gone far enough? Positivist methodologies have required us to iron out complexity, ambivalence, and contradiction. Public expectations of science have reinforced this drive for certainty in the form of concrete definitive "findings." But when we peep behind the positivist mask, all sorts of discomforting questions arise: are all instances of sexual coercion always victimizing? Do they always cause harm? For instance, in the arena of attempted sexual assaults, are women sometimes warriors, fighters, heroes? What are the effects of using these different kinds of language? Are the more subtle forms of sexual coercion argued to be contiguous with rape by some feminists best conceptualized on a continuum of sexual victimization? Or, are there other ways of critiquing heterosexual practice which routinely privileges men's sexual interests over women's? Or, should both strategies be adopted simultaneously?

In case I've overstated my concerns about the language of victimization, I'd like to emphasize that I am not arguing for an abandonment of the victimization framework. Rather, I am suggesting that we need to question whether it is always appropriate and/or wise to talk about all the different forms and occasions of unwanted sex, sexual coercion, sexual abuse, sexual assault, and sexual violence as *victimization*. Making connections between everyday sexual practices (such as sexual pressure in a marriage) and sexual violence has been important for highlighting the role of normative culture in sustaining problems such as rape. However, we have not always maintained a distinction between the theorization of say, a continuum of sexual victimization, and the implications for how we then understand men's and women's actions and experiences at the more normative end of the continuum. Using the language of victimization to discuss this territory of the continuum may be theoretically valid and yet at the same time (wrongly?) give the impression that we believe every act that falls along the continuum is an act of "victimization," that it makes "victims." I don't want to insist that every time a woman experiences some unwanted sexual contact it is an experience of victimization. But, far from dismissing such experiences, it seems to me that the challenge is to find different ways of critiquing the ways in which our culture(s) can tolerate all sorts of gendered injustices, inequalities, and plain unfairness in the name of normative heterosexuality. As I have been arguing, this is important not only because such experiences may be erosive to a woman's well-being, but also because they are part of the same cultural fabric that produces rape.

When I first wrote an earlier version of this chapter, I was plagued with uncertainty about whether my questions could lead to unnecessary and undermining problems for the feminist analyses of rape and sexual coercion that I value. Having since had the opportunity to dig back further into the early second-wave feminist writings on rape, I am now less troubled by these questions, and more convinced of their importance. I found that many of the early feminist writings on rape were

themselves nuanced with such concerns, and outside of psychology at least there were many expressions of reservation about a victimization framework. In raising these points here, I now feel that I am drawing on traditions that exist within feminist rape activism and theory, rather than simply bringing forth insurrectionary musings. My desire in doing so is to help strengthen and sharpen our critique of victimizing forms of sexual coercion in ways that help prevent victimization and ameliorate the effects of potentially victimizing acts for individual women. If we don't revisit these questions about the victimization framework I sense we may risk leaving a fertile gap for backlash discourse to take hold. At the same time, this kind of move should create spaces for developing supplementary ways to critique both normative and violent forms of heterosexual practice – *without* losing sight of the potential for both rape and more normative forms of sexual coercion to be victimizing. That is, it may enable us to issue new and more varied moral arguments against the cultural acceptance of a form of heterosexual practice in which it can be hard to tell the difference between “just sex” and rape.

## Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this chapter was originally published in Sharon Lamb's (1999b) book *New Versions of Victims*. While it has been revised for inclusion here, I have retained for coherence some brief sections that repeat, in condensed form, some of the material I've discussed at greater length elsewhere.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:* This chapter was written as a response, and implicitly orients, to debates in the 1990s about how to think about (sexual) victimization in the context of backlash. I have not attempted to update the discussion to keep pace with different ways elements of these debates have since unfolded.

- 2 Although this research has not always been explicitly identified as feminist.
- 3 Some studies ask this direct question in addition to many more of the specific behavioral questions.
- 4 Although it is tempting to think that this is an out-of-date representation of heterosexual practice, the popularity of John Gray's books, such as *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom* (1995), promoting such a style of heterosexuality suggests that it still has widespread currency (see Chapter 4).

*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:* This old-fashioned portrayal of women's role in heterosex – as responsive to, and gatekeeper of, male advances – continues to circulate. As one specific example, the defense lawyer in a 2017 New Zealand rape trial drew on what is arguably a cultural tolerance of the kind of sexual persistence and force displayed by the male defendant, and what he in effect portrayed to be inadequate gatekeeping by the female complainant (“did you not recognise that telling him you were on the pill in those circumstances [in response to him asking her if she was “on the pill”] was you telling him you wanted to have sex with him?” quoted in Mather 2016) (see also note 2, p. 219). A different kind of evidence comes from interview-based studies that continue to show people normalize sexual pressure from men and resistance from women within heterosexual contexts. For example, in their study with teenagers (16–18 years old) in the U.K., Marston and Lewis (2014: 5) found it was considered normal for women to be “badgered” for (in this case, anal) sex: One young man said, “you just keep going till they get fed up and let you do it anyway” (see also Jozkowski and Peterson 2013).

- 5 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:* Within the debates I was orienting to in this chapter, the dominant discursive framework was strongly gendered – that is, women were presumptive victims, and men

- were presumptive perpetrators. The presumed gender dynamics of sexual victimization are now often less fixed, and more diverse.
- 6 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Relatedly, Jo Schmidt and I critically explored the “double-edged” nature of a trauma of rape discourse for making sense of the impact of rape (Gavey and Schmidt 2011; see also Gavey 2003, Gavey 2007). We found that people drew on this discourse in ways that, while sympathetic, erred toward othering and potentially stigmatizing women who had experienced rape.
  - 7 This is not to deny that many feminists have been, and still are, careful to insist that women’s agency and resistance are not entirely absent within the experience of victimization. However, as Kathleen Barry (1979: 46) originally argued, “while women are encouraged to fight back, we still recoil from recognizing the interaction a woman is necessarily engaged in when she is raped or enslaved; she is responding moment by moment.” Sometimes, she said, women’s active efforts of coping and survival are not recognized because they don’t take the form of victimhood that is expected.
  - 8 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: See Gavey and Schmidt (2011).
  - 9 One other common criticism of this work centers on the ambiguity of questions about unwanted sexual intercourse and unwanted attempts which occurred “because a man gave you alcohol or drugs.” Due to the ambiguity of the question, the validity of scoring affirmative responses as “rape” has been questioned (see Chapter 2).
  - 10 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Evaluation of some more recent programs shows more promise (e.g., Senn *et al.* 2015; see note 9, p. 221).
  - 11 Many writers point to the different outcomes of the Mike Tyson and William Kennedy Smith rape trials to illustrate this point (see Moorti 2002); see also Chapter 1.  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: More recently, racialized disparities in rape sentencing have been widely commented on in the United States in relation to the relative lenience of white American college athlete Brock Turner’s sentence compared to the judicial treatment of Black men (e.g., King 2016; see also Hutchinson 2016).
  - 12 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: See McKenzie-Mohr and LaFrance (2011: 52) for an exquisitely thoughtful discussion of the delicacy required by women to tell their stories about experiences like rape (and depression), when the language for doing so is so inadequate, and their attempts are so easily “undermined by dominant sexist discourses” (see also Alcoff 2009).
  - 13 See Wood and Rennie (1994) for an interesting discursive analysis of the complexities and difficulties that women face in formulating their experiences of sexual intercourse against their will as rape.
  - 14 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: See Gavey (2009) and Jacquet (2016).
  - 15 However, the substitution of “survivor” for “victim” in many feminist accounts is a complicated act that does not necessarily imply much of a change in how we understand the process of victimization. It is arguably a more positive term in that it conveys a sense of resilience and a sense of a woman’s existence (through rape or abuse) being an active accomplishment which should be emphasized. However, at the same time, the common meaning of “survival” as existence through the threat of death conveys the sense that rape and sexual abuse are equivalent or nearly equivalent to death in severity. The possible downside of this is that it may be difficult for a woman to call herself a survivor without marking her self-image with the inherent necessity that damage has occurred (which is not to deny that rape is sometimes experienced as being as bad as or worse than the prospect of death).
  - 16 Sam Warner’s (2000, 2003) “Visible Therapy” model for working with women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse adopts a similar approach.

# 7

## TURNING THE TABLES? WOMEN RAPING MEN<sup>1</sup>

Can women rape men? Recently I gave a talk on the subject. I based my argument around an analysis of a scene from the 1990 film *White Palace* (Robinson, Dunne, Rosenberg, and Mandoki 1990). In that scene, Susan Sarandon's character (Nora) performs oral sex on a sleeping man (Max), played by James Spader, after he made it pretty clear when he was awake that he didn't want to have sex with her. The scene provides a fascinating point of reference for thinking about the possibilities of women sexually coercing men. I anguished about whether to show the scene as part of my talk. It would definitely liven up the talk and make my analysis more accessible to others; but it also felt vaguely gratuitous to be showing edited sex highlights.

Eventually I decided to show the scene – or rather a compilation of scenes putting the actual act into at least some truncated context. So I took the videotape to an AV technician for help in editing together the eight or so different bits of the movie I thought were relevant. Having watched the video the night before, to choose which scenes to compile, I had left the tape at the end of the oral sex scene, where by this stage Nora and Max were getting “hot and sassy,” as one film reviewer at the time put it. When the male technician put the tape into the video machine, I was embarrassed by what was showing. I immediately felt the need to provide some academic justification for my viewing, and blurted out, “I’m studying women’s sexual coercion of men and there’s a scene in here that shows that!”

The AV technician also looked a bit embarrassed, but his response was quick and enthusiastic: “Cool, can I volunteer to be in your study?” It was the kind of joke that works to diffuse the tension of an awkward situation. But it was also a statement that conveys elements of cultural, if not personal, truth. It worked because we both know that within the terms of a male sexual drive discourse, men are always eager and ready for sex . . . or are they? Over the past decade a group of psychologists have instigated an interesting extension or reversal of the more commonplace research on men’s sexual aggression against women (e.g., Anderson

and Struckman-Johnson 1998). Arguing that the research was set up in a biased and one-sided fashion, by asking men only about being aggressive and women only about being aggressed against, they asked both women and men about their experiences both of being aggressive and being victimized. On the face of it, the results vindicated their concerns. Men also reported having had sex when they didn't want to – with women. However, there were some important differences in the ways that women and men described the impact of sexual coercion.

In this chapter I critically review this literature on the sexual coercion of men by women, and consider how we might represent and make sense of such phenomena.<sup>2</sup> How should we theorize the possibilities of women sexually coercing and/or raping men, and the implications such understandings might have for a politics of rape? My interest in these questions is spurred by two virtually opposite kinds of interests and concerns. In the context of my argument in this book, I suggest that it is vitally important to consider the possibilities of women acting as sexual aggressors toward men and men being victimized by women's sexual coercion. The reason for this is that if we are able to imagine, and recognize, such possibilities then there is room to seriously disrupt the dominant discourses of heterosexuality that cast women as passive and men as active; and which, I argue, work to support the material construction of women as victims and men as agents of sexual coercion and sexual violence. In this way listening to the possibility that women could be sexual aggressors or that men could be victims of women's coercion has radical potential for a feminist analysis of rape and sexual coercion (of women, by men). Conversely, a refusal to believe that women could be sexually aggressive or that men could be sexually assaulted (especially by women) continues to perpetuate stereotypical gendered attributes for all women and all men. From a poststructuralist point of view that holds that discourse contains the cultural possibilities for acting and being, then the value of such modification of our gendered stereotypes is *not* that it somehow frees up women to assault men, but that it opens up the possibilities for a complete rewriting of the dominant discourses of sexuality, in ways that unhinge sex/gender from their rigidly specified forms of identity, experience, and practice.<sup>3</sup>

My other reason, however, for wanting to look at these questions stems from my inability to imagine, and therefore accept, that heterosexual aggression would be the same for women and men. Therefore I am suspicious of, and want to critically interrogate, any approach or polemic that attempts to draw a gender neutral analysis of heterosexual coercion. As in the area of so-called "domestic" violence, there is somehow always the potential for male victims of gendered violence to usurp female victims as the more interesting side of the coin. At a national conference on "Victims" I attended in the early 2000s, the stranger I was chatting to in the coffee break glazed over when I said I was doing research on rape (of women), and quickly moved to ask me whether there was much research on male rape victims. I noticed the same phenomenon when giving lectures to undergraduates about rape and sexual coercion of adults, with students increasingly eager for me to include a section on male victims. While even in the late 1980s it was brave new territory in our Psychology Department to devote a whole lecture to rape, within a

decade the issue seemed to lose student interest without the intrigue of looking at men victims and/or women aggressors.<sup>4</sup>

As I discussed in Chapter 2, there was a sudden explosion of research in the 1980s on the prevalence of rape and sexual abuse. It was found that many women had experienced various forms of unwanted and forced sex. Studies suggested that between one quarter and nearly a half of women had experienced *rape or attempted rape* at some point in their lives. Another significant finding at this time was that the large majority of all instances of sexual assault were carried out by men who were known to the women they abused – for example, dates, husbands, and boyfriends. This, and much of other research at the time, converged to present a pretty dismal picture of heterosex – one in which normative modes of sex are silently geared around men’s supposed “needs” or interests.

Starting in a small way in around the mid- to late 1980s a new strand of research sought to turn the tables on the dominant paradigm of rape research, by asking both men and women about their experiences of both being forced to have sex and forcing sex on others. As I’ve already noted, the results appeared to justify this new line of inquiry.<sup>5</sup> In a range of studies cited by Byers and O’Sullivan (1998), it was suggested that while 22 per cent to 83 per cent of women reported having been sexually coerced by a man, between 4 per cent and 44 per cent of men reported having been sexually coerced by a woman. The forms of sexual coercion reported by men were not generally violent attacks, or even forced sex carried out by physical force or the threat of physical force. While there are a handful of anecdotal or single case reports of women violently sexually attacking men (for example using weapons; e.g., Sarrel and Masters 1982) it would seem that this sort of thing is rare. What these figures reflect, then, are experiences where a man has felt pressured to have sex with a woman, for a variety of reasons to do with her direct attempts to encourage him, or perhaps to exercise psychological pressure. If we look simply at self-reports of having unwanted sex, *with or without pressure* from the other person, one study found that 63 per cent of men and 46 per cent of women reported having experienced unwanted sexual intercourse, with or without pressure from the other person (Muehlenhard and Cook 1988). Clearly, this finding is somewhat surprising in light of the male sexual drive discourse and what that leads us to assume about men’s sexuality and their sexual readiness, in particular. I will return to this point later. It is important to consider these figures about the prevalence of women’s and men’s reports of unwanted sex in the context of other data from the same studies: that is, responses about the reported impact of such sexual coercion. In this body of work, considerable differences were consistently found, between women’s and men’s reactions to sexual coercion in these kinds of studies. For example, one study found that 43 per cent of men indicated they were “not at all upset” at the time by the experience of sexual coercion they reported (O’Sullivan, Byers, and Finkelman 1998). Conversely, only 6 per cent of women reported that they were “not at all upset” at the time by the experience. Similarly, while 31 per cent of women reported that they were “extremely upset” by their experience of sexual coercion, a smaller proportion of men (14 per cent) reported

feeling this way. At face value, these findings are more consistent with a male sexual drive discourse – although still not entirely consistent.

There are many complicated and interesting questions surrounding how we interpret these kinds of results, and I will return to these later in the chapter. But first I will discuss why this research is a bit more potentially interesting than it may appear on the surface.

From the vantage point of the discursive framework I outlined in Chapter 3, I would want to argue that research on the possibilities of both women's sexual aggression and men's sexual victimization (especially within a heterosexual matrix) are important for a feminist rape prevention agenda (even if it's not immediately obvious why). Not only does it have the potential to challenge stereotypes of men as sexually driven, aggressive, and unstoppable, and women as passive, relatively asexual, and prone to victimization, but also, as I have already noted, from this Foucauldian vantage point, such stereotypes (as features of discourses) are seen as contributing to the cultural conditions of possibility for our very ways of being, our acts, desires, and choices. Thus, while not wanting a glib celebration of women's sexual "aggression," representing the very possibility of such a thing arguably shores up the possibilities of women's nonpassivity and men's vulnerability – essential possibilities for a revised form of heterosexuality in which it would be less possible to confuse rape and sex.

From a feminist Foucauldian point of view, the problem with feminist (or other) rape research that only looks for men's sexual aggression and women's sexual victimization is that it reifies understandings of women's sexuality as passive, submissive, and vulnerable, and men's as active, aggressive, and dangerous. In doing so it arguably risks contributing to discourses/knowledge that actually perpetuate the very dynamic of rigidly gendered heterosex that arguably supports the rape and sexual coercion of women. But are there costs to emphasizing this kind of phenomena? For example, in a social context somewhat tired of hearing about sexual abuse, reports of women assaulting men may well have more "news value" and may risk distracting emphasis from the more common and systemic forms of male coercion of women.

In the next part of this chapter, I will reflect on the issue of gender neutrality by changing tack to look at representation in the film *White Palace*. This film is interesting because it portrays a woman initiating sex on a nonconsenting man (he is asleep at the time) and so it is a relatively rare moment from popular culture where the possibility of women's sexual coercion of men is figured.<sup>6</sup> As such, it provides a more vivid point of reference for considering my original questions about how we should theorize and react to the possibilities of women's sexual coercion of men.

### **Reading *White Palace***

*White Palace* is the story of Max and Nora and their improbable relationship. Viewers are first introduced to Max (played by James Spader), a 27-year-old white Jewish advertising executive, who lives alone in a stylish, impeccable home that is neurotically ordered and tidy. Morose over the death of his conventionally attractive young wife, who died in a car crash a few years earlier, he is uninterested in his

friends' attempts to fix him up with a girlfriend. As he says to one, "What if I told you I wasn't interested in getting laid right now?" Nora (played by Susan Sarandon) is a 43-year-old white working-class chain-smoking waitress at a greasy hamburger place, the White Palace. When some of the boxes of hamburgers at Max's friend's bachelor party are discovered to be empty, Max insists on going back to the White Palace to demand the missing burgers. That is where they first briefly encounter each other. Later that evening, Max retreats from the party to drink alone at a bar. Coincidentally, Nora is drinking at the same bar. She tries to chat him up, but Max does not return her advances. Both drunk, Nora manages to persuade an unenthusiastic Max to drive her home. As Max pulls up to Nora's house he accidentally runs over her mailbox. He goes inside, for a coffee to sober up, but ends up staying the night on a sofa bed in Nora's messy living room, because he feels so sick. Just before dawn, Nora comes into the room and begins to perform oral sex on him while he is still asleep. Initially he responds in a half-asleep state during which he is depicted as dreaming that he is with his wife. When he realizes it is Nora instead he tries to push her away but Nora continues. Max puts up some initial resistance, but Nora pushes him back down. When she asks if he wants "more?," he answers "yes." She asks him to "say please," which he does, and they eventually have intercourse. He leaves in the morning, saying he won't ever see her again. He returns the next morning, however, to "fix her mailbox," and they end up having a relationship which, although marked by their many differences, is portrayed as important to both of them.

The representations of female sexual desire and agency in *White Palace* present complex and interesting possibilities for feminist critics. For instance, how do we read the scene where Nora and Max first have sex? Is this an erotic moment, appealing to feminist viewers because of its representation of a woman acting on her sexual desires, enhanced by the nontraditional ways in which gendered power is possibly reconfigured in the interaction? Or, is it a scene that is unpleasant to watch because of its representation of sexual violation as one person acts on another's body without their consent? And what determines the possibilities of reading this interaction in either, or possibly both, of these ways?

If Nora was a man and Max was a woman, we would most likely see him as sexually aggressive, and be critical of the narrative development of the scene. We could accuse the film of reproducing rape myths (Burt 1980), such as "when a woman says no, she means try harder," by portraying Max (if he was a woman) as eventually participating enthusiastically in sex with Nora (if she was a man). But can we simply reverse the sexes and still understand the scene and what it represents in the same way? Should the same standards be applied in reading the politics and the morality of this scene? Or, if not, what are the political implications for reproducing stereotypical binary understandings of gender that render men unrapeable by women, and women as inherently not sexually aggressive?

In the rest of this chapter, I am interested in exploring ways in which this kind of portrayal of heterosex can be read, and developing an argument about the kinds of readings that are most readily available (in the early 2000s) for us to make sense of

such configurations of heterosexuality. My primary interest here is in thinking through the issue of how we (all) are culturally enabled and constrained to make sense of the *acts* themselves that are represented in this film (rather than a focus on the form of these particular filmic representations per se). To illustrate this, I draw on reactions from eight women (including myself and Marion Doherty) and one man who watched the film, and then discussed it in (one of) two groups. These groups were organized and facilitated by Marion Doherty as part of a larger study for her Masters thesis (which I supervised) on representations of women's "active" sexuality in film (Doherty 2000).<sup>7</sup> From these discursive instances, I try to elaborate broader questions about understandings of the gendered nature of heterosexuality and rape.

There are two interrelated questions I want to discuss in relation to the representations of Nora and Max's first sexual experience together. First there is the issue of how we respond to depictions of heterosex in which there is a question mark over the man's consent; then there is the question of how it is possible to represent a woman's desire expressed through *initiation* of sex with a man. Both of these questions are posed by representations of heterosexuality in which women step outside of their usual place in the active/passive binary of heterosex. Exploration of these issues also allows a discussion of the ontology of rape in relation to sexual difference, and consideration of the ways in which gendered possibilities for enacting heterosexual desire matter in this context.

### Reading sex and rape in *White Palace*

There are two dominant ways in which we can make sense of the *White Palace* sofa bed scene. One response, strongly underpinned by the male sexual drive discourse (e.g., Hollway 1984a), is to see the situation as an icon of male fantasy. As one reviewer noted, "and what young fellow wouldn't care to wake up on a couch with Susan Sarandon's head in his lap?" (Corliss 1990: 103). The powerful and pervasive male sexual drive discourse holds that men are always-already ready for sex; any resistance would not only be unmanly but likely be a sham. Notably, none of the popular reviews of the film at the time, that I could locate, made any reference to Nora as sexually aggressive. The closest they came is the reviewer who slipped in that she "for want of a better phrase – takes advantage of him;" yet this is in the context of describing the film as "modern movie love" that "leaves you with a smile on your face and hope in your heart" (Pitman 1991: 138). The film was typically characterized along these lines, as "hot, sassy fun that is also wildly romantic" (e.g., Travers 1990: 162), with "the early love scenes" showing how "two people can fall into lust and worry about love later" (Variety 1990: 60). Arguably, this way of reading Nora's actions through a male sex drive discourse was dominant at the time – a reading which lends no critical attention to Nora's initiatives toward the unwilling Max.

A completely different response, however, is enabled by a sort of "post-feminist" de-emphasis of sexual difference (perhaps anticipated within the kinds of feminism that Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1988 characterized as having a "beta bias" that allows them to ignore or minimize differences between women and men). Within

this liberal framework, in which women and men are equal in their rights and responsibilities, notions of specifically gendered forms of power are absent. From this discursive vantage point, Nora's actions could constitute sexual aggression.

### Rape or seduction

The scene described earlier, where Nora performs oral sex on Max while he is (initially) asleep, was the topic of unprompted interest and debate among the participants in our groups. Within the narrative structure of the film, Nora appears to be assertively enacting her own desire for sex with Max. However, because Max is initially asleep, it is unclear whether her sexual assertiveness leaves her as some kind of feminist heroine or, rather, as a sexual aggressor, whose actions should be condemned in the interests of moral consistency. Participants did respond to this dilemma in a variety of highly contradictory ways and, indeed, this point was argued in both of the groups. I am interested in tracing these responses to Nora's actions, and theorizing them in relation to contemporary discourses on gender, sexuality, and rape.

Most of the participants who watched this film expressed some degree of ambivalence about Nora, with most indicating discomfort about the way she tried to pick up Max in the bar and the way she initiated sex when he was asleep. One participant, however, admired Nora's attitude and actions:

W11: I loved her, I think she was cool, she could seduce him, she can do what /she wants with him./

W9: /Oh really?/(general laughter)

W11 described Nora's behavior in the bar scene as "just sort of familiar, it was normal." However, as W9's reaction suggests, not all participants were so impressed. In Group 1, in the jostle over what Nora's actions meant, they suddenly became reconstructed from "seduction" to "rape" by one of the participants:

W6: She effectively raped him, I mean if it was a reverse role what sort of um, outcome would there have been of that? I mean, (MD: Mmm.) they make things all glossy in movies but if it was reality (MD: Yeah, yeah.).

W7: Yeah, right, I called, I, you see I called it seduced, you can see my opinion can't you? (Laughter) (MD: Mmm.) Yeah.

W6: But it wasn't seduction because he said "No" and at that point in time he wasn't a willing participant. (MD: Mmm, mmm.)

In the other group, another participant came up with a similar argument about the sofa bed scene, although she called Nora's actions "sexual abuse" rather than "rape":

W10: And I really didn't like the, the way she kind of (half-laugh) um, started off the relationship. (MD: Right, yeah, yeah.) So it . . .

MD: Tell me more about that, (laugh) just . . .

W10: Well I just ah, I thought um, (pause) you know, I mean if, if the roles were reversed and it was a man, if she had been a man and if he had been a woman. (MD: Yeah.) And that's sexual abuse.

Another participant in the same group expressed a similar point of view:

W9: I was certainly uncomfortable um, about that seduction scene for the same reason that when the genders are swapped over I'd be swinging from the chandelier, (MD: Yeah.) um, (pause) and that would be the only, that would be something that I, I would take issue with . . .

[gap of 14 lines]

Yeah, yeah um, and she wasn't a saint, um, you know, she was out of line seducing him and she shouldn't have done it. (MD: Right, yeah, yeah.)

### **Seduction or rape: gender reversal as a lens for making meaning<sup>8</sup>**

The construction of Nora's actions as "rape" or "sexual abuse" is achieved in all three of these exchanges through an explicit gender reversal. The need for this kind of thought exercise to help make sense of the scene underscores the unusual and transgressive nature of credible representations of women acting to initiate sex on an unwilling male partner. So markedly do such interactions fall outside of dominant understanding of heterosexuality that we need to work to make sense of them, and to place them in a proper moral order. This rhetorical "gender reversal" maneuver arose in both of the group discussions in which participants attempted to negotiate the meaning of Nora's actions in this scene.

The lesson of gender reversal is that "if a man did *x* to a woman, we'd call it rape; therefore, it is illogical that it is not rape just because a woman is doing *x* to a man." In this way, the argument of gender reversal relies on assumptions of gender sameness. That is, the assumption is that we can replace the actors engaged in heterosex or rape with others of a different sex, and it should make no difference to the "truth" or experience of the event (*x*) for those involved. However, when we consider that an invitation to imagine swapping the sexes would not be necessary if sexual difference had no currency, the rhetoric of gender reversal deconstructs itself. That is, if women and men were not different in any meaningful ways, and gender relations were not inscribed and lived through such differences, then there would never be the moment of incomprehension that incites the need to imagine the genders reversed.

The arguments achieved through gender reversal assume a liberal, gender neutral subject, and in doing so implicitly refuse the possibility that the ways in which the (apparently) same event is experienced is, or could be, totally different for women and men. Indeed this ostensibly gender neutral understanding has been formalized in a growing body of work interested in "sexually aggressive women and the men they pursue" (Anderson and Struckman-Johnson 1998: 1). This work appears to be characterized by an attempt to separate power from gender, as analytic categories (e.g., Anderson 1998). While not denying the "power differences between men

and women” (ibid.: 91), such power seems to be understood in a way that is added on to gender rather than thoroughly infused in gender. Indeed, within this paradigm, it is believed to be possible to remove “the confound of victim–exploiter roles from gender” (Byers and O’Sullivan 1998: 147). To the contrary, I would argue that the experience of rape or forced sex is importantly gendered. There are many reasons for this, such as the ways that shared cultural understandings provide expectations about the likely impact of certain activities, the ways gendered identities render the meanings of acts differently, and also because of differences in women’s and men’s bodies and the possibilities that the lived experiences of these bodies are fundamentally different in the arena of heterosexual sex and/or rape. Just one example would be the likelihood that many men would regard a “forceful sexual advance” from a female sexual partner as a game (Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 1998), that is unlikely to engender fear and a physical–psychological inability to stop it. I develop this argument in more detail below, and also highlight the problem of ignoring gendered power relations in the gender reversal arguments.

Ironically, W6, the participant who argued strongly for an understanding of Nora’s actions *as rape*, later offered a viewpoint about how men would perceive Nora’s behavior that directly acknowledges the gender specificity of rape:

MD: So do you think that guys would watch that and, (pause) react that way, would they react, the way the women would react if it was reversed.

W6: No I think they’d love it.

W5: Mmm, I do too.

W7: /It gives men [unintelligible] the opportunity./

MD: /S- so, w- so why? That’s really interesting./

W6: Because that’s their dream isn’t it? (MD: Right.) Well, either way, either way round it’s their dream, to be ravished and to appreciate it.

MD: To what, ah, what? To be, either way round is for the, like so . . .

W6: Whether they’re doing the ravishing (MD: Ravishing.) or being ravished (MD: Ravished, yeah.) I think that they would enjoy it.

MD: Oh okay, okay. So it’s kind of like, you’re saying that it’s kind of, it’s non-consensual but that’s what they’d want anyway?

W7: I’d imagine they’d want um, not to have to make the run, the running the whole time, not having, (MD: Mmm.) not making the advances the whole time, so they rather like the fantasy of a woman seducing them. (W6: Mmm.)

In contrast to the argument or perspective enabled by W6’s earlier use of gender reversal to claim that Nora committed rape, here we see how W6 is able to develop an argument that would seem to put her earlier representation of Nora’s acts *as rape* into a category that is completely different from how we would normally understand rape. Although what Nora did may be rape, as W6 earlier argued, it is a kind of rape she claims that men would “love” and “enjoy.” Despite the persistence of rape myths (e.g., Gavey and Gow 2001), it no longer makes

sense to speak of women enjoying rape, except perhaps in the most perverse and underground of circles. Indeed, in the extract above, it could be argued that W6's position arises out of an awareness or counter-analysis that (heterosexual) rape is, in fact, inherently gendered. That is, the meaning of a woman giving oral sex to a man who is asleep is profoundly different from the meaning of a man giving oral sex to a woman who is asleep. As soon as the woman awakes she enters into a context deeply mediated by prevailing cultural understandings of men's sexuality as driven and potentially aggressive. Men (as a category, even if it's not true of individual men) are imbued with power and physical strength, which is likely to render woman as the *subject* of fear, in a situation that is culturally marked as having the potential of *danger* (see Muehlenhard 1998). As gendered subjects constituted differently through these dominant cultural constructions, the situation is likely to be intrinsically and intensely different for women and men (see also Koss and Cleveland 1997). The ways in which the bodies involved in rape are sexed (as man or as woman) fundamentally determines the experience and "reality" of the event, to the extent that it is not clear whether it can really still be rape in the way that we usually understand what rape means, when the aggressor is a woman. This is not to conclude that this difference is inevitable, even though I assume it is normative. It would be possible for a man to be raped by a woman in such a fashion that, for various reasons (e.g., use of weapons), it would be experienced more similarly to a man's rape of a woman. It could be argued that this possibility is an exception to gender normativity.<sup>9</sup>

The kinds of understandings of "rape" as *not rape* are enabled by a male sex drive discourse (also evidenced in the extract below); and indeed if male sexuality is normatively constituted through this kind of discourse, then the very experience of what could be characterized as "rape" by a woman may be experienced in a way that is positive. It is thereby a fundamentally different phenomenon to rape as it is understood in feminist discourse and most contemporary Western discourse.

W10: Um, you know, he's asleep and I just think you know, and, kind of you know, but it, it, if you get any guy and start sort of giving him a blow job or whatever, they're not, you know, ninety-nine percent of them are going to find it quite hard to actually resist. (MD: Right, yeah, yeah.) Do you know what I mean, so it's kind of like setting herself up for, seducing him.

Through the discursive lens of a male sexual drive discourse, men's proclivity to sex is so strong that a man's consent can be presumed as the default response to any sexual initiation. Effectively, this renders men unrapeable – especially, perhaps, heterosexual men by a woman.

### **Problems with the impossibility of imagining the rape of men by women**

While I have argued that there are important problems with making sense of a woman forcing sex on a man through the same lens as we'd use to make sense of a

man forcing sex on a woman, equally there are problems with an unwillingness to recognize the possibility of women raping (or, at least sexually assaulting) men (see also Muehlenhard 1998). The problems lie in two quite different areas. First, there is the practical humanitarian issue of acknowledging the possibility for individual men to be hurt. The dominant male sex drive discourse, in concert with other discourses of masculinity, which constitutes “real men” as proud, strong, and in control, makes it difficult to imagine men as victims of a woman’s sexual aggression. As noted earlier, research that has tried to measure the prevalence and effects of sexual coercion of men by women suggests that such a thing is reasonably prevalent, but that (in contrast to the reports of women about coercion by men) many men describe it as a neutral to positive experience (e.g., Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 1998; and see Byers and O’Sullivan 1998, for a brief review). Given the discursive constitution of normative masculinity, it is difficult to know how to interpret such findings. For instance, do we read them transparently as evidence that men experience heterosexual coercion very differently from women; or do we approach such information with caution, wary that the *veracity* of men’s *reports* is constrained by the very discourses that, from a different perspective, would be seen to *constitute* men’s *experiences* differently, more positively? That is, are men constrained from telling the “truth” of harm and victimization by the discourses of hegemonic masculinity, or do these discourses seamlessly constitute men as invulnerable to that kind of harm? From a straightforward humanist concern for the former possibility, it would be imperative to be able to acknowledge and respond to male victims of heterosexual coercion. Similarly, it would be necessary to be able to acknowledge that women can perpetrate sexual aggression against men and that these actions may need to be legally as well as morally opposed.

As well as these concerns about the individuals who may be caught up in such phenomena, there are also important theoretical issues for feminism. In contrast to humanist concerns, largely for male rape victims, these feminist concerns center on the less immediate issue of the potential repercussions of representations of women as stereotypically passive and not dangerous, for the very possibilities of *men raping women*. As Sharon Marcus and others (e.g., Gavey 1996; Waldby 1995; see also Hollway 1984b) have argued, reiterations of representations of women as passive and vulnerable and men as sexually aggressive may in fact actually render women’s bodies more rapeable, in a material sense, and men’s bodies as more able to rape. This poststructuralist proposition arises from the assumption that narratives about men’s dangerous sexuality and women’s vulnerability, for instance, form part of the “savoir” that enables rape (e.g., Marcus 1992).

### **Gender, definitions of rape, and morality**

The debates over whether or not Nora’s actions constituted rape, or even sexual aggression, revealed some interesting ambiguities around the whole issue of what makes something “rape” in the sense of being a morally unacceptable violation.

***Rape as power not sex***

One strong thread of feminist analyses of rape has been to argue that “rape is about power, not sex” in an attempt to oppose the kinds of minimizing patriarchal constructions of rape that saw it as just a bit of (harmless) sex, the by-product of unmet natural sexual needs in men. This feminist position has served to emphasize that rape is not just sex that women don’t like, or even just some kind of male sexual deviancy, but that it is made possible by the abuse of male power and that it is experienced by women as violation. This way of thinking about rape as an act of power has become a readily available way of understanding rape, and is evident in the following extract from Group 1:

MD: Mmm, so, you were feeling outraged at watching it?

W6: I think I probably was, yes. (MD: Yeah, mmm)

W5: I’m not convinced that, he was being used, because initially it started off as a blow job didn’t it? (W7: Yeah) So, so she, she wouldn’t be getting much sexual satisfaction from that.

W6: Well, I think that depends, she may well have. (General laughter)

W5: Fine, (general laughter) fine.

NG: This is the Monica debate.

W6: But he wasn’t a consenting partner.

W5: I’m not arguing about whether, in terms of um, ah, that, that it would, would be pleasant sex ’cause they were both drunk basically. (W7: Mmm) But I’m not convinced that it was rape. (Pause) Convince me. (General laughter)

W6: Well, if he was a girl and she was a guy, ah, well it’s not even date rape because they hadn’t been on a date they just ended up in the same house together. Convince you? He was lying there asleep, a nonconsenting partner, he’d expressed no interest and she took advantage of it.

W5: But she wasn’t, ah, well yes, but then we get back to whether or not she was getting sex- sexual satisfaction, ’cause I wouldn’t say that she was, I think she was arousing him.

W6: Well, I guess it’s rape, it’s a power thing isn’t it? It’s aggression, it’s nothing to do with sexual satisfaction.

The conclusion to this exchange illustrates the risk, from a feminist point of view, of applying formulaic understandings (slogans or definitions) of rape that don’t attend to the specificities of a situation. Within the framing of this scene in the film, it is nonsensical to describe Nora’s actions as “aggression,” in the sense of improper assault, as W6 seems to be suggesting. Nora appears to be represented as approaching Max in order to initiate a sexual encounter (leaving aside for a moment the question of whether or not the way she went about this was acceptable). There is no suggestion, within the narrative structure of the scene or the film as a whole, that she had any aggressive (in the sense of hostile or violent) intentions toward Max. Neither is there any suggestion that she is physically

stronger than Max, or that she had any nonphysical way of coercing him to have sex with her (such as threatening him with some action if he didn't, or verbally abusing him for his lack of interest). Her "only" coercive tactic was sexually arousing him to a point where he chose to change his mind – and within the film he is portrayed as voluntarily and enthusiastically participating in sex with Nora after that point. There clearly was a transgression involved that was to do with *power*. The point where Nora started to perform oral sex on Max while he was asleep was a moment where she was in a more powerful situation (he was asleep), and she misused this power (particularly given that he had previously clearly indicated that he was not interested in a sexual interaction with her). However, I would still like to argue that the fusing together of power, aggression, and rape, in this instance at least, allows us to overlook some of the "invisible differences" that would be faced by a woman in the same situation as Max.<sup>10</sup>

The value of highlighting attempts such as these to make sense of Nora's actions is that they invite a critical understanding of the dynamics of heterosexual coercion *of women*. That is, it allows us to consider and clarify what might be going on, that could be different and possibly not immediately obvious, if a man did what Nora did to a woman, such that we might be likely to think of it as closer to aggression or rape.<sup>11</sup>

A similar issue arises in examining an impassioned debate that arose in Group 2 around a consideration of whether Max consented and, therefore, whether Nora's actions were rape. This argument shows how, in the absence of recognition of sexual difference and gendered power relations, a pernicious effect of the rhetoric of gender reversal can be an undermining of feminist emphases on men's responsibility for rape (of women) and a reiteration of women's blame for (some) rapes (of women).

W11: Yeah, see that's where I, I'm, I'm finding it quite difficult to even think it was rape or to think it was (MD: Right) anything like that, (MS: Yeah) because like for me it's like he said "Yes" he didn't orally say "Yes" but to me he's, was saying "Yes" all along, (MD: Right, yeah) because she made like, strong advances to him, he knew exactly what she wanted, (MD: Mmm, mmm) and um, (pause) and by the end he did drive her home and he did use the couch or sleep on the couch and, and yeah, he didn't say "Yeah, I want a blow job" but he didn't say "No" he didn't want a blow job either, (laugh) sort of. You know, like, ah, yeah, there's more ways to see it, I know there's that, that, that sort of, what is it? "How m- what part of 'No' don't you understand?" (MD: Yeah) sort of thing (MD: Yeah) (laugh) but, (MD: Yeah) there's also many ways you can say "Yes" without actually, saying "Yes." (MD: Yeah)

W10: I did, I guess I just might feel that sort of, in a different situation or whatever you've got um, a girl in a bar who's wearing a short skirt and who's had a bit much to drink and she's being a real flirt and, um, she, you know whatever, gets offered a lift by a guy to take her home so, you know, he takes her home, and the next you know, kind of like, he's on top of her having sex or whatever, does that mean she asked for it, because she was flirting and she was wearing a short skirt? (MD: Mmm) Do you [know] what I mean?

W11: It's it's not a matter of, of asking for it, I mean that's sort of, (W10: But it gets that . . .) that's that sort of blame sort of bit, it's it's sort of . . .

W10: But in the same context of, [unintelligible]- you know, she could have been saying "Yes" although she didn't actually say "Yes" the fact that she, knew that he fancied her and she off- accepted a lif- ride home, (W11: And slept on his couch.) well, yeah, and then she, you know, woke up in the middle to him sort of (MD: Mmm, mmm) pounding up and down on top of her, you know, do you know what I mean? So, if the situation was rever- reversed, just because he knew that she fancied him and he got too drunk and ended up at her house and had to lie down because he felt sick, doesn't mean that he wanted to have sex with her. (MD: Mmm)

W11: But I sort of see it as two consenting adults, I don't see it as, as this power like, she's a young girl, or naive, or, or he's a naive man that doesn't know what's happening, I just see them as both equal, you know, I see them both having the power and they both (MD: Mmm)

W10: But he was asleep, what power did he have?/I guess that um,/

W11: /But, but,/but he didn't have to go there and he didn't have to um, (pause) yeah, I just think, I just think it is, he is saying "Yes" in many ways without actually saying . . . (MD: Mmm, mmm)

[gap of 49 lines]

W10: Don't you, if you passed out, um, you know, 'cause you were drunk or whatever and some guy started mau- mauling you or whatever, would you consider yourself consenting?

W11: It depends who the guy was I suppose, (general laughter) I mean really, (MD: Yeah, yeah) but I mean to me, yeah, I mean, I could be horrified and be traumatized and say it's rape, but I mean I might really enjoy it if I really liked him so, it, yeah, I don't know.

What we can see through this exchange is the necessity of some recognition of sexual difference for understanding not only the ontology of rape, but also its moral and political implications. Underlying the debate taking place in this extract are assumptions about what rape is and why it is morally condemned by society. Feminist analyses of rape have emphasized the crucial element of power in understanding rape – that is, the notion that rape always involves the misuse of power by one person over another. While feminist arguments directly link such power to men, theories of patriarchy that are sometimes assumed do not necessarily elaborate an understanding of how individual women and men become (or are) sexed (or gendered) in ways that allow rape. For instance, how is power *gendered*, and in what particular ways is power *meaningful* in the context of coercion and rape? What are the political and moral consequences, moreover, of developing a so-called power analysis of rape or sexual abuse that is gender neutral?

Although it is not necessarily obvious from the above excerpt, it is interesting to note that W10, who formulated a kind of nongendered version of a feminist argument about rape, did not identify as a feminist, while W11, who is arguably attempting a more risky position, did identify herself as a feminist. The problem that W11 gets into,

however, is that in the absence of being able to articulate a kind of feminist discourse of sexual difference, she gets backed into a position in the argument that ends up looking quite dangerous from a feminist point of view. That is, she ends up developing an argument that relies on ideas that look quite close to those that feminists have long criticized as being rape myths (e.g., Burt 1980), such as the notion that a woman gives consent to sex through such indirect signs as going to a man's apartment. She has developed her position to explain why she didn't see that what Nora did to Max was rape; however, when gender reversal is invoked to encourage her to revise her view, she hasn't got a way of saying, "but it's different!"

As I have already argued, a gender neutral analysis of rape and sexual coercion is highly problematic, because it papers over what are likely to be some important, but not necessarily obvious, differences in women's and men's experiences of heterosexual and gendered relations more generally. We needn't accept essentialist theories such as the controversial evolutionary arguments about rape to maintain that it mostly *is* different for women and men at this point in time. For example, we must consider the differences in the legitimated positions for sexual agency for women and men. How do the differences in cultural expectations about women's and men's sexual "drives" and needs and so on not only constitute the behavior of women and men in initiating sex or forcefully seeking sex, but how do they also leave their mark on the person who is the recipient of such acts? Our understandings of the normative cultural scripts (or stereotypes) for male and female (hetero)sexuality are likely to be lenses through which we read all manner of relevant detail for assessing safety and risk, which operate to constitute our experience of control or fear or pleasure, and so on. For example, how we approach and answer questions such as: how serious is this person's intent? How much do I want this? How much do I definitely not want this? How likely is this person to continue vigorously to pursue this sexual encounter? How likely am I to be able to stop this if I don't want it? How likely is this person to resort to physical force or violence to have sex with me? How readily is my fear aroused by this person's actions? How do our relative physical strengths weigh up against one another? How readily is my sexual interest aroused by this person's actions? Within a heterosexual matrix, the answers to all these questions, and other relevant questions, are likely to be highly dependent on both one's own and the other person's sex. While the answers will also vary according to other attributes about the person (e.g., how big they are, how much you like them, how much you are sexually attracted to them, how "reasonable" you believe they are and, indeed, how reasonable they turn out to be, and so on), most of us would no doubt agree that the sex/gender of both actors is important, and likely to determine the direction of expected answers to these kinds of questions.

Growing up sexed in contemporary Western cultures is likely to produce bodies and identities that (more or less) conform to these dichotomous outcomes. Women, in general, would be more likely to feel fear and sense danger when confronted by a sexually aggressive man, than would a man confronted by a sexually aggressive woman. Not only do the "sexually aggressive" acts of a woman and a man not necessarily *mean* the same thing (because of the discursive context in which we read them – for example, our expectations about how stoppable or

unstoppable they are, and our expectations about how probable physical force is likely to be brought to bear), but, our psychological, physical, and emotional (if these can be separated) responses to these acts are likely to be different. As women and as men we are propelled into what is the discursive weave of (hetero)sexual aggression as differently enabled subjects – both as initiators and as resisters.

## Women as subjects of desire

One of the differences that makes a difference in thinking about gender, heterosexuality, and rape, is the ease with which women and men can be positioned as subjects of a sexual drive discourse. As I have already discussed, the male sex drive discourse works to render men as always-already ready for sex, and as active sexual agents. Conversely, there is no equivalent agentic sexual subjectivity available to (all) women. As Lillian Rubin (1990) observed, some decades after the “sexual revolution” there was still no word in the English language without pejorative connotations for a woman who has sex freely. If women do step outside the bounds of acceptable responsive heterosexuality they run the risk of falling into the moral dumping ground, as “whores,” “sluts,” and “nymphos,” as the extract below illustrates:

W6: Going back to the messages about women, they had the iceberg, the motherly type, (w5: Mhum.) the whore, and the (w5: The Madonna and whore, wasn't there?) yeah, yeah.

[gap of 20 lines]

NG: What makes her the who- the whore, (w6: The whore.) figure?

W6: Sex is her focus at the time we meet her in the movie.

NG: So sex makes a woman a whore, do you think, in that, in these kind of . . . ? I'm not saying that that's your view, (w6: Mmm, no.) but that just, (pause)

W6: Hum, (thoughtful tone) well it did to me in this movie, (NG: Mmm) yes.

(MD: Mmm) That was my impression of her at the beginning.

Nora's mere *desire* for sex invokes the figure of the whore. Given the high stakes involved if a woman attempts to navigate heterosexual encounters differently it is not surprising that an acceptable version of initiation emerges which is defined by passivity and lack of conscious control:

NG: 'Cause it is kind of, I mean it's funny isn't it when we think about it, but it's that question of how um, yeah with particularly I mean, oh I don't know if it is particularly, I was thinking about the older woman and younger man, particularly ah, sort of out of that normal script, but how does a woman make her desire known? (MD: Mmm) You know, how does the woman actually, (pause) attempt to initiate a relationship or a liaison?

W6: It's a lot to do with body mannerisms that we don't always know that we're doing.

W5: And smell.

W6: Oh pheromones.

W5: It is, it is. (MD: Yeah, yeah)

MD: Bits that we can control apart from the pheromones. (Laughter)

W6: Yes, but you don't consciou- ah um, you don't consciously control them, if the mood takes you your body just (W7: Mmm) (MD: Right) does these mannerisms. (MD: Yeah, yeah)

When presented out of conversational context, this depiction of the constraints on women's heterosexual agency is striking for its exaggerated portrayal of female passivity. While many women would no doubt reject this stereotyped role, and assert their rights to a more active and agentic (hetero)sexuality, the sentiments expressed in this extract do bear some resemblance to the modern gender conservatism of once popular sex writer, John Gray. For instance, Gray advises women to "camouflage any knowledge she has of her own desires and pleasures, producing a masquerade of receptivity and submission to her partner's skill" (Potts 1998: 164). Incidentally, according to Gray, it can be a turn-off for men if women talk in "complete sentences," but women are likely to be impressed if a man talks to her in complete sentences during sex (Potts 1998: 167). All of this illustrates the limitations on women being able to voice desire. Women's sexual desire, it would seem, must be displayed only in ways that don't expose it too unambiguously.

Even in the supposedly progressive spaces of popular culture where women's active sexuality has been portrayed in an, at least reasonably, positive light the limits of women's sexual agency are readily apparent. In the popular television show *Sex and the City* there is an episode in which the feisty and assertive Carrie is troubled because her date consistently fails to make the first move. She anguishes over whether or not to initiate a kiss. As a story about four women friends going all out for what they want – "love, sex, and power" – *Sex and the City* is self-styled as a quintessentially modern tale about enlightened women and sex. In this episode, then, the show reminds us that in spite of any sexual revolution, the notion of sexual freedom for women is still restricted in some quite important ways.

If Peter Anderson's (1998) chapter in *Sexually Aggressive Women* is anything to go by, women who initiate sex with men fall into the same category as women who are sexually aggressive toward men – and that is a problem category, for which women's "motives" need to be explained. Through the repeated use of phrases like "women as sexual initiators or aggressors" (ibid.: 81), he writes as if women's sexual initiation and sexual aggression are able to be talked about in the same breath, without the need for clear distinctions. This habit is not new. In Eugene Kanin's 1970s attempt to replicate his early work on sexual aggression (Kanin 1957; Kirkpatrick and Kanin 1957) he too addressed the issue of "sexually aggressive females" (Kanin and Parcell 1977: 72). He and his colleague were interested in whether "the offended female can be seen as having presented a different sexual self from the nonoffended"; whether they were more likely to have been "inviting' male advances" (ibid.: 73). In an odd twist of wording, however, that makes the results difficult, if not impossible to interpret, women were asked "whether they were ever sexually aggressive and offended a male companion by their 'forward or provocative behavior'"(ibid.: 72).

Such quaint phraseology once again suggests there is a very thin line, if any at all, between sexual initiation and sexual aggression when it comes from a woman.

The deep cultural ambivalence about female sexual desire requires of girls and women that it be carefully controlled. Deborah Tolman and Tracy Higgins (1996) discuss a controversy in the United States, just over a decade ago, that perfectly illustrates this. After a letter to Ann Landers was published, in which a woman complained about the actions of some teenage girls who had phoned her son and left “sexually suggestive messages,” Landers apparently received 20,000 responses. Mainstream media coverage of this “shocking,” “bewildering,” and “frightening” event portrayed the girls as “obsessed,” “confused,” “abused,” and “troubled.” Landers herself opined: “What this says to me is that a good many young girls really are out of control” (Yolfe 1991; quoted in Tolman and Higgins 1996: 206). Tolman and Higgins extract the profound contradictions in how this kind of incident was represented in contrast to portrayals of a series of sexual abuses and rapes by “popular white high school boys” a few years later. While the girls’ seemingly relatively minor transgressions were pathologized in the media talk, the boys’ more serious crimes were normalized. A male sexual drive discourse was employed to explain the “naturalness” of the boys’ behavior, to the point where some excused it on this basis: “What can you do? It’s a testosterone thing” (Tolman and Higgins 1996: 207).

These constructions reveal the continued precariousness of women’s heterosexual agency, and they also reveal the strength and persistence of binary representations of male and female sexuality. Just like ballroom dancing, it would seem, natural sex is initiated and controlled by men. My analysis here is motivated out of a desire to disrupt this rigid binarized nature of sex – in part, because it provides too strong a cover for the sexual coercion and rape of women by men. To this end, I believe it is important to highlight and focus on the exceptions to these dominant, commonsense representations. The scene in *White Palace*, for instance, disrupts the familiar mapping of male/female difference onto an active/passive binary and raises important questions in the process. As I have shown in this chapter, however, responses to these somewhat challenging representations can end up denying their radical potential. I have argued that both of the most familiar discursive lenses through which this scene can be read – that shaped by a male sexual drive discourse and that provided by the operation of gender reversal and assumptions of a gender neutral subject – are limited and problematic. The presence of sexual difference must be considered in attempts to understand the dynamics of heterosexual rape and sexuality, and denying such difference in the interests of feminist moves toward gender equality is a head-in-the-sand approach that only perpetuates the often invisible and naturalized effects of gender oppression.

## Notes

- 1 Substantial parts of this chapter were published previously in a 2001 article co-authored with Marion Doherty in the *International Journal of Critical Psychology*. Many of the ideas discussed here were originally sparked in conversation about *White Palace*, gender, and sexuality with Chris Atmore.

- 2 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: This kind of research focus has become topical again – I will revisit these questions in greater detail in Chapter 9.
- 3 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: In writing this chapter, I was implicitly thinking about cisgender women and men. Transgender women and men, and people of nonbinary gender, have rightly demanded much greater visibility and recognition in recent years. With this, questions that were two or three decades ago treated as theoretical challenges for how to think and talk about categories like “women” and “men”, in relation to gender identity and diversely sexed bodies have become more urgent and concrete “real world” concerns. My analysis in this chapter doesn’t necessarily hold up well to the challenges of thinking beyond binary gender. More carefully addressing how the issues I discuss in this chapter relate to people across a spectrum of gender would require (and deserves) a new lens, giving more attention to complexities and nuances of sexual difference. Doing so would likely bring more texture to the analysis of the gender of sexual violence as it affects all people.
- 4 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: How students respond to questions around gender has continued to change. When I made this observation in the early-mid 2000s, my sense was that the students I was teaching, in general, started out relatively disinterested in gender politics (or, at least, the figure of “the feminist” was not one that was easy for students to publicly identify with). So, at that time, relative disinterest in sexual violence against women, and interest in male victims could seem like a way of distracting from recognition of ongoing gender inequality. By contrast, over the past five years, many of the students I teach in undergraduate classes arrive with a strong interest in gender politics, quite deep knowledge and sophisticated intersectional critiques, and many identify with feminism. During this time, many students have shown an interest in sexual violence beyond the heterosexual matrix; but many of them have approached this with a more sophisticated and politicized set of interests that are aligned with feminism.
- 5 Such questions were not entirely new (see Kanin and Parcell 1977). Diana Russell did also ask women about unwanted sexual experiences with women. In using an expanded definition of rape “to include forced oral or anal sex, or oral or anal sex because of a physical threat, or when the victim was unable to consent because she was unconscious, drugged, or in some other way totally helpless” (1984: 67), Russell reported that five of the 930 participants in her study reported an experience of rape by a woman. In other words, 0.7 per cent of all rapes reported by the 930 women in her sample were carried out by women (in three of these cases male rapists were also involved). In presenting these data, Russell reminds her readers that similar acts of forced oral or anal sex by men were not calculated as “rape,” and if they had been the proportion of female rapists would have been less than 0.7 per cent.
- 6 The unusualness of this representation is underscored by the relatively sympathetic portrayal of Nora – her sexuality is not demonized in the way that women’s assertive or “aggressive” sexuality is in some other popular films.
- 7 Group 1 contained three women participants plus Marion Doherty (MD) and myself; Group 2 contained one man and three women participants and MD. Participants were all Pākehā; their ages were 22, 37, 37, 38, 45, 50, 55, and they were recruited through contacts of contacts in MD’s wider network. The group discussions were based on questions and ideas formulated to allow for the elaboration of particular issues around heterosexual representation, and constructions of female sexuality in general. All the participants are represented in the transcripts as numbers with a prefacing M or W to indicate whether they are male or female. Marion Doherty and I are represented by MD and NG respectively. In the transcripts, overlaps between the speech of two participants are indicated with forward slashes. I gratefully acknowledge Marion Doherty’s contribution to these analyses.
- 8 In the discussion that follows I am critical of a gender reversal argument, but I want to emphasize that I regard this logic as called into being due to the discursive void for ways of making sense of these kinds of representations of female sexuality. This critique is

intended to point out problems with the tools for argument, not as properties of these participants, but as shared cultural resources (see Weatherall et al. 2002).

- 9 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Even beyond transient factors, such as a woman's use of certain types of weapons, or when a man is incapacitated through the effects of alcohol or drugs, we can imagine how some specific kinds of circumstances would severely disrupt the usual hierarchy of gendered power, and over-ride the gendered differences that I've noted in terms of normative expectations about one's sense of one's capacity to control the outcome of a coercive situation – for example, where a man is a prisoner and a woman is institutionally empowered to act upon him; or in relational contexts, where a man's physical and/or psychological power and capacity are constrained through disability or through his young age.
- 10 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: In re-reading this paragraph, I am aware (yet again!) how delicate this argument is: how essential it is to take seriously the gender of actors (and what this means for how they are likely positioned and able to respond in an interaction), and how difficult this is to do (without unpacking every clause, and also without essentializing gender difference). For instance, while I say the film did not indicate that Nora had any aggressive intentions toward Max, I am aware that I do not always see aggressive intent as an essential ingredient of sexual assault or rape. In fact, at the level of individual psychology, I think it is entirely possible for a man to rape a woman without consciously *intending* to be aggressive. The act *is* aggressive by virtue of it subduing her agency and overriding her wishes about what happens to her body; but as a man in a culture still shaped by norms that naturalise and justify male sexual insistence and some level of collective deferral to male sexual entitlement, he can “just do it” because he wants “it” (see, for example, Leanne's account of rape in Gavey 2007). He doesn't need to intend to aggress against her, or even to hurt her – he is resourced (culturally and psychologically) to act in this way through gender privilege (or “masculine capital”) that gives him some scope to disregard her actual wishes (so long as he can tell a semi-plausible story about how he thought he didn't do that). Women have none of this cultural artillery backing up their sexual behavior toward men – so where they act sexually aggressively they are transgressing gender power norms. Men, when they act aggressively, on the other hand, are trading on those norms.

Raymond Douglas's (2016) sensitive portrayal of his experience of rape as a young man, helps to show what I mean by masculine capital; just as it shows this was not sufficient to prevent him being raped. He explains that through the complex ways of being gendered as a man, he had an advantageous entry point to the experience of violent abuse. That is, he held the expectation that he would be able to fight his way out. Like nearly all other men, he says, he had a “conviction that ... when the chips are truly down, if you are fighting for your life, you will find within you the strength to prevail over anyone who isn't fighting for his.” This belief closely mirrors what Bergoffen (2012: 46) refers to as “the masculine fantasy of invulnerability.” The fantasy is not one of immortality, but “the fantasy of the hero, of the one who is invulnerable to the power of another insofar as he will always confront this power as an active agent.” Douglas describes this masculine capital springing into action when he realized his attacker was committed to violent force:

It's the nearest thing I know to a core constituent of maleness, *our psychic ace in the hole*. It allows us to go through dangerous parts of town without worrying, or even thinking, too much about it. ... this sense already preprogrammed within us, that those reserves are there to be called upon when we need them, and that they will not then fail us.

(2016: 11, *emphasis added*)

While some women are able to take up this fighting stance, it is not normatively woven into feminine identity in the way that Douglas describes it here. To the contrary, it is widely reported that women's fear of rape and sense of violability shape their behavior in

exactly opposite ways – avoiding, for instance, dangerous parts of town. As Valentine (1989: 386) found in her study of “the geography of women’s fear,” the predominant strategy women used to “stay safe” was “the avoidance of perceived ‘dangerous places’ at ‘dangerous times.’”

Douglas was not able to physically fight off the man intent on raping and violently hurting him, showing that complete faith in inviolability is misplaced, for anyone. His description of what happened clearly shows dynamics of power and force at play in ways that rendered him powerless to stop the violent assault (the rapist was stronger, more experienced, and up till that point a trusted authority figure). It is more difficult, however, to imagine that this would have been the case if his attacker was female, other than in exceptional circumstances.

- 11 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: That is, as a man and a woman who have just met, they would not interact simply as individuals who differ in physical size and appearance, style, interests, and so on. They would also relate to each other through the prism of gender (as well as prisms of race, ethnicity, age, and so on), providing dense interpretive frameworks for each person to understand the other’s actions and bodies, what they mean, how they affect their own possibilities for action, and so on – *regardless* (until proven otherwise) of the actual intentions and capacities of the particular man or woman or other person in the situation. I don’t think we can ever entirely escape these kinds of interpretive filters – they may become almost irrelevant in some relationships, but they are likely to be particularly salient when people first meet in a sexual encounter.

# 8

## TOWARD ENDING RAPE

[W]e have learned through painful disillusionment that there is no one solution to our oppression, just as there is no one source of our oppression. What this means is that we must combat rape on many different fronts.

*(New York Radical Feminists 1974: 176)*

In the spirit of a rapprochement between radical and poststructuralist feminist approaches to rape,<sup>1</sup> and at the same time bringing to bear a social science perspective, I have had two intersecting aims in writing this book. First, following in the tradition of radical feminist analyses, but using poststructuralist insights in the process, I have tried to draw attention to the scaffolding of rape that remains within our contemporary culture in the form of persistently gendered patterns of heterosexuality. Within this framework the naturalization of women's passivity and men's aggressive pursuit of sex can sometimes let rape slip by unnoticed as just part and parcel of normal sex. While a century ago this version of heterosexual sex was promoted as the ideal, today dominant Western ideals promote egalitarianism and reciprocity within heterosexual sex. We are surrounded with echoes of sexual liberation rhetoric telling us that women and men have equal rights to sexual pleasure and sexual autonomy, overlaid with a neoliberal patter which insists that we are free agents with abundant choice and control over these personal aspects of our lives. These relatively new cultural truths are not completely false. Some, perhaps even many, of us do experience significant sexual freedoms and choices relative to what was possible at many points in the past. But, as I hope to have shown in this book, it is simultaneously true that even in the absence of overt violence a myriad of constraints channel and limit these choices in ways that render us less free than we might like to think. To varying extents, these restrictions are invisible due to the naturalizing effects of dominant discourses of gender and sexuality that constitute our taken-for-granted assumptions about the ways of the world.

My other aim in writing this book has been to begin to complicate this picture, and in the process turn a reflexive eye to the form of our contemporary feminist social science theories of rape. We now live in a world where the dominant meanings and truths about rape have been powerfully modified by feminist activism and research. These new meanings have not replaced older sexist constructions of rape as witnessed, for example, in local panics about “false rape” accusations (Gavey and Gow 2001) and in ongoing legal commentary on what constitutes consent (e.g., van de Zandt 1998).<sup>2</sup> But they have powerfully added a women’s-eye point of view to the public construction of the problem of rape. By virtue of these contributions, we are now told that rape and sexual coercion are endemic, that around half of all women have experienced some form of sexual victimization, and that rape is a traumatic experience capable of ruining mental health. In the hopes of ending rape and, in the meantime, reducing the negative impact of rape on women, this delivery of rape onto the public agenda as a social problem of magnitude and significance is a huge victory. While not wanting to destabilize the positive changes to the meanings of rape that have occurred since the 1970s, I do think it is necessary to listen to some of the cautionary considerations that have been raised about the implications of our newer ways of representing rape.

My central argument in Part 3 of this book is about the need to unsettle rigid gendered binaries around both active desiring sexuality and representations of victimization. In this chapter, I want to briefly revisit this deconstructive mood, en route to identifying some particular sets of issues I think deserve closer attention in the ongoing feminist struggle against rape. I have neither a grand theory of rape, nor a watertight set of prescriptions for how to end rape. Clearly, it is an obstinate and complex social problem. While it is easy to reiterate feminist imperatives for foundational changes necessary to end rape – such as dismantling patriarchy, eradicating male violence, achieving equality between women and men, and so on – these agendas don’t always easily translate into concrete practical steps for change in those directions. They do contribute to increasing awareness about rape which is a necessary although insufficient first step. On the other hand, most educative rape prevention programs, while influenced by feminist analyses of rape, are based on psychological models for targeting knowledge, attitudinal, and behavioral change in individuals (e.g., Bachar and Koss 2001; Gidycz, Rich, and Marioni 2002; see also Carmody and Carrington 2000). The kinds of issues I want to consider here will seem piecemeal and fragmented by comparison with broader feminist edicts about ending rape, and indeed they are. Yet they will seem diffuse and possibly idealistic compared to psychological change models. I am not recommending specific directions for policy and practice, but rather hopefully opening up new questions and considerations to be debated by those engaged at these practical levels. They are intended to raise both supplementary possibilities for action and to prompt revisions of current models of rape prevention. It is also the case that the strategies I discuss pertain most obviously to rape and sexual coercion within (actual or potential) heterosexual relationships. In the move away from seeing the psychopathic stranger as the prototypical rapist, I don’t want to pretend that some rapes are not also thoroughly complicated by violent idiosyncrasies

of individual predatory men and that they are unlikely to be prevented by the kinds of social change I and others recommend.

All of the issues I highlight are to various extents subsumed by what I believe is the overriding need to de-naturalize a rigid gendered binary of men as active sexual actors and women as passive (a)sexual subjects – related to what psychologists sometimes refer to as the “sexual double standard” (e.g., Crawford and Popp 2003; Muehlenhard *et al.* 2003). As I noted in Chapter 7, Sharon Marcus and others have argued that reiterations of representations of women as passive and vulnerable and men as sexually aggressive may in fact actually render women’s bodies more rapeable, in a material sense, and men’s bodies as more able to rape. This poststructuralist argument is concerned with asking, “how the violence of rape is enabled by narratives, complexes and institutions which derive their strength not from outright, immutable, unbeatable force but rather from their power to structure our lives as imposing cultural scripts” (Marcus 1992). Marcus in particular is concerned with demolishing the view that women are inherently rapeable: a view that she implies is too readily accepted within much of the conventional feminist wisdom on rape. This argument invites us to consider that our own theories of rape and our day-to-day ways of talking about rape may actually end up being part of the problem.

This critical poststructuralist gaze has been turned in on feminism in particular, holding it to account on these charges. Yet contrary to the impression Marcus gives, it is fair to point out that such concerns have actually been circulating in some form since the earliest feminist scholarship on rape. In their early critique of the victimology of rape, Weis and Borges (1973) suggested that the American dating system plays a major role in producing women as “legitimate victims” (see Chapter 1). They laid the blame on the socialization of women and men into roles that prepare each for heterosexual rape: “The stereotypic notions of male and female roles and their relationship to conceptions of masculinity and feminine sexuality, coupled with a situation that is fraught with ambiguous expectations, provide the ingredients for systematically socialized actors who can participate in the drama of rape” (Ibid.: 86). Rape prevention, they concluded, requires “liberation from the confines of the usual sex-specific role behavior and expectations” (ibid.: 110). Some of the early writers went beyond this recognition of the role of culture in producing rape-able men and rapeable women, to raise concern about how all the new public awareness of rape was not enough to stop it. In their feminist “survival manual” *Against Rape*, for instance, Andra Medea and Kathleen Thompson (1974: 6) warned that many of the television programs on the topic “do nothing more than to further frighten women who are already afraid.” In addition to promoting self-defense for women, they suggested that it was equally important that women learn “how to cope with the idea of rape. Until it is reduced from an overwhelming, darkly evil prospect, the individual woman will not be able to deal with it” (ibid.: 6–7). They went on: “As long as we accept the stereotypes that are presented to us in everything from pulp detective stories to Oscar-winning films – that

women are naturally passive, childlike, and vulnerable, and that men are naturally aggressive, brutal, and uncontrollable – the rape situation will not change” (ibid.: 7). Within the context of the later feminist sex debates concern was also expressed about the damaging potential of generating increased fear. Snitow et al. (1983: 40) for instance, asked why “has the struggle against sexual violence – which originally emphasized the politics of rape – taken so symbolic a turn? Does propaganda about women’s fear and vulnerability encourage women to useful caution or make them more afraid to control their own lives?” (see also Vance 1984b).

So, while Marcus’s (1992) critique has often been greeted as a fresh new perspective on rape, there are strong elemental traces of at least some of her concerns within the early feminist literature.<sup>3</sup> The message in these various feminist writings is pretty clear. Without challenging the traditional stereotypical representations (and constructions) of men and women, it will be impossible to end rape. What we need is a new cultural terrain in which it would be completely implausible to read a woman’s silent, still, and sullen passivity as sexual consent.<sup>4</sup> With this backdrop no longer simply part and parcel of normal sex, a man’s act of forcing sex on a woman would stand out in crisper relief, for all concerned, *as rape*: a necessary precondition, surely, for change. To generate this new terrain we need to destabilize and rework discourses of sex and gender, masculinity and femininity, sexuality and heterosexuality, in ways that make possible radically different forms of male and female sexual embodiment. In particular, we need to work toward de-gendering both sexuality and violence. Inevitably, much of this work would have to take place apart from and in a form not directly associated with anything that looks like formal rape prevention.

One step in this direction has been the need to rethink the concept of consent as an adequate marker for determining sexual infringements.<sup>5</sup> This suggestion is far from new. As Carol Pateman (1980: 164) pointed out:

The conventional use of “consent” helps reinforce the beliefs about the “natural” characters of the sexes and the sexual double standard discussed in this article. Consent must always be given *to* something; in the relationship between the sexes, it is always women who are held to consent to men. The “naturally” superior, active, and sexually aggressive male makes an initiative, or offers a contract, to which a “naturally” subordinate, passive woman “consents.” An egalitarian sexual relationship cannot rest on this basis; it cannot be grounded in “consent.”

Numerous other feminists and legal scholars, most notably Catharine MacKinnon (1987b, 1989, 2003), have argued that the concept of sexual consent is impoverished and virtually meaningless in the current context. In addressing this problem in relation to date rape in particular, feminist philosopher Lois Pineau (1989: 235) put forward a “communicative” model of sexuality as an alternative to the contractual model on which the notion of consent is based. In this model, she said,

sexual interaction should look like “a proper conversation rather than an offer from the Mafia.” Situations in which a woman has been subjected to aggressive pressure to have sex would not be considered the kinds of encounters in which it would be “reasonable” to expect her to consent. Thus, if she claimed she did not consent under such circumstances, the presumption would be that she did not, and the burden of proof would fall on the man to prove that she did consent. Various attempts have been made to devise and encode within the law principles that require more than passive acquiescence in order for a woman’s consent to be presumed. These include concepts like “affirmative and freely-given permission” (Schulhofer 1998: 96) or “positively indicated free agreement” (Graham 1996: 9; see also Lacey 2001; Malm 1996; McSherry 1998; Naffine 1994).<sup>6</sup> Catharine MacKinnon (2003: 271) insists that such moves must be underwritten by a legal recognition of gender inequality:

The idea here is not to prohibit sexual contact between hierarchical unequals *per se*, but to legally interpret sex that a hierarchical subordinate says was unwanted in light of the forms of force that animate the hierarchy between the parties.<sup>7</sup>

In the legal context, where prescriptive definitions are required, these kinds of shifts seem like definite improvements. In thinking about the broader cultural arena, however, I think slightly different tactics are required. Widespread social change is unlikely to be effected through the crystallization of a programmatic new ethic of sexuality alone. While the promotion of new gender-sensitive standards of justice and equality is important, it needs to occur alongside more deconstructive moves that undermine the viability of the naturalized binary workings of gendered sexuality. Part of the reason for this is the inherent vulnerability of (the rhetoric of) such grand principles to elide the more slippery workings of power that constrain choice and autonomy beneath their very eyes. As I have argued elsewhere, “without a deconstructive impulse we can remain blind to unarticulated discursive webs that compromise our ability fully to enact such ideals as equality and democracy” (Ryan and Gavey 1998: 154).

So how do we move beyond a normative construction of heterosexuality that allows rape a safety within its perimeter? In particular, how do we get past the knotty paradox that Marcus and others have diagnosed, of how it can be possible to unravel these gendered binaries at the same time as we arguably reinstall them each time we continue to assert them as the very truths we seek to change? There is no easy answer to this, because any “ideal” solution can be seen to have political complicities and costs. My working answer, like the New York Radical Feminists urged in 1974, is to simultaneously fight against rape on many fronts, always attempting to be reflexive about the practical political implications of the strategies we choose. This certainly implies theoretical sacrifices, as well as strategic gambles and concessions along the way; but such messiness is inevitable in any reflexive political contest.

## Returning to the local

At the beginning of this book I forewarned of a certain generalizing current in my analysis that rides uneasily across cultural and geographic differences. While I found this unavoidable given the kind of argument I wanted to make, I now want to return to this issue in a slightly different way. When it comes to formulating tactics for political action and social change, close attention to the local context is essential. This means, for example, attention to the cultural and racial specificities of (hetero)sexual configurations. It means paying attention to local struggles over the meanings of sexuality and of sexual violence; and attending to what is prescribed and elided in those formulations, and how power operates through those dominant meanings.

While I believe that theoretical reflexivity is important for any political project, rigid theoretical purity and consistency is likely to be limiting. Chris Atmore (2003) stresses the importance of location and context in relation to the particular form of struggle that we might end up prioritizing. She contrasts, for instance, the different cultural landscapes of New Zealand and Australia which, in and around the 1990s, threw up different challenges for social political struggles around issues like sexual violence. Beyond the surface sameness of these two cultural sites, Atmore perceives and portrays New Zealand as “more hospitable to strategic separatisms of various kinds (lesbian, feminist, indigenous),” and at the same time “less sexually libertarian, so less hospitable to opening up of at least some kinds of questions of sexual pleasure” (ibid.: 24). For a lesbian feminist theorist–activist like Atmore, who is as comfortable drawing on radical feminism as she is drawing on postmodern feminism, this leads to different political choices. In the New Zealand context where she might be more “assured of a taken-for-granted critique of sexual coercion,” she suspects she would find herself arguing more along poststructuralist, deconstructive trajectories. Whereas, if the moral problem with sexual violence or the gender politics of it are under threat, putting more eggs in the radical feminist basket would be strategically necessary. It doesn’t matter too much for now if the particular details of this hypothesis about intra–Antipodean local differences turn out to be entirely accurate or not! The point is simply that it makes sense to be flexible and strategic about the arguments and actions we adopt, attending always to the particular cultural formations that are most problematic at any one time and place (see also Scott 1988).

## Women’s bodies and aggression

One avenue for change geared toward disabling rapists’ potential for rape is the promotion of physical strength and bodily know-how in girls and women. Women’s self-defense played an important role in early feminist activism against rape (e.g., Boston Women’s Health Book Collective 1976; Manhart 1974; Medea and Thompson 1974; New York Radical Feminists 1974).<sup>8</sup> Indeed, many of the early feminist theorists (and activists) “described physical struggle using a lexicon of bravery and heroism rather than abjection” (Haag 1996: 41). As Boston’s Cell 16 group advocated in 1969, “It must become as dangerous to attack a woman as to

attack another man” (Densmore and Dunbar; quoted in Bevacqua 2000: 44). Yet since that time self-defense was neglected and/or disparaged by many feminists (McCaughey 1997; Haag 1996). In response to this hiatus, Martha McCaughey (1997) has called for a return to women’s self-defense as a domain for transforming women’s embodied subjectivities in ways that enable us to directly fight back against rape.<sup>9</sup> In *Real Knockouts* she advocates a “physical feminism,” which draws on diverse theoretical resources, from the corporeal feminism of theorists like Elizabeth Grosz and the discursive work of Judith Butler, to the radical feminism of Catharine MacKinnon. In doing so she calls into question feminist (and wider) squeamishness about women’s violence, pointing out that “male domination is already an embodied politics; hence feminism would do well to get physical too” (ibid.: 201).<sup>10</sup> McCaughey is careful not to pretend that self-defense alone will stop rape, and to insist that it should be part of a broader array of anti-rape strategies. But she argues compellingly that a feminist re-think of our ambivalence toward aggression and violence is necessary for challenging the structural embodied logic of rape, which requires men who assume they can forcefully overpower a woman, and women who assume they can be forcefully overpowered by a man. Philosopher, Ann Cahill (2001: 14), in her book *Rethinking Rape* is particularly enthusiastic about McCaughey’s vision, concluding that “the best possibility for resistance against the discourses that make rape a possibility is to be found in the recodification of women’s bodies themselves.”

I heartily agree with this pronouncement, but would add that it needs to be joined by a recodification of men’s embodied subjectivities, as well as by other forms of recodification – not just those that disrupt the usual gendered script around violence, but also those around sexuality (which I will discuss later). However, one limitation with this proposal for rape prevention, at least as taken up by Cahill, lies in its limited assumptions about how the moment of danger would present itself. In a world in which rape was not tolerated – evidenced by men experiencing physical and social harm when they tried to force sex on a woman – Cahill imagines:

women could roam the streets at any time at night. They could walk through bars alone or with each other without the fear or discomfort of being harassed by male strangers. They would not fear their husbands, boyfriends, lovers, brothers, or friends, as those relationships would be founded on a mutual recognition of physical and emotional strength. Knowing themselves, individually and collectively, in a distinctly embodied way, to be deserving of this kind of freedom and security would also result in a confidence that, were they to be attacked, their experience would not be met with suspicion or dismissal.

(Cahill 2001: 206)

This vision – which Cahill presents as feasible, even though she concedes it might take time – is attractive and promising. Yet, what it seems to ignore from my point of view is the slippery boundary between sex and rape. It is not only the conservative law that has trouble distinguishing rape from just sex, in effect telling many women who

experience rape that they did consent. It is also women themselves, who sometimes avoid subjecting their own experiences of forced sex to the label of “rape” (as I have shown in Chapter 5; see also Chapter 6). Mary Koss’s (1985) work on hidden rape, for instance, showed that there were few differences in the severity of sexual assaults committed against women she characterized as “unacknowledged rape victims” compared to those characterized as “acknowledged rape victims.” What did distinguish the women who did not call this forced sex “rape” from those who did was that they were more likely to be in a sexual relationship in which they had had prior “sexual intimacy” with the man who forced sex on them (see also Kahn et al. 2003). (Subsequent studies have found that women who call their experience rape were more likely to have experienced physical force at the time.) Cahill’s reference to “attack” is pertinent here.<sup>11</sup> In a situation initially perceived by a woman as a willing social or sexual encounter it may be incredibly difficult to pinpoint the moment at which her experience becomes one of being under attack – when it turns from some form of acceptable seduction into annoyingly persistent persuasion into attempted forced sex into rape. Not only do women need to be enabled to fight back when the situation calls for it, but our standard scripts for heterosexual sex need to be overhauled so it is clearer sooner that the man who keeps pursuing an unwilling woman is entering the territory of sexual coercion and potentially rape. The execution of self-defense, I would have thought, requires a kind of anxious vigilance, alertness to danger and particular forms of physiological arousal that are not always compatible with more sexual and/or intimate kinds of embodiment.

Part of physical feminism’s agenda is a shaking up of conventional notions of femininity, with the aim that women would no longer be so constrained by imperatives around passivity, politeness, and deference to men. While self-defense training may help women to throw off these kinds of feminine shackles, it makes sense that broader social changes in normative expectations for femininity and masculinity would make this a more sustainable goal. A good place to get the ball rolling might be in attempting to teach children more fluid ways of being girls and boys. In *The Secret Lives of Girls*, Sharon Lamb (2001: 227) has taken on the question of how to raise girls without inadvertently reproducing the straitjacket of femininity. She argues that we need to actively resist two of the strongest prohibitions for girls today – those against sex and aggression. As the title of her concluding chapter suggests, she wants us to welcome “sex, power, and aggression in the lives of girls.” This is important, Lamb argues, because unless we respond more constructively and positively to girls’ sexual play and their engagement with their own bodies, including their experiences of aggression, we teach them to become ready-made for adult sexual relations with men that privilege androcentric norms of sexuality and relegate women’s sexual desires and pleasures to second place.

Welcoming aggression into girls’ and women’s lives is a controversial position within feminism (see McCaughey 1997). When it is even considered, it is often not favored because it is seen to be condoning violence, which is reviled as a destructive and masculine act that women are in some sense morally above. Yet while a key meaning of aggression does connote hostile and destructive behaviors,

or making unprovoked attacks and assaulting others (often for no good reason), it also has a more positive meaning: “feeling or energy displayed in asserting oneself, in showing drive or initiative; aggressiveness, assertiveness, forcefulness” (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). Challenging the rules of normative femininity that constrict women’s expression of assertive and forceful actions clearly is important in an anti-rape context. Moreover, the role of “legitimate violence” in the case of self-defense, while arguably problematic within some broader moral frameworks, has to be looked at in a more complex way, according to Pamela Haag (1996: 47), lest women remain “presumptively ‘available’ for violation, and men presumptively capable of violating.”

One practical and relatively simple recommendation arising from Lamb’s (2001) research concerns the value of sport for girls. In fact, Lamb recommends that girls be given the opportunity to learn an *aggressive* sport. Playing sport provides a legitimate context, she suggests, in which girls can experience the embodiment of strength and aggression. Although encouraging girls to play sport and be involved in physical activities may seem far removed from rape prevention, it is plausible that promoting the development of an active, strong physicality could be one small yet helpful cultural intervention in the right direction. Interestingly, in a 1982 address on “Women, self-possession, and sport,” Catharine MacKinnon (1987b: 122) advocated for the value of athletics for women, for very similar reasons: it “can give us a sense of an actuality of our bodies as our own rather than primarily as an instrument to communicate sexual availability.” Despite the essentialism of which she is sometimes accused, MacKinnon’s (1987b: 120) radical feminist explanation of why more women don’t participate in sports speaks clearly of the socially produced nature of women’s feminine corporeality: “Women have learned a lot all these years on the sidelines, watching. Not only have we been excluded from resources, excluded from participation, we have learned actual disability, enforced weakness, lack of spirit/body connection in being and in motion.”

## Sex and the sexed body

An important target for the deconstructive impulse I referred to earlier is sexuality itself. Part of the strategic toolkit for disabling rape must be the “queering” of sex and sexuality in the broadest of ways.<sup>12</sup> By this I mean not only challenging heteronormativity, but also working to transform the ritualized nature of sexual relationships between women and men, including the meanings of femininity and masculinity in these contexts. Some of the practical strategies that might be adopted are fairly obvious. They would include the provision of programs that promote female agency in various ways, and support and encouragement for girls and women to participate in them. These would offer opportunities for girls and women to experience and develop physical strengths, pleasures, and acumen necessary for an embodied agency (as I have been discussing, through self-defense training perhaps, and also through sport and physical activity more generally). Also important would be forms of sexuality education that deliberately seek to erode compulsory heterosexuality and the sexual

double standard. Instead they would promote the necessity of women's desire as a prerequisite to sex, rather than simply their right to say "no" (see Chapter 4). These messages, of course, have to be thoroughly woven into sexuality education for boys as well. Also crucial is the ongoing need within sexuality and anti-violence education to chip away at the cultural idealization of and infatuation with overly aggressive hegemonic masculinities, which teach boys and men (as well as girls and women) that men have gender-based entitlements that women do not.<sup>13</sup> These kinds of initiatives are already underway in many places, although usually in far too limited and segmented forms. Where such interventions are successful, we might expect that "empowered" and agentic individual women and sensitized and "enlightened" men will effect ripples of influence that will contribute to social change. However, this is insufficient. Equally important – in fact, essential – is the less direct work that needs to go on in reworking the substance of contemporary common sense so as to transform the cultural horizon of possibilities for these expanding femininities and masculinities. This is the kind of politics of discursive intervention implied by feminist poststructuralist theory.

At this level of cultural critique and social activism we need ongoing challenges to the tentacles of heteronormativity that prescribe heterosexuality as the normal and best form of organizing gender and sexuality. We also need to challenge the promotion and naturalization of a host of sexual imperatives, including the coital imperative, where they take form – in, for instance, cultural constructions of and remedies for sexual "dysfunctions."<sup>14</sup> Another phenomenon that needs ongoing critical attention is the popularization of vulgar evolutionary psychology pronouncements about gendered sexuality. All of these reiterations of conservative values and forms of gendered sexuality are already subject to constant analysis and critique by feminists, queer theorists, LGBTQ activists, and other cultural critics and activists.

Together, these direct educative interventions and the broader processes of cultural critique and social activism can work to transform the cultural conditions of possibility for rape. They can promote cultural space that allows and expects forms of female sexuality that are just as active and agentic as male sexuality is; and forms of male sexuality that can legitimately be passively receiving. Within this de-gendered sexual context, space would also be created for defusing and resisting all sorts of other (escalating) sexual imperatives to do with desire, intercourse, orgasm, and erections.<sup>15</sup> Of course many women and men currently do live out these "transgressive" sexualities, in subtle and daring, as well as comfortable and uncomfortable, forms. For example: men who are comfortable with sex and intimacy in the absence of a "reliably erect" penis, men who are not particularly interested in sex, women who are very interested in sex and actively pursue casual sexual encounters, cisgender heterosexual couples who choose to include coitus sparingly or not at all in their sexual repertoire, and so on. Yet, not only do these possibilities sometimes entail personal risk of censure and punishment for those women and men, but stories of these alternative ways of doing gendered sexuality are rarely given airspace in the popular cultural realm. Representation of these complicating narratives of gender and sexuality in the media, for instance, might have important potential for unsettling the easy assumptions and conclusions that

we are able to collectively draw about the natural and the possible. There are multiple opportunities for this kind of generative disruption.

One set of possibilities consists of tactics of representational deconstruction. These would work to bring to the popular imagination other ways of seeing and understanding gender and sexuality (and this needs to happen in relation to representations of women's strength and potential for aggression as well). These might include playful, creative forms of culture jamming<sup>16</sup> in which inventive new ways of seeing are skillfully released within (un)popular culture. While this particular example might not properly count as culture jamming (depending on your political priorities at the time – given its simultaneous promotion of consumer capitalism and its bending of gender norms), an interesting occasion of this kind of thing might be the famous Levis advertising campaign in the U.K. (and New Zealand) in the mid-1980s. In the television ad, model Nick Kamen walks into a launderette and strips to his boxer shorts, to the tune of Marvin Gaye's "I heard it through the grapevine".<sup>17</sup> In this beautifully stylized and erotically infused scene, women in the launderette are shown enjoying watching Kamen strip. What is notable about this advertisement is not that it shows a male body as the object of desire – that had been done before. But, as Suzanne Moore (1988: 47) noted, it was radical within a mainstream context to portray "a male body coded, in Mulvey's apt but awkward phrase, for its 'to-be-looked-at-ness'." It has been observed that this image was equally appealing to women and men, but within this ambiguity was a legitimate public space and encouragement for women to step into the position of active, desiring heterosexual subjects. This may seem a relatively trivial cultural moment in the context of anti-rape politics. Like many political acts, its significance in isolation might be small. Yet, I think it is important to recognize the potential within such representations to provide new forms of understanding gender and sexuality. In theoretical terms, culture jamming of this kind (if we can call it that) contributes to the power-knowledge nexus that makes new ways of being possible. An advertisement like this can be a moment of "savoir" that expands "pouvoir."

Such cultural instances have been criticized, predictably, for their objectification of the male body. This is certainly one way of looking at it, and is possibly cause for concern. Yet feminist critiques of the objectification of women's bodies do not migrate well for effortlessly theorizing displays of the male body. Where this occurs, it still does so within a context of discursive and structural power relations in which meanings of women's and men's bodies and desires are not interchangeable.<sup>18</sup> From a feminist point of view such images can be appreciated for their transgressive queering potential to expand normative constructions of feminine and masculine sexualities.<sup>19</sup>

Returning to a domain where academics perhaps have more to directly contribute, there are many ways I think in which our theoretical analyses and our empirical research can contribute to provide insights and data that go against the grain of commonsense ideas about men's sexuality and women's sexuality and provoke new ways of imagining socio-sexual possibilities: tales, for instance, of women's active – in the sense of proactive seeking and initiating – sexuality or men's enjoyment of sexual passivity.

One of the interesting themes that came out of our work on Viagra (Potts et al. 2001–3) was the strong presence of some older women’s accounts of active, desiring sexualities. While this was by no means an uncomplicated “finding,” (e.g., see Potts et al. 2003), it was to some extent a welcome surprise. One couple I interviewed, separately, both described a sexual relationship in which not only did they seem equally desirous and active (which, while counter-stereotypical to some extent, is perhaps not surprising), but in which she was described as having a “sexual drive” in terms that were strikingly similar to the male sexual drive discourse. Such accounts are not well represented in the usual discourses of heterosexuality. Both spoke, for instance, of how she would reach a point of irritability that called for the relief of sex (meaning orgasm and intercourse). Similarly, it was interesting to hear some men describe their use of Viagra arising from a need to satisfy their female partner when they themselves could do without the erectile fix.

Another tale that tinkers with the dominant discourses of heterosexuality is the apparent delight that some men reportedly experience in heterosexual passivity (see Segal 1990). As Segal (1994: 288) points out, there is no reason to assume that a man’s adoption of sexual passivity is necessarily “pro-woman.” Yet if there are stories to be told about this form of male (hetero)sexual experience, they might contribute another small notch in the direction of queering (hetero)sexuality. This is because they challenge normalizing and naturalizing pronouncements about the true nature of gendered sexuality. On this same theme, Carol Smart (1996: 236) has questioned how we might make sense of S/M sexual practices in which “men desire to be beaten and spanked by women.” While it may not be revolutionary, she argues, (dis)regarding this kind of S/M as a perversion and/or as necessarily oppressive to women misses an opportunity for destabilizing what heterosexual sex is, and “only serves repetitively to normalize and institutionalize a highly simplified notion of heterosexuality” (ibid.: 237).

One further area that is important not only in its own right of course, but also for what it says more generally about women and men and our sexual natures, is the emerging work on sexual coercion and sexual violence among lesbian women (e.g., Girshick 2002) and among gay and bisexual men (e.g., Fenaughty et al. 2006). This work shows, in a way that I think tends to be more compelling than the work on *heterosexual* coercion of men, that the male sex drive is no protection for adult men against experiences of sexual vulnerability and violation.<sup>20</sup> The research on sexual violence among lesbian women also shows that men do not have a prerogative on sexually abusive behavior.

Within mainstream social psychology there are also empirical research programs generating data that fit into this sort of destabilizing agenda: for example, the work I have discussed in Chapter 7 on women’s “sexual aggressiveness.” Research in this tradition provides strong counter-stereotypical “evidence” that men are not always aggressively driven to have sex and that women do not always need to be persuaded. Women, in fact, also report experiencing occasions of actively attempting to persuade a sexually uninterested man to have sex with them (e.g., Byers 1996; Byers and O’Sullivan 1998; Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson,

and Anderson 2003). Sandra Byers and her colleagues have been devoted to showing that sexual coercion is not “normative or typical of sexual interactions in dating relationships” (Byers 1996: 15).<sup>21</sup> While at one level these kinds of findings are hardly news to many of us, the accumulation of such images does, nevertheless, unsettle the received common sense of heterosex that is traded within the pop psychology of John Gray as well as in popular evolutionary psychology. As such, it provides an important story to tell.

I am enthusiastic about the potential for this kind of politics of discursive intervention to prompt cultural change through the destabilization of familiar old ways of doing sex and gender and the promotion of alternative possibilities, in ways that weaken the cultural scaffolding of rape. Yet there are at least three interrelated potential pitfalls that I want to try to avoid in recommending this path – complacency, individualizing, and depoliticizing. As Susan Bordo (1997: 185) has cogently argued, “we cannot make the mistake of imagining that they [dualisms like mind/body, male/female, black/white] have been transcended or ‘transgressed’ just because we can ‘destabilize’ them in theory.” It could be all too easy to drift into a complacent sense of satisfaction through achieving some kind of theoretical mastery over problems of rape and sexual coercion *in the abstract*. Within our understandings and our theory we must be careful not to accomplish a representational erasure of the existence of the concrete material effects of the gendered hierarchical binaries that we currently live with. It is tempting sometimes to be captivated by the possibility of telling transgressive stories – such as those I have alluded to above from my own interviews with a handful of women and men about Viagra. But it is dishonest to emphasize these kinds of tales if in doing so we steal the spotlight from the more pervasive and “mundane” instances where the conventional gendered binaries play out repetitively in unjust and injurious ways.

These kinds of political strategies are, as I keep saying, about changing the cultural conditions of possibility for rape. While they do suggest that not all is as it seems beneath the cultural surface (e.g., men are not always-already ready for sex), the political project is concerned with engendering cultural change. It is about envisaging a different future rather than simply reinventing the present (as the backlash commentators do). In our endeavor to destabilize gender we cannot simply deny the differences in what it means to be a woman and a man in this culture at this time; how the mesh of culture and biology works to produce particular sexed corporealities and subjectivities. While these processes do not operate in a fixed determinate way, it does not follow that any person so produced can wish personal change into being (see Chapter 3). It is not therefore a simple matter of imagining a new cultural fabric and then expecting individual people to suddenly fall into new patterns of experiencing and acting within a cultural context that is, for the present, largely unmodified. In a recent critique of feminist poststructuralist approaches to rape, Carine Mardorossian (2002: 755) mistakenly, I think, implies that they make “women’s behavior and identity the site of rape prevention.” As she rightly insists, an individualizing move of this kind would be not only unrealistic, but it invites victim-blaming. Rather, as she argues, “social inscriptions – that is, our physical situatedness in time and space, in history and culture – do not simply evaporate because we are made aware of them” (ibid.). The hope, however, is that through a politics of

discursive intervention (among other strategies) we will ignite a process of profound change to the forms of those very inscriptions – even if the benefits are not fully enjoyed by our own generation.

One other problem with some of these kinds of disruptions to traditional narratives of gender and sexuality is that they risk popular recuperation within depoliticizing if not thoroughly reactionary forms. Unfortunately, this opportunity is provided, I think by some of the social psychological research that utilizes the reductive framework of positivist science. In flattening out the nuances and complexities of gendered embodiment, and rarely taking sufficient account of power, these approaches *can* offer a dishearteningly disingenuous image of gender neutrality. This is certainly not true of all researchers in the area; several are careful to tell a more complicated story. Conclusions such as the following, however, reveal the rather naive and fanciful engagement with our social world that can arise from such a paradigm: “In reality, men become the sexual assault victims of other men *and women* in the same way that women do” (Davies 2002: 204; emphasis added).<sup>22</sup> Promoting a message of gender sameness is not the same thing as deconstructing gendered sexuality, as I have discussed in Chapter 7; and its implications for understanding and eradicating sexual violence are retrograde in my opinion. As Claire Renzetti (1999: 52) has argued in her discussion of women’s violence within intimate relationships, feminists need to “seize this issue and make it our own” so that issues of these kinds aren’t simply turned against us.

### **Harm and the continuum of sexual victimization**

There is one final issue I want to revisit, and it is perhaps the most controversial. This is the invitation to rethink the interplay between our concept of a continuum of sexual victimization and our dominant narrative of trauma in understanding the impact of rape. Let me say at the outset that I am not seeking to abandon either of these frameworks.

Within the social science research on the prevalence and mental health consequences of a wide range of sexually coercive experiences, an impression is sedimented that it is both common for women to have experienced sexual victimization, and that it has serious potential mental health consequences. Such messages are also woven into many feminist narratives of rape in the form, for instance, of reiterations of “the trauma of rape” as an uncontested inevitability (e.g., Hengehold 2000). From the point of view of an anti-rape agenda, this kind of research and the constructions it gives rise to have value in providing a powerful framework for arguing the moral wrongs of rape and sexual coercion. Not just that, of course, they also contribute to developments in therapeutic understandings and so on, that should be helpful for women traumatically harmed by rape. But as I have noted in Chapter 6, concerns of various kinds have been raised about the drawbacks of an habitual holding up of “the broken body as the way to argue that a set of social arrangements is objectively wrong” (McCaughey 1997: 17).

In that chapter I touched on questions about the concept of a continuum of sexual victimization and the need for more nuanced uses of the category of “victim.”

The continuum concept has been useful in framing an understanding of the very possibilities of sexual violence within heterosexual relationships, and in theorizing the relationship between rape and the building blocks within normative heterosexuality that make much of it possible. It is arguably misleading, however, to apply the notion of a continuum to understanding the relationship between the *experiences* of “rape” (particularly in the classic paradigmatic form involving a terrorizing and/or violent attack) and more commonplace experiences of heterosexual coercion. This is emphatically not to imply that rape within dating or marriage relationships, for example, is inherently less serious or less traumatizing than rape by a stranger. It is also not to imply that rape unaccompanied by violent force cannot also be traumatizing. Neither is it to assert that non-rape forms of sexual coercion are not also potentially destructive, and certainly a troubling site for gender relations. However, a proper understanding of these practices of sexual coercion and violence, and of the different experiences they entail, requires a more careful approach.

How, for instance, might we attempt to incorporate the heterogeneity of rape into our theories? It is clear that not all rapes are the same. Even when we restrict ourselves to a fairly conventional narrow definition of rape as unwanted sex obtained by force or threat of force (for example, the kinds of experiences that would be counted using responses to items 9 or 10 on the original SES; see Chapter 2), not all such rapes are the same. At one extreme, some rapes occur as part of a life-threatening assault, where a woman might be literally paralyzed with fear. She could be subjected to a wide range of different forms of severe physical violence and/or torture, leaving her with serious physical injuries and lasting emotional trauma. At the other end of the spectrum, a woman might experience the forced sex as something that falls into a somewhat more everyday sense of “bad life experiences.” It might not leave major psychological trauma characterized by intense ongoing fear; if it does leave an ongoing painful psychological mark it might be one that is more akin to the hurt and humiliation that can be brought about by experiencing some kinds of relationship betrayal perhaps, rather than the kind that has typically been associated with rape.<sup>23</sup> It is salient to recall that when the notion of “rape trauma syndrome” was first introduced by Burgess and Holmstrom (1974: 982) it was described as the psychological reaction to a “life-threatening situation.” However, to emphasize what I have already said, I do not want to imply that rapes that are not experienced as life-threatening and/or violent cannot also be experienced as traumatic and harmful. It is essential, I believe in attempting to complicate the direct mapping of trauma onto rape, not to uncritically invoke theories or data that diminish our capacity to hear and tell stories of unbearable pain and suffering wrought by rape and sexual abuse.<sup>24</sup>

Some feminists have traced how the influence of implicit medical and psychological paradigms has become woven into a feminist understanding of rape, in ways that might not always be helpful (e.g., Kelly et al. 1996; Kelly 1988/9). In raising concerns about the “therapeutically-inspired axioms” that have come to predominate in feminist politics about violence, for instance, Pamela Haag (1996) reads the tone of Robin Warshaw’s (1988) popular book, *I Never Called It Rape* as projecting the sense

that “the act [date and acquaintance rape] committed against the woman becomes a totalizing experience itself, a singular event that fixes the victim on the trajectory of others who are defenseless and seeking rescue” (ibid.: 59). Many feminists influenced by poststructuralism or social constructionism have asked for more reflexivity in adopting such frameworks of understanding (e.g., Gavey 2003; Heberle 1996; Lamb 1999b; Marcus 1992; Reavey and Warner 2003). What might they elide and constrain? What, if any, might be the costs of insisting too strongly on rape’s inevitable trauma? Echoing some of the early concerns of Kathleen Barry (1979), Jeanne Marceek (1999: 165) has argued that the lexicon of “trauma talk” she found in feminist therapists’ accounts of their work:

subsumes the particularities of a woman’s experience into abstractions (e.g., “trauma,” “abuse”) and reduces experience into discrete, encapsulated symptoms (flashbacks; revictimization). It offers cause-and-effect explanations that are linear, mechanistic, and mono-causal. It sets aside a client’s understanding of her own experience in favor of a uniform narrative; a single cause reliably (even invariably) produces a fixed set of symptoms.<sup>25</sup>

As an indication of how disturbing the clumsy uptake of this model can be, it has been reported that some Canadian judges have treated evidence of a “posttraumatic stress disorder” as “a prerequisite to the conclusion that the plaintiff has been a victim of sexual violence” (Des Rosiers, Feldthusen, and Hankivsky 1998). Not only does this framework have double-edged implications for the women whose experiences are subjected to its analytic lens (see also Chapter 6; Gavey 2003<sup>26</sup>), but it has troubling implications for a broader rape prevention agenda (see Heberle 1996; Marcus 1992; Medea and Thompson 1974).

To some extent, irrespective of what we believe the impact of rape and sexual coercion to be, the question is how we utilize this knowledge in the interests of dismantling the cultural scaffolding of rape. Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray (1993), for instance, have theorized the political implications of speaking out about the trauma of rape and sexual abuse. They claim that “all survivors face debilitating trauma” (ibid.: 282) but, they argue, “we are fluid, constantly changing beings who can achieve great clarity and emotional insight even from within the depths of pain.” Tracing both the transgressive potential of “survivor discourse” and the ways in which it can be recuperated within dominant (unsympathetic) discourses, they conclude that “what we need to do is not retreat – as Foucault might suggest – from bringing sexual violence into discourse but, rather, to create new discursive forms and spaces in which to gain autonomy within this process” (ibid.: 287).<sup>27</sup> Renée Heberle (1996)<sup>28</sup> has also questioned whether “speaking out” about the truth of women’s pain and “sexual suffering” is an effective *political* strategy. Her response is more skeptical. While she acknowledges there may be therapeutic benefits to such practices, she wonders if they might actually contribute to the very conditions that enable rape. This could happen, she argued, through obscuring what might otherwise be “an immanent fragility to masculinist dominance” (ibid.:

65) and, in the process, reifying this dominance and sedimenting women's vulnerability. Clearly, there remain important questions about the effects of our strategies against rape. While we can monitor and assess these effects, we also need to consider, of course, what the political costs might be of abandoning the practice of publicly speaking the pain of sexual violence; mindful of whose perspectives, whose voices, and what kinds of discourses of gender, sexuality, and rape were privileged when the burdens of rape and sexual coercion were borne by women in private and in silence.<sup>29</sup>

\* \* \*

In this book I have attempted to chart the dramatic shift over recent decades in the ways we understand rape. Because most rapes are committed by men against women within the context of an actual or potential heterosexual relationship, and because many such rapes have historically been written off as just sex, it has been necessary to interrogate this site – of heterosexual sex itself – in the process of understanding rape. In developing threads first articulated in 1970s radical feminist analyses of rape, I have argued that normative heterosex provides the cultural scaffolding for rape. Within the sharply gendered binary dynamic of heterosexual sex (masculine–feminine, active–passive, dominant–submissive, desiring–desired) lie the building blocks that both enable rape and provide the perfect alibi for many rapes – it was just sex. At least part of the fight against rape can be conceived as changing the cultural conditions of possibility for rape. This means that the very gendered binary nature of (hetero)sexuality – the meeting of active aggressive masculinity and passive responsive femininity – must itself be the object of change.<sup>30</sup>

In drawing on Foucault's theories of discourse, power, and subjectivity, I have adopted a form of social constructionism that brings notes of both pessimism and optimism. On the one hand it points out that as individual women and men and other people we are less free than many of us like to imagine. Bringing this theoretical framework to an analysis of women's accounts of their experiences of heterosexual coercion illuminates the constraints that limit women's choices about how to resist unwanted and forced sex from men. On the other hand, if we turn our attention to the possibilities for *cultural* change rather than *individual* agency and resistance, in the first instance, there is cause for some degree of optimism. This kind of social constructionist gaze introduces a contextualization of contemporary meanings and practices of gender and sexuality. Combined with the rear vision provided by studies in the history of sexuality, it becomes clear that much of what is taken for granted as natural and normal (e.g., (hetero)sex is coitus, women are not sexually aggressive, the pursuit of pleasure is a legitimate reason for having sex) are not timeless truths. Rather, they are products of our particular time and place. This historicism provides a useful counter to the all-too-ready appeals to "human nature" as justifications for the status quo. It enables, instead, hope in the possibilities for social change toward more just forms of sexuality.

My other main point in this book has been to argue for a more reflexive and critical analysis of our own frameworks of understanding rape. In some ways I am suggesting that our analyses of rape have simultaneously gone too far and not gone far enough. They have gone too far, perhaps, in extending the framework of victimization to cover acts that might actually be part and parcel of our cultural norms of heterosex. It is not that it is wrong to call critical attention to this everyday kind of sexual coercion, as the backlash critics imply. To the contrary. However, from a poststructuralist position this particular way of conceptualizing the problem has potentially troubling implications – which I have been discussing in this part of the book. In short, if we see discourse as constitutive rather than merely descriptive, we have to take care that our explanatory frameworks don't inadvertently instill meanings that potentially perpetuate the cultural formations we need to change.

Where we have perhaps not gone far enough is in extending the critical gaze more fully into the area of (hetero)sexual sex. Feminists have long criticized the institution and practices of heterosexuality, and those working directly in the field of sexual violence have drawn connections between rape and the gendered dominance–submission dynamic of normative heterosexual sex.<sup>31</sup> Yet, as others are also starting to argue, while continuing to assert women's right to say no to sex, we need to work on broader fronts to challenge naturalizing discourses about gender and sexuality and, ultimately, to destabilize gendered modes of sexual desire and behavior. In challenging sexual imperatives more widely, it is my hope that the private landscapes of sexuality will eventually be transformed in ways that no longer provide the cover for rape to be confused with just sex.

## Notes

- 1 I am not alone in this aim. It is characteristic of Australasian feminist Chris Atmore's work, for instance, and is evident in Martha McCaughey's (1997) book *Real Knockouts*. Of course any attempt to bring these approaches together necessarily transforms them in the process.
- 2 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Only last year, a young man was acquitted in a New Zealand rape trial that heard evidence the woman had said "no" dozens of times, and tried repeatedly to pull up her underwear, while the defendant held her arms above her head and allegedly raped her while she looked at the ceiling, with tears coming down her face (*New Zealand Herald* 2017). The defense lawyer nevertheless told the jury "consent is the key word. It matters not whether it was given joyfully, reluctantly, exuberantly" (Mather 2017) (see also Gavey 2017).
- 3 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: See Gavey (2009) for an analysis of early U.S. feminist anti-rape activism in relation to Marcus's argument.
- 4 At least in the absence of some extra positive indication of agreement.
- 5 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: In Chapter 9, I discuss the converging trends of misogyny's escalating visibility and gender's erasure in discourse around sexual violence law and prevention policy. In this context, I am concerned about how the concept of consent has been increasingly mobilized as *the* node for change – not only within institutionalized prevention, but also within progressive and activist discourse (see Gavey 2017). As Messner (2016) notes, "the rapist" is now imagined as someone who lacks training about consent, rather than someone who overconforms to dominant conceptualizations of masculinity. I know that to some extent focussing on consent is a strategic compromise for sexual

violence prevention educators. Some have described to me how they (reasonably) regard introducing this bare basics notion as an essential starting point in contexts where traditional gendered discourses of sexual desire, need, and entitlement script the routine sexual coercion of girls by boys. Yet, at the same time it is increasingly clear that promoting the importance of sexual consent, without addressing systemic gendered power dynamics, may only bring about modest shifts toward stunting the cultural conditions of possibility for sexual coercion and rape. Feminist philosophers and others continue to elaborate the reasons why “the concept can conceal structural processes that manufacture acquiescence and then name it consent” (Alcoff 2009: 126; Cahill 2016), and social scientists demonstrate its weak fit with how young people communicate sexual willingness and the complexities around this (e.g., Beres 2014; Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Jozkowski and Peterson 2013; see also Muehlenhard, Humphreys, Jozkowski, and Peterson. 2016). Worse still, it might simply shift the goal of normative masculine sexual pressure from sex (as an end in itself) to consent (as the route to sex). In cases of pressured, or “unjust sex,” (where a woman’s state of disinterest is worn down to the point she reluctantly agrees or acquiesces), consent can become what Ann Cahill (2016: 755) calls an “ethical cover.” A tick-box, covering-your-back kind of consent motivated by the interests of the person seeking consent, without proper regard for the interests of the person they want consent from (Gavey 2017). As Cahill (2016: 755) puts it, “her sexual agency is hijacked, used not to forward her interests, but in fact to undermine them.” While women who experience this kind of sexual pressure are unlikely to call it rape or sexual assault, it nevertheless comes with its own potential for harm. It can leave someone feeling used and disrespected, and sometimes fearful and betrayed. In a wider sense, when repetitively patterned by gender, it tells women they are the second sex. If we just promote the importance of consent without also interrogating what it means and how it is shaped and constrained in uneven ways by gender norms, then not only do we not stop this sort of unjust sex, we might inadvertently authorize it.

(Unfortunately, I do not have space to respond to what some might think of as a new wave of feminist backlash related to conversations about consent [e.g., Halley’s 2016 tirade against *affirmative* consent]. While Gotell [2010, 2015] has examined the contradictory outcomes of legal recognition of affirmative consent, Halley’s [2016] analysis is blighted by a dogmatic and blinkered position that suffers from an apparent out-of-touchness with the social science literature that documents and unpacks the dynamics of coercion and consent that remain normalized and naturalized within heterosex. Halley’s [ibid.: 259] concern about “a carceral project that is overcommitted to social control through punishment” is important [especially given its extremes, in the United States; and given the racism woven into it in many countries, including like New Zealand]. But her [and others’] caricature of “feminism as caught in an intimate carceral embrace” [Gotell 2015: 56] is a misleading oversimplification – as Gotell demonstrates so well in her excellent “critique of the critique of carceral feminism.” While work done in the name of feminism can be complicit with the State in problematic ways, as Wendy Brown [in Cruz and Brown 2016: 76] says, when this work is “terrible”, it is “rarely because [it’s] feminist – more often because [it’s] colonial, racist or neoliberal” [see also Gotell 2015].)

- 6 In this chapter I do not further consider changes needed in relation to the law and the criminal justice system more generally. This is not because I don’t consider such change to be important. To the contrary, but a detailed analysis of such issues is beyond the scope of this book.
- 7 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: MacKinnon (2016) has continued to develop this position, arguing that we should redefine rape in terms of gender inequality, because consent is an “intrinsically unequal concept” (ibid.: 442) (she suggests welcomeness instead). “Sex that is actually desired or wanted or welcomed,” she says, “is never termed consensual. It does not need to be; its mutuality is written all over it in enthusiasm. Consenting is not what women do when they want to be having sex” (ibid.: 450).
- 8 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: See also Gavey (2009) and Jacquet (2016).

- 9 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: In the United States, at least, self-defense as a tool in the *primary* prevention of sexual violence remains controversial, or overlooked, often due to misconceptions about what it is and the theory of change that underlies it (e.g., Gidycz and Dardis 2014; Hollander 2016; McCaughey and Cermele 2014, 2017). More recent studies have shown that well-designed and intensive programs have a positive effect in reducing a woman's chances of experiencing rape. For example, in a randomized control evaluation of a sexual assault resistance program that included self-defense, Charlene Senn and her colleagues found that women who completed the program were 50 per cent as likely to experience rape or attempted rape in the following year (Senn *et al.* 2015; see also Hollander 2014). Beyond such significant results for individual women, however, feminist scholars who advocate for the importance of self-defense training argue that its benefits extend beyond the individual: it has a potentially important role in "challenging broader cultural norms that fuel rape culture" (McCaughy and Cermele 2017: 288; see also Jordan and Mossman 2017; Gidycz and Dardis 2014; Hollander 2016).
- 10 Any kind of theory that ends up recommending ways that *women* can change in order to stop rape is subject to criticisms that it is implicitly holding women responsible for rape. I have considerable sympathy for this position, yet in the area of physical self-defense, I think McCaughey's point is important here. While of course we want to challenge forms of masculinity that enable men to be sexually violent toward women, it is seems imprudent to sit by until this change has occurred; and moreover, such a change to masculine physical potentials may develop more quickly in some kind of reciprocal relationship to the "challenge" posed by women's increased physical strength, ability, and confidence.
- 11 A general limitation in Cahill's (2001) otherwise excellent book is her reluctance to imagine the blurred terrain that exists for some women at some points between sex and rape. For instance: "It is difficult to imagine a victim of rape, for example, describing her assailant as a sexual partner, while one can easily imagine a rapist portraying the event as purely sexual" (*ibid.*: 140–1). Yet in my and many others' empirical studies of women's accounts of their experiences of sex, sexual coercion, and rape, it is clear that this is not at all impossible, because for some women the "assailant" is her sexual partner before he rapes her, and while this act is certainly likely to complicate that relationship it does not automatically erase it.
- 12 See Jackson (1999) for an ambivalent feminist response to the potential of queer theory and politics for the critique and transformation of heterosexuality.
- 13 Of course, feminist psychoanalysts like Jessica Benjamin and Wendy Hollway might point out that such cultural ideals have their roots in (or at least exist in a relation of interdependence with) the ways in which femininity and masculinity are produced in the context of gendered parent-child relationships in early life. This would imply another layer of complexity to the sites and forms of intervention required for cultural change in this direction. (See Benjamin 2004; Hollway 2004). (*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: My argument in Chapter 9 is more influenced by these sorts of ideas.)
- 14 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: See, for example, Gupta's (2015) argument that norms of "compulsory sexuality" function as a system of social control in contemporary Western societies. Beyond the academy, the New View Campaign has sustained a vigorous activist campaign against different facets of the medicalization of female sexuality, including fighting against the United States' Federal Drug Administration approval for the drugs Intrinsa and flibanserin, both marketed as treatments for "female sexual dysfunction." The group's activities, led by Leonore Tiefer, are documented in detail on their website <http://www.newviewcampaign.org/> (see also Cacchioni 2015, Moynihan 2014; Tiefer 2015).
- 15 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: As sexual fashions change, and previously marginal sexual practices become more mainstream, the implications are not always as liberatory and empowering as "sex positive" popular culture makes out. As Maria João Faustino's work-in-progress on a genealogy of heterosexual anal intercourse in popular media shows, there can be fine lines between calling attention to "new" sexual practices, celebrating them, and normalizing them (in a Foucauldian sense, that virtually insists on them). This would be an example of movement toward a new imperative that we should resist – particularly in

light of the troubling gender politics that seem to go with anal heterosex (which is commonly associated with male pressure and coercion, and sometimes force, and not uncommonly experienced as painful by women, e.g., Fahs and Gonzalez 2014; Marston and Lewis 2014; McBride 2017; see also Jozkowski and Peterson 2013). Drawing attention to this is not the same thing as rejecting anal sex outright, but rejecting approaches that implicitly set it up as women's new sexual duty.

- 16 For an introduction to culture jamming see Mark Dery's 1993 essay "Hacking, slashing and sniping in the empire of signs" [*2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Now available at Dery (2010).] As one site describes it:

"Culture Jamming" sticks where rational discourse slides off. It is, simply, the viral introduction of radical ideas. It is viral in that it uses the enemy's own resources to replicate itself – corporate logos, marketing psychology, clean typography, "adspeak." It is radical because – ideally – the message, once deciphered, causes damage to blind belief. Fake ads, fake newspaper articles, parodies, pastiche. The best CJ is totally unexpected, surprising, shocking in its implications.

(*Culture Jamming 1991*)

- 17 This classic ad was rated in 2000 as one of the greatest TV ads and, interestingly, was wildly successful in commercial terms, increasing U.K. sales of the jeans by 800 per cent within a year (see Chandler 2002).
- 18 See, for example, Bordo's (1999: 27–30) reading of two versions of the Jockey ad that displays either five men or five women with their pants down around their ankles. As Bordo argues, these parallel images have quite different meanings in our contemporary cultural context.
- 19 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: In Chapter 9, I discuss Layton's (2014) analysis of the psychic effects of neoliberalism, which gives us a way of thinking about the psychology of normative dominance that pays sophisticated attention to the constitutive role of sociocultural and political forces. It helps us to understand the psychological underbelly of masculine dominance, and why so many men (and some others) cling to it, in varying ways and degrees. At the same time, it helps us to see that the processes that need to change are more complicated, on more levels (psychological, sociocultural, political) than deliberate attempts to prevent sexual violence usually tackle. When I wrote *Just Sex?* I saw potential in "culture jamming," and seeding within popular culture more expansive and transgressive "ways of seeing and understanding gender and sexuality." This kind of tactic is surely essential within the range of tools we bring to the job of change (and probably in some form or another irreplaceable now, in the more ostensibly democratized spaces of digital culture). But recognizing the path that thwarted psychological attachments to the myth of masculinity (see Chapter 9) can take, should clarify that this is too little too late. It also carries some risks – especially if rendered in ways that seem to "turn the tables" on men. For example, what would we imagine is the meaning and message of an advertisement showing a woman's stiletto heeled boot resting a man's naked buttock, with the words "Put the boot in" (BBC News 1997)? Judith Williamson (2003) noted that many men complained that it encouraged violence against them. Her reading, however, suggests a more complicated and less obvious effect. As part of a wave of advertising that "has achieved a gender revolution before the fact," with its disingenuous portrayals of powerful women and compliant men, she suggests:

Deeply unpleasant as this image is, its relation to actual violence may nevertheless be the reverse of that proposed in the complaints. It could be seen as projecting in fantasy form not only some men's wishes and/or fears, *but an eroticised justification for their anger.*

(*Williamson 2003; emphasis added; see also Benton-Greig, Gamage, and Gavey 2018*)

- 20 It also reiterates that men can be raped – although I think this has for some time been more widely accepted, and has probably been understood as a crime of violence, rather than as an endpoint on a continuum of sexual coercion.
- 21 I note that she uses the term “normative” as synonymous with typical or usual, while I use the notion somewhat differently to refer to implicit cultural standards or ideals. In my usage these norms may not always be lived out in everyday practice, but they remain as standards for guidance and/or censure.
- 22 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: There has been a new surge of such claims in recent years. In Chapter 9, I will critically discuss some of this work (focussing on Lara Stemple and colleagues’ articles that have received a lot of publicity).
- 23 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: See for example, Gavey (2007).
- 24 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: On related concerns, see also Stringer (2014).
- 25 See also Lamb’s (1999a) critique of PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder). For a contrary feminist point of view, see Susan Brison’s (2002: 80) reflexive philosophical analysis of her own experiences of recovering from a brutal rape and attempted murder. She argues, drawing on her own experience, that “a diagnosis of PTSD (and subsequent treatment) can be empowering to a victim whose efforts to recover have been hindered by her (and society’s) belief that her injuries are ‘all in her head.’”
- 26 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Based on the way that people in focus groups talked about what they imagined the impact of rape to be, Jo Schmidt and I argued that a “trauma of rape” discourse can provide a double-edged framework for making sense of the impact of rape (Gavey and Schmidt 2011). That is, while it offers a positive counter to traditional minimizing and victim-blaming responses, it can entail new ways of (inadvertently) othering and stigmatizing people who have experienced rape.
- 27 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Perhaps what we are witnessing in the early days of the #MeToo movement is something exactly like this – new discursive forms and spaces that have provided a platform of and for solidarity that can hold multiple individual disclosures of harassment, abuse, and violence within a politics of collective strength and refusal.
- 28 Her analysis draws on Marcus’s (1992) argument and on Elaine Scarry’s work on the relationship between pain and power in the context of torture.
- 29 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: Web 2.0 and social media have transformed the possibilities for people who have experienced sexual violence to “speak back”, sometimes in ways that are very powerful. Although, as some accounts show, the effects for women calling out men who have abused them can be double-edged as they still can be subject to public victim-blaming and minimizing responses, especially if they don’t fit public perceptions of the “ideal victim” (Salter 2013; Sills *et al.* 2016).
- 30 Although I have already made this point earlier, I will state it again, because I know from past experience that what I am saying here is easily open to misreading. I would like to stress that I am not arguing that all heterosexual sex is necessarily overdetermined by this gendered dynamic; and I am certainly not arguing that heterosexual sex is inherently coercive. I do believe it is possible for women and men to have sexual relationships that are not characterized by acts of male dominance or rigidly gendered patterns of initiation and control over sex. When I say that this gendered binary is “normative,” I mean that it exists as a cultural pattern, as a reference point for what is normal and/or acceptable, not that it is “the (statistical) norm” of what is actually practiced.
- 31 *2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*: See Gavey and Senn (2014) for a more updated discussion of relevant research literature.

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## PART 4

# Rejoinder for the second edition

You know I'm automatically attracted to beautiful – I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything.

*(45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, recorded 2005, revealed 2016 – prior to his election; see Blake 2016 for the video)*

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# 9

## THE GENDER OF RAPE CULTURE

### Revisiting the cultural scaffolding of rape

Revisiting *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape* nearly a decade and a half after it was written is a strangely sobering experience. The public landscape of gender and sexual politics is almost unrecognizable, laden with new challenges for understanding the socially-situated phenomenon of sexual violence *and* new challenges in theorising it inclusively, in ways that can best inform praxis toward ending it.

In the original edition, I argued that Western society is ambivalent about rape – treating it as one of the most serious crimes while simultaneously disregarding, minimizing and justifying it in some, perhaps many, cases. To make sense of this contradiction, I used a feminist psychosociocultural approach for understanding the “cultural scaffolding” of sexual violence, arguing that binary norms of masculine and feminine identity, embodiment and sexuality provide fertile “conditions of possibility” that both enable and obscure rape and sexual coercion. The point of the book was to elucidate the connections between the normative patterns of gendered (hetero)sexuality and men’s sexual violence against women. At the same time, I wanted to think critically about the form of our feminist analyses, such that we would not always be bound to mapping and diagnosing “the problem” in a way that inadvertently gave it more force. I argued that our approach must be nuanced enough to recognize the contemporary gendered reality of sexual violence without reiterating the very same limiting gendered stereotypes that arguably make it possible in the first place. In this way, the book attempted to walk a delicate line, crafting a gendered analysis of rape alongside a vision or aspiration that was in many ways post-gender – or, in Bonnie Mann’s (2014: 2) terms, aspiring to more “lightness of gender.”

In this new chapter, I want to attend to what I see as some key gaps in the first edition of *Just Sex?* – particularly in relation to the significant social and technological shifts that have occurred since the book was first published, which affect (and/or reveal) both the nature of sexual violence itself and the wider cultural scaffolding that supports it. In just one chapter, it is impossible to do justice to the large volume of

research and scholarly literature on rape that has been published at pace over the past decade and a half. Through the book I have tried to identify and comment on points where social, cultural, legal or political changes have affected my original claims. But *a lot* has happened – these updates have necessarily been selective and I have not been able to address every important shift. Here, I will focus on two areas that I think are most relevant for updating my argument, or situating it in a more contemporary context: (1) the re-emergent visibility of sexism and misogyny and (2) the sticky place of gender in the cultural scaffolding of rape. New digital communication technologies and social media play an important role in bringing these issues to the fore, in both regressive and progressive ways. The deeper we dig in trying to understand the connection between the ostensibly unrelated phenomena of pervasive sexism, on the one hand, and sexual violence toward men (for example), on the other – which have both attracted rising popular attention – the more obvious it is that our problems lie not just in the heteronormatively shaped gender binary, but in specificities of the cultural code for masculinity that feeds into this. In drawing together my thoughts on these issues, I will revisit why a gendered analysis of sexual violence remains fundamental to the challenge of dismantling the cultural scaffolding of rape.

## Rape culture

One big change over the past decade has been the re-politicization of rape, focussed around various iterations of the earlier feminist concept of “rape culture.” First, I want to situate my discussion in relation to this re-emergent political vocabulary. The notion of rape culture, like my argument in *Just Sex?*, rejects the idea that rape is an aberrant act committed by individual “bad apples.” It instead insists that we need to look at everyday norms, actions and values that make sexual violence possible and that cover it up when it happens. *Just Sex?* is essentially a book about rape culture, written before the recent revitalization of a feminist politics of rape. My notion of a “cultural scaffolding of rape” maps on to what I regard as one of the two key interlocking elements of rape culture. This gendered dominance–submission binary is what provides a normative pattern for (hetero)sex that makes a man’s rape of a woman possible and, at the same time, plausibly deniable (it was “just sex” not “rape”). In referring to a normative pattern, it is worth repeating that I do not mean a pattern that is “normal” in the sense that it shapes the form and experience of all heterosexual sex. Rather, that it provides an implicit template for gendered sexuality that is skewed in ways that can accommodate male (but not female) sexual urgency, selfishness, and pressure as unremarkable or even normal.

The other key element, more commonly associated with rape culture, pertains more directly and overtly to sexual violence itself. This is the constellation of victim-blaming and trivializing depictions of rape – such as the rape jokes, the “slut shaming”, the myths that render certain categories of men above suspicion and certain categories of women below the threshold for sympathy and understanding. Providing reinforcement to the normatively gendered scripts for (hetero)sex (but not just heterosexual), these sorts of discourses and practices help legitimate men’s breach of sexual boundaries and ethical lines. And, when such breaches become visible, they work as cultural back-

up forces to help obscure them, minimizing the seriousness of sexual violence and in some cases justifying and excusing it.

It is difficult to pin down the origin of the term rape culture, but it goes as far back as the 1970s when it was used within the U.S. anti-rape movement. (One of the first published uses of the term is the 1975 Cambridge Documentary Films' "Rape Culture" documentary [Lazarus 2000]). Since that time, it has floated in and out of feminist academic literature (including a few references in *Just Sex?*). But it wasn't dusted off for popular use until at least the late 2000s. The term appeared for the first time on Wikipedia (which was launched in 2001) in 2005 and on Twitter (launched in early 2006) in late 2007. It really started to gain traction around 2009 as new communication technologies associated with Web 2.0 brought more (and uncensored) feminist voices to popular media (for example, feminist websites and blogs, such as Friedman 2009 and McEwan 2009) – fostering wide distribution of ideas and information through social media (e.g., Rentschler 2014; Sills *et al.* 2016). Interest in the term subsequently spiked sharply in 2013 (according to Google Trends, Niccolini 2016).

### **Sexism and misogyny – insights from the digital world**

2013 was also the year that Steubenville teenagers Trent Mays, 17, and Ma'lik Richmond, 16, were convicted of raping a 16-year-old girl in August 2012. The boys sexually violated the girl as she was dragged from party to party over the course of several hours one night, while she was in an inebriated and at times unconscious state. What made this widely publicized case so important was the abundance of documentary evidence, circulating through digital communication networks and posted online, "like a graphic, public diary" (Macur and Schweber 2012) of the event. As well as showing Mays' and Richmond's protracted maltreatment of the young woman, it also revealed many witnesses who did nothing to stop it. The digital record also showed an audience of the boys' peers actively celebrating their actions and contributing to the young woman's abuse through their own denigrating and dehumanizing joking and victim-blaming comments shared on social media. It wasn't until the next day, when the girl awoke naked, that she began to find out what had been done to her, through a digital trail that included "compromising and explicit photographs of her" (Macur and Schweber 2012).

Cases like this graphically illustrate the role of social media and digital culture in shaping (and revealing) new cultural conditions of possibility for sexual violence. *Just Sex?* was written a decade and a half ago, but in many ways it is a different social world. Social media barely existed beyond small niches when the book was published (van Dijck 2013). And, bizarre though it now seems, when some of the earlier empirical research for the book was conducted the World Wide Web had yet to take off (Greenemeier 2009). Now social media, and digital information and communication technologies more generally, are central to the ways most people in many parts of the world "do" personal, relational, social and political life. This technological revolution is relevant to shaping and resisting rape culture, as well as understanding it.

It seems remarkable in retrospect that neither sexism nor misogyny are indexed in *Just Sex?* As a sign of how dramatically the landscape of gender and sexual politics has changed, I think this would now seem an unusual omission in any analysis of the cultural scaffolding of rape. Although many of the norms and practices discussed in the book, as part of the scaffolding for rape, are sexist, this framing remains implicit. Concepts like sexism and misogyny were out of vogue at the time in countries like New Zealand, where postfeminist rhetoric shaped a commonsense view that gender equality had been largely achieved. This is part of the reason why I hedged around tackling them more directly – to have done so would have risked being dismissed as excessive, old-fashioned, and out of touch.<sup>1</sup>

It has taken time for feminists to reclaim this vocabulary. As British feminist scholar Rosalind Gill (2016: 625) notes, in her (and my) “feminist lifetime,” the key concepts of sexism and patriarchy were almost eradicated, only to re-emerge recently “championed by younger generations of women.” In her 2011 article “Sexism reloaded, or, it’s time to get angry again!,” she recalls the exact moment (in 2005) she heard the call to revitalize the use of the term “sexism” and refuse the connotations its use had acquired through its mocking in the media. In response to a young woman’s question about what could be done about the state of representation of women in advertising, feminist media critic Judith Williamson had said “The problem is that sexism didn’t go away, we just stopped talking about it.” What we could do, she suggested, was “simply start using the term again” (Gill 2011: 61; see also Williamson 2003). Williamson’s (2003) reflection on sexist advertising actually provides an important artefactual record in relation to this linguistic de-tooling of feminist critique. By the nineties, she says, the *idea* of sexism had gone away, while of course the phenomenon had not. This left us with a bizarre reality in which certain forms of sexism were framed in the mainstream as “retro” fun, and the ground for critique was often shaken, even within feminism, by insistences that because women were *choosing* to participate, it was a sign of agency and empowerment, and so beyond viable critique (see Gavey 2012).

Avoidance of these once foundational feminist concepts hampered how we were able to talk about systemically imbalanced and unfair gendered power relations and routine denigrations of women. But the reason I didn’t go far enough in explicitly recognizing the role of sexism and misogyny as key elements in the cultural scaffolding of rape was not just to do with fashions in political rhetoric. Misogyny simply was not visible to me in the way that it is now. This is a delicate point to make, because gender inequality and various forms of sexism were still pervasive, of course. In the 1990s and early 2000s, cultural products like advertisements, sitcoms, music videos and pornography were rife with sexist stereotypes and belittling representations of women. And the material effects of a patriarchal stamp still structured many parts of society, manifest in exclusion, discrimination, and violence. But they did so – in my part of the world – in ways that were slippery to criticism. The early challenges of feminism had been taken on board to the extent that gender inequality and sexism had to be denied, hidden, or dressed up as something else. For example, in reflecting on her research (published in the early 1990s) about the lack of women employed as broadcasters in U.K. pop music

radio, Gill (2014) describes what she called at the time a “new sexism.” This referred to the ways gender discrimination was happening “in a rhetorical context, influenced by feminism, in which sexism had to be disavowed and potential accusations of sexism had to be rebutted” (Gill 2014: 115; see also McRobbie 2004, 2009). The radio station bosses and producers Gill interviewed had to work to explain why so few female DJs were employed, necessitating subtle manoeuvres to justify the situation without appearing sexist. Explicit disclaimers, such as “I’m not sexist but ...,” were common (Gill 2014: 115).

What was different then, was that it was possible to believe this sexism was vestigial, that its heyday was over, and we were slowly but surely *in transition* to something better. Many forms of overt misogyny were more closeted, and sexism, it seemed to me at the time, was on the wrong side of progressive social change. We were in a period of denial (in so-called developed countries at least) about the extent of ongoing gender inequality and the routine derogation of women. In many places, the obfuscating language of gender neutrality in institutional spaces coincided with popular cultural assurances any apparent sexism was only “ironic” (and indeed cutting edge), and that women were not only willing, but also empowered, participants. But rather than reading this as a sign of patriarchal lock down, I seem to have tamed my frustration with faith that “the social heart” was in the right place, and it would just take more time for fuller gender equality and justice to come to life.

From 2009 onwards, I recall several instances, however, of being shocked to hear about this or that example of everyday sexism within popular culture – the hyperbolic sexism of *Benny Hill* jokes of my parents’ generation re-emerging as jokes about women’s “place in the kitchen” and rape jokes among a generation younger than me. (I vividly remember a 2011 conversation in which I was shocked to learn from a younger colleague that rape jokes were now a thing, again). This kind of humor and “ironic” belittling of women was off my radar in the early 2000s.<sup>2</sup> But digital technology and social media have offered a technological lifeline for sexism and misogyny – amplifying, circulating, and pulling it back onto the main stage (see also Henry and Powell 2014). As a platform for any man (or anyone) to share their views with immediacy and potentially wide exposure, digital communication technology has revealed that misogyny never went away. It has not only provided a virtual fly on the wall of “locker room” culture, but provided the means for stirring it up, reconstituting it, and making it normal again. (It has also, thankfully, provided a platform for exposing and challenging rape culture and the wider “matrix of sexism” [Sills *et al.* 2016: 6; Keller *et al.* 2016] – for example, The Everyday Sexism Project,<sup>3</sup> launched in 2012, and now innumerable websites, blogs, Twitter accounts and so on.)

The vitriol and the violence of some of these public displays of misogyny is exasperating. The abuse – including rape threats and death threats – circulated and sent to women for expressing public opinions (and not just feminist ones) has been widely documented (e.g., Jane 2014, 2017; Mantilla 2013; Penny 2013; Sobieraj 2017). Scholars have interpreted this “gendertrolling” (Mantilla’s term for online aggression that specifically targets women), as men’s resistance to, and attempts to stop, women’s full participation in the public sphere (e.g., Jane 2014; Mantilla

2013; Sobieraj 2017). Mary Beard (2015), the British classicist who has herself been subject to high profile online abuse, points out that women's exclusion from public speech has an ancient history within western culture. What's more, she says, in ancient times it was not just that women were excluded from public speaking, but that the practice and skill of speaking in public "defined masculinity as a gender" (ibid.: 812). This gendered pattern of speaking, and familiar prejudices against women's public speech have become ingrained in our culture, she suggests. While most high profile cases of gendertrolling target women speaking out against sexism (Mantilla 2013), Beard argues that it is less what women say than the fact that they are transgressing into "traditional male territory" that incites the abuse.

It is not always even women's *speech*, however, that attracts online sexist censure: sometimes it is women's bodies and their very existence that provokes outrage. One example that caught my attention was the venom delivered on Twitter about the 2013 Wimbledon tennis champion, Marion Bartoli (e.g., Everyday Sexism 2013). Tennis fans fired off furious tweets, mocking and berating her in terms that were sexually demeaning, hostile and aggressive. Bartoli was targeted for what her body was read as saying, rather than what she herself spoke. The main theme of objection seemed to be her nonconformity to a narrow stereotypical version of feminine beauty and body ideals (which are embodied by many top women tennis players). Many of the offensive remarks were highly charged with emotion – giving the impression of having sprung from a wounded pressure point. How could the mere physical form and presentation of an elite female athlete draw so much hatred and abuse? Was it that her nonconformity signalled a refusal to submit? And was this (probably not deliberate) disobedience *felt* by those men tweeting (there were some women<sup>4</sup> too) as a symbolic threat to their own deep investment in the taken-for-grantedness of masculine heteronormative privilege? And the normatively condoned gendered derivatization (Cahill 2009, 2011) of women by men – the feeling (if not conscious idea) that she exists *for* them. A similar tone is observed in the way that men do sexual harassment on popular dating apps like Tinder – as Thompson (2018) shows through her analysis of screenshots posted to feminist Instagram account *Bye Felipe*, as well as *Tinder Nightmares* (see also Hess and Flores 2018). These men's messages show patterns of arrogant sexual entitlement; some show men responding to women's (usually polite) declines, or non-responses to sexual requests, with hostile degrading and dehumanizing messages about their appearance and worth. One relatively tame case, for example, evokes the stomping ring of a toddler tantrum:

B: Now buzz off you don't get to speak to me you havnt gained that privilege  
 I hate fat women gross  
 B: I don't even consider you as a person to begin with so take care  
 (Thompson 2018: 79)

Like the tweets about Bartoli, these Tinder retaliations seem to attempt to assert dominance from a position of grievance. While these are just a few examples, they

are far from isolated. Emma Jane, an Australian scholar and former journalist, who has been tracking and archiving examples of “gendered cyberhate” since 1998, confirms there is “a *lot* of misogyny of the internet” – much of it involving “sexually explicit threats of violence” (Jane 2017: 13).

Nicola Henry and Anastasia Powell (2014, 2018) would place much of this kind of online harassment and abuse within a broader category of “technology-facilitated sexual violence.” They point to new forms of sexual abuse and exploitation that are made possible by new technologies, as well as new ways of “doing” more familiar forms of violence. These include so-called revenge pornography – or what might better be described as “image-based sexual abuse” (McGlynn and Rackley 2017), where sexual or nude images are taken and/or distributed without consent of the person in the image. This happens through social media and other forms of communication, often among peer networks, as well as more publicly on websites for this specific purpose (e.g., see Hall and Hearn 2017; Uhl, Rhyner, Terrance, and Lugo 2018). Research repeatedly confirms the gendered nature of these practices. The vast majority of people exploited on revenge pornography sites are women (e.g., Uhl *et al.* 2018); and there are strongly gendered patterns to the way “nudes” are obtained and distributed among peers (e.g., Powell 2010; Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone, and Harvey 2012; Salter 2016). In dynamics that mimic both a sexual double standard and heterosexual coercion as they apply to in-body sexual encounters, high school girls we worked with conveyed that it was to be expected for girls to face pressure from boys to send nudes, as well as facing wider social pressures not to (Thorburn *et al.* 2018). While some unethical sharing of nudes may be thoughtless acts of jockeying for masculine position – where the girl is treated as an object of status currency – the acts referred to as revenge pornography are often perpetrated against an ex-partner (Hall and Hearn 2017), and seem more deliberate in their intent. Hall and Hearn (*ibid.*: 10; emphasis in original) note that one of the main ways men account for posting images to revenge pornography websites is “perceived grievance and loss of control, ranging from loss of external control *over the woman* to loss of personal control of *the man’s own status*” (see also Salter, Crofts, and Lee 2013).

Nothing has more dramatically publicly demonstrated the fragility of social progress toward all kinds of social equality than the 2016 election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America. The white patriarchal displays of his early presidency, as well as the wider regressive racism, sexism, and transphobia his election has reinforced, have deeply challenged any complacent (albeit likely misplaced) faith in the inevitability of social progress. Common threads link moments like the post-liberal “men-only” PR photographs of Trump, watched by his associates, signing an executive order to limit and control women’s reproductive rights (Belam 2017; Cosslett 2017), with trends like the resurgence of rape jokes and online misogynist aggression, and the actions of young men who take and share photographs of young women being sexually exploited and abused. In different ways, all these phenomena are emboldened public displays of sexism – patriarchal reflexes stretching with impunity. The *visibility* of sexism and misogyny in all these scenarios is key.

Feminist journalist Laurie Penny (2013) called Steubenville “rape culture’s Abu Ghraib moment,” asking “what type of culture could possibly produce such

pictures”? Despite the pivotal publicity the Steubenville case attracted, the events of that night and its aftermath are not unique (e.g., Dodge 2016; Heyes 2016; Oliver 2016; Powell 2015). What is so significant about the pictures of abuse that circulated in Steubenville – and images like those of Rehtaeh Parsons and Audrie Pott (two North American teenagers who were photographed while they were sexually violated, and who later killed themselves after photographs of the abuse were distributed on social media and peers bullied them off and online, see Burleigh 2013; Segal 2015) – is that they were created deliberately by perpetrators of abuse and their peers. They aren’t “found images” caught by third party surveillance (although in the case of Steubenville some material circulating online was hacked and released by the group Anonymous to expose peer collusion and institutional cover up, e.g., Abad-Santos and Sullivan 2013). Mostly, though they are trophy images that brazenly document sexual maltreatment and mock its victims. As such, they not only baldly display the young woman’s violated, sometimes unconscious (see Heyes 2016) body; the images also reveal the norms and values shared by those behind the camera, and those who distribute and comment on the images. In Steubenville, it suggests that these young men and others saw the images as “something other than evidence of sexual assault” (Dodge 2016: 68). Or, as Penny (2013) put it, the more slippery possibility that “rape and sexual humiliation of women and girls is so normalised that it does not register as a crime in the minds of the assailants” (see also Powell 2015).

Images are culturally important, according to many philosophers, as they shape our understanding of reality and the possibilities for ethical and political responses to violence and suffering (see, for example, Bergoffen 2012; Butler 2007). In her analysis of the infamous photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib, Judith Butler (2007: 958) argued that they reveal that “the perspective on the so-called enemy was not idiosyncratic, but shared, so widely shared, it seems, that there was hardly a thought that something might be amiss here.” This is made apparent not just by what is in the image, but by the broader context in which it is produced – including what is considered acceptable to photograph and what is subsequently done with the image. Butler’s observation about U.S. personnel treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib echoes in the accounts of some of the photographer-bystanders and in the online speech of a peer audience in the Steubenville case. According to a *New York Times* story, at one point in the evening the girl who was sexually violated “could not walk on her own and vomited several times before toppling onto her side” (Macur and Schweber 2012). One young man reported that “Mays then tried to coerce the girl into giving him oral sex, but the girl was unresponsive.” This witness, who had been in the back seat of his car while Mays was flashing the girls’ breasts and penetrating her with his fingers, videoed what he saw on his cell phone, showing it to at least one person. While he later described his filming as a “wrong choice,” and became a witness for the prosecution, he said he didn’t attempt to stop what was happening, “because ‘at the time, no one really saw it as being forceful’” (ibid.). No one, that is, saw it as wrong.

While images are circulated most obviously through photographs and videos, digital culture arguably creates *visibility* in multi-media ways that include non-visual

sources. Digital media circulates words and phrases rapidly, repetitively and constantly, and as they accumulate and saturate in culture and in consciousness, these also contribute to shared lenses and shared visions of what the world is. Misogynist tropes (floating free of narratives) can thus feed into our own mental memes where images and words powerfully come together to reinforce norms and frames that tell us how certain groups of people, certain acts and states should be regarded and valued. In Steubenville, what some boys said when they watched or heard about the abuse unfolding, sticks to the images in ways that are equally revealing and disturbing. With blasé efficiency, text messages described the girl as “dead.” More expansively, in a quickly infamous 12-minute video, a local college student, Michael Nodianos, was almost delirious with excitement as he rolled off an endless supply of offensive analogies to laugh at how “dead” (i.e., passed out) she was. Like images, these forms of speech are often not written into explicit coherent narratives. They are more like discursive fragments, perhaps visible signs of powerful ghost discourses propping up the patriarchal substrate of our modern world, which explicit modern values like equality only scratch the surface of.

In high profile cases of teenage sexual exploitation, some boys go beyond sharing and commenting on images online, to openly boasting about their conquests. In a New Zealand case in 2013, Beraiah Hales and Joseph Parker, two of the main protagonists in a group of teenage boys calling themselves “Roastbusters”, appeared in a video on the group’s Facebook promoting “roasting” – the practice of two boys penetrating a girl orally and vaginally at the same time (Gavey 2013; and see New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse 2013). On other social media accounts they talked openly and proudly about the coercive tactics they used to make this happen (Gavey 2013)<sup>5</sup>. Asked on his ask.fm account, “how would u get a girl? into bed [sic],” Hales responded (presumably joking) “Chloroform.” Parker was asked on his ask.fm account, “How the fuck do you manage to a [sic] girl into roasting, coming from a wannabe roaster. ;p,” and offered detailed guidelines:

99% of girls that we roast say “ew I would never roast I think its yuck” what you need to know is girls dont mean what they say half the time. you just have to get them in the frame of mind that roasting is nothing major and they will love it blah blah, or you can just take the Down low route and just have 1 get with her normally an once they are doing they thang the other just creeps on over and trys to roast (keeping in mind you both MUST flirt an hit on her prior to all this going down) [sic]

On the similar theme of the challenge of getting a girl to do something she might reasonably be expected to resist, someone asked Hales “how did the gang bang come about? please just explain haha like did she ask, did you suggest it.were you all in the room and all were horny like how did it start [sic],” to which he responded “just got her drunk ;).”

These boys showed off Teflon coated masculinities – powerful, wilful and invulnerable. They joked at any suggestion they could get in trouble. Yet it would be a benign interpretation to say they did not understand their actions as some

form of sexual violation and exploitation. When someone challenged Hales on ask. fm about statutory rape and having sex with an underage girl, he responded, “I’ve already been to the police about that haha and im not going to jail sooo idk what you’re on about.” To another question, asking him for a saying he says a lot, he replied, “Go ahead, Call the cops. They can’t un-rape you.”

### ***Beyond the scandal***

Steubenville, Roastbusters, and many other of the high profile cases of teenage sexual exploitation and violence have received mixed reactions. They ignited familiar victim-blaming and shaming as well as responses that downplayed and sought to justify and normalize the boys’ actions (as reported widely in the media; for examples see Moore 2013; see also Stubbs-Richardson, Rader, and Cosby 2018). In Steubenville in particular, where Mays and Richmond were members of a revered high school football team, the boys attracted considerable sympathy, understanding, and support. Yet this minimizing response coexisted with palpable community outrage and disbelief. Both the Steubenville and the Roastbusters cases immediately became *scandals*. Stories about the events and the main protagonists stirred voyeuristic interest as well as serious deliberations about how this could have happened and what could be done to remedy it. In the New Zealand case, the boys’ actions were widely condemned among the public and in the mainstream media; and botched institutional responses (notably by the police, but also reportedly by one of the high schools the boys attended) lead to protests and inquiries (Farley 2017; Gavey 2014b; Malthus 2014; New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse 2014).

While this shared public anger and condemnation could seem to signal a progressive shift away from victim-blaming and rape-minimizing culture, paradoxically there are conservative undertones to this “exceptionalizing” response. Badiou (2014; see Badiou also 2018), for instance, explains how scandals are useful for maintaining the status quo because they “present a small bit of the real as an exception to the real itself.” Badiou’s concerns are far removed from sexual violence. He is interested in how the “true real of the world” has become reduced to, and confused with, economics. In this world, financial scandals give us a glimpse of what is really going on; when a scandal is uncovered we get to see a small part of that reality, that which is generally obscured and invisible (for example, the corruption that becomes inherent in capitalism when profit is the bottom line and making as much money as possible is the norm). In this sense, scandals deceive. They allow us to fixate on what we can pretend is a terrible aberration, while the more systemic problems in the everyday workings of culture and society (from which scandals erupt) remain invisible to us. Thinking in these terms about Roastbusters, for instance, puts a more complex light on the widespread, intense public anger that fermented on the keyboards and streets of Auckland. In particular, reports of vigilante groups, including one reportedly offering a “4k reward for footage of Roastbusters getting hidings”; and reports of “irate, angry fathers’ ready to dish out their own brand of justice,” and of gang members keen to be involved (Dougan 2013).

There is a large gulf between the context of war and the context of teenage parties. And the unique dynamics of genocidal rape make it very different from (most) rapes committed in “peacetime” societies. But in her analysis of the rapes of Bosnian-Muslim women by Bosnian-Serb soldiers during the genocide in the former Yugoslavia, Debra Bergoffen (2012) raises several points that provoke us to think about traces of commonality. She details elements of how such rapes were performed (systematically and publicly), as well as how they were handled within the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Bergoffen argues that the point of such organized rape as a strategy of war was to destroy enemy men (women were the vehicle to do this). “It is a reflection of the profound reality of patriarchy,” she says, “this reality being that the meaning of masculinity and the power of gendered men are derived from their power to control women’s bodies” (ibid.: 62). It was thought to work, she suggests, as an attempt to destroy Muslim men’s masculinity through making a spectacle of their inability to protect “their” women. The ire of angry fathers and gang members looking for violent retribution toward Roastbusters, while in a vividly different context and on a vastly different scale, also perhaps speaks to the way rapes that are “scandalous” in their own contexts function within a patriarchal order. Notably, images of sexual violence were also part of the rape strategy in the former Yugoslavia – which Bergoffen argues magnified the genocidal power of these ritualistic rapes, by memorializing it. In this context of genocidal war, the images were part of a strategy designed to destroy men (destroying women along the way), which raises provocative questions about the function of images of abuse in cases like Steubenville and Roastbusters. Are images in this context a sign that women in contemporary western cultures have “risen” to the status of enemy, or are the images and their circulation more mundane forms of an underlying homosocial jostling for position (e.g., Bird 1996) among men? According to Pascoe and Hollander (2016), the kind of aggressive male response that we observed in Auckland against the teenage Roastbusters, might be worrisome not only because of the threat of vigilante violence, but also for what it says about how high profile rapes can function in surprising ways in the service of propping up rape culture. They refer to a case in which players from one U.S. college football team sang the words “no means no!” in celebrating their victory over another team with a player who had been accused of rape. Pascoe and Hollander (2016) have argued that this sort of public shaming by men of other men for sexual assault is actually a way of reinforcing masculine dominance (over other men, as well as women) – that they call “mobilizing rape.” It is also prone, they argue, to reinforcing racialized and other hierarchies among men, as the spectre of racism informs which men are imagined as “the rapist.”

When genocidal rape was brought to the ICTY, and soldiers were convicted of “crimes against humanity,” it was a landmark moment that “put the world on notice that war time rape could no longer be dismissed as unavoidable” (Bergoffen 2012: 1). This was profoundly important for the recognition it gave to the value of women’s testimony and dignity. But there are elements of the way it was handled that need further scrutiny. In making a point that is similar to Badiou’s,

Bergoffen (2012) draws on Baudrillard to observe the deceptive function of scandals that circulate around the spectacle of genocidal rape. In particular, she discusses the fact that women testifying in this court had to do so anonymously, in order to protect their safety – not from enemy men, but from those within their own communities. Although the circumstances of this irony are very different from those in the other examples I’ve been discussing, in both cases I think we can see how headline rapes can work to “conceal that there is no scandal in [mundane] heterosexual rape” (ibid.: 64). In looking at the way images fuel such scandals, Bergoffen explains that:

[Baudrillard] alerts us to the ways that the shock and revulsion elicited by the image may be deeply conservative insofar as they are reactions to visible suffering, *but not to the structures that produce the suffering.*

(*ibid.*: 66; *emphasis added*)

These philosophical cautions about the conservative, concealing – even deceptive – function of scandals, demand that we are more reflexive and careful in how we think about cases like Steubenville and Roastbusters, and even Harvey Weinstein (or any of the individual men outed through disclosures in the current #MeToo movement). Yes, they need to be called to account for the abuse they have perpetrated. But unless we see them as products, firmly situated within and enabled by masculine capital within a cultural scaffolding of rape, then they risk becoming convenient scapegoats that allow the underlying structures that produce and protect them to remain untouched. We don’t need to dig too deeply to realize we can no longer deny the ongoing role of gender and misogyny in those “structures that produce the suffering.”<sup>6</sup>

## Gender

Ironically, the rising visibility of public misogyny that I have noticed in my own back yard since *Just Sex?* was published coincides with heightened challenges to feminist analyses of sexual violence that insist gender matters. *Just Sex?* argues that the normative matrix of heterosexuality provides scaffolding for rape – that its norms and scripts with “complementary” active and passive<sup>7</sup> roles for men and women shapes and guides patterns of identity, behavior and interaction that arguably authorize “sexual encounters that are not always clearly distinguishable from rape” (p. 3). When the gendered script of sexual violence departs from the stereotypical male aggressor and female victim this argument is tested. How, for instance, do we adequately recognize sexual violence within gay and lesbian relationships and communities, and the particular dynamics of sexual violence against transgender people? And, how do we account for reports of sexual assault of (cisgender, heterosexual) men by (cisgender, heterosexual) women? While the “fine print” of my argument in *Just Sex?* insisted on the importance – for humanitarian as well as theoretical and political reasons – of these questions, it can be

difficult to hold these in view alongside the main focus of the book, which is a critique of the normative conditions of possibility for rape and sexual coercion of women by men.

In the next part of this chapter I will discuss where recent challenges to what may (imperfectly) be called a “gendered analysis” of rape come from, what they mean, and what kind of response they call for. Far from abandoning a gendered analysis, I argue that it remains essential if we have any hope of tackling pervasive forms of sexual violence. But to navigate this difficult territory – where there are risks of exclusions and erasures and unhelpful reiterations at every conceptual turn – what we need is a critically inclusive gender analysis. This would be a way of thinking about sexual violence that recognizes there are gendered *patterns* to the interactions between perpetrators and victims/survivors that reflect (not always perfectly) gendered patterns in the cultural scaffolding of rape (how gender is scripted and plays out in sexual relationships and in other everyday interactions). It does not insist that these patterns are over-determining. That is, gender is not the only thing that matters, and these patterns do not account for all occasions of sexual coercion or rape – at least in terms of the identified gender of those involved. However, this does not mean that, even in cases outside of a heterosexual matrix, gender is irrelevant. Far from it. As Mann (2014: 1) puts it, gender has “ontological weight.”<sup>8</sup>

Critiques and dismissals of gendered analyses of sexual violence come from very different directions, including opposite poles in the world of gender and sexual politics. Yet, there is surprisingly little recent scholarly work unpicking the contradictory assumptions and aspirations that animate how and why gender is – or is not – taken into account in academic research, as well as in law, policy, and activism (although see du Toit 2012 on the problems with gender neutral rape law in South Africa and Russell 2013 on the “sexual indifference” of rape law in England and Wales). While progressive concern for inclusion (notably for LGBTQ people) motivates some de-gendering of how we formulate and respond to the problem of sexual violence, antifeminist so-called men’s rights activists (MRAs) arrive at a similar place with a very different agenda. These MRA groups render gender analyses of sexual violence as a misandrist feminist plot to disparage men and deny their suffering (see Gotell and Dutton 2016). Somewhere in a middle ground perhaps, is a liberal desire to recognize that anyone can be a victim of sexual violence, regardless of gender – which on the surface is neutral and could seem politically progressive, but which I argue can be conservative in practice.

MRAs claim men are equally as likely to be sexually victimized as women and vehemently oppose any claims that there is a gendered pattern to sexual violence. They portray men as quadruply victimized: through sexual violence itself, denial of the existence and suffering of male victims, denigration of all men through any message that singles out men to stop rape, and through false rape allegations. While their call to recognise male victims of sexual violence will find few objectors, their wider tactics are characterized by misleading claims and an aggressive misogyny that does more to provide further evidence of, and insight into, the problematic

gendered scaffolding of rape than to demonstrate its redundancy. Although I won't discuss them further here, MRA activities do deserve close scrutiny, because as Lise Gotell and Emily Dutton (2016: 71) show, their rhetoric co-opts foundational "progressive concepts like rights and equality" and filters into mainstream discourse (see also Sheehy 2016). (Gotell and Dutton also emphasize, however, the importance of situating MRA claims within the broader context of neoliberal and postfeminist discourse that provides a primed audience for their messages; see also Stringer 2014 on this more general point about the influence of neoliberal values in shaping the politics against rape.) As a sign of the move of MRA-type discourse into the mainstream, Gotell and Dutton point to the U.S. example of the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)'s widely publicized rejection of the term rape culture. RAINN, whose website describes it as that "nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization" (RAINN 2018) insists that "rape is caused not by cultural factors," but instead by the decisions of a relatively small number of violent criminals (Berkowitz and O'Connor 2014).

The ways gender is taken into account in law, policy, prevention programmes and even activist praxis vary enormously in different places around the world. While a proper analysis would require a much fuller discussion, attending to numerous nuanced contextual differences, I want to discuss some examples of how gender is *not* taken into account, to begin to highlight why this is problematic.

RAINN's individualistic approach to sexual violence lends itself to a strongly gender neutral approach. Some elements of the gender of sexual violence are registered: On one page of their website on "Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics" (three clicks from the home page),<sup>9</sup> graphics and text recognize that higher rates of women than men experience sexual violence. Similarly on a page on the "Scope of the Problem: Statistics,"<sup>10</sup> (also three clicks in), the heading to a text section reads "Men, women, and children are all affected by sexual violence." But on that very same page, there is no attempt to make sense of the graphic beneath it that shows "9 out of every 10 victims of rape are female." And overall, any meaning to this information is virtually erased in all other messaging on the website under an over-arching message is that "sexual violence can happen to anyone,"<sup>11</sup> and through the way they address all advice to an implicitly gender neutral reader dealing with an ostensibly gender neutral problem. For instance, perpetrators of sexual violence are implicitly gender neutral. On their page "Perpetrators of Sexual Violence: Statistics"<sup>12</sup> the six graphics chosen to illustrate who perpetrators are show data related to their relationship to victims, their age, race, and three elements of their criminal history, but nothing about gender. Any breakdown by gender is also absent in the text section, "Who are the perpetrators?" We get more sense of how RAINN stands in relation to a gendered analysis, in their statement to the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. In that document, they criticize what they characterize as an "unfortunate trend" in debates about sexual violence on campuses to:

focus on particular segments of the student population (e.g., athletes), particular aspects of campus culture (e.g., the Greek system), or traits that are

common in many millions of law-abiding Americans (e.g., “masculinity”), rather than on the subpopulation at fault: those who choose to commit rape.

*(Berkowitz and O’Connor 2014)*

In a profoundly atomistic and a-social approach to human psychology, which also happens to be wildly out of step with feminist and other social science approaches to prevention, this leads them to advocate that “the most effective – the primary – way to prevent sexual violence is to use the criminal justice system to take more rapists off the streets” (*ibid.*).

In the New Zealand context, gender neutral discourse around sexual violence has been mainstreamed<sup>13</sup> in ways that I think uncritically merge liberal concerns (“anyone can be a victim”) and progressive concerns (directly emphasising the importance of addressing sexual violence faced by people in the rainbow community). In one influential local text – a 2015 report by the New Zealand Law Commission (NZLC) on “the justice response to victims of sexual violence” – a gendered analysis of sexual violence is explicitly rejected because it is taken to mean neglect of the experiences of those “who do not fit the gendered model of sexual violence” (NZLC 2015). Their rationale is worth quoting in more detail. In addressing the scope of their report, under the heading “Sexual violence can affect anyone,” they explain:

In this Report, we have chosen not to take a “gendered” approach towards sexual violence. A gendered approach would focus on sexual violence as a form of criminal offending that is predominantly perpetrated by men against women [here they cite *Just Sex?*]. We do not contest the elements of power and control involved in sexual violence, and we recognise the need to look carefully at the intersections between sexual violence, family violence and other forms of criminal offending. However, we do not wish to overlook the incidence or effect of sexual violence in same-sex relationships, of sexual violence against those who identify as transgender, and of all other victims who do not fit the gendered model of sexual violence. For the same reason, we do not use gendered pronouns throughout this Report.

*(ibid.: 29–30)*

In hitting both progressive and liberal notes, this rationale echoes concerns about “fairness” (Russell 2013) in an earlier British Home Office review of sexual offenses law:

It was an important part of our task to recommend a law that was self-evidently fair to all sections of society, and which made no unnecessary distinctions on the basis of gender or sexual orientation.

*(Home Office 2000, quoted in Russell 2013: 260)*

While not as explicit as the NZLC report, the predominant approach to community-based sexual violence prevention in New Zealand also largely avoids emphasizing gender. This happens in ways that are much more subtle than we see with RAINN,

perhaps resulting from the practical challenges and complexities of trying to accommodate a gendered analysis alongside political and strategic constraints in bringing this to life. TOAH-NNEST (Te Ohaakii a Hine – National Network Ending Sexual Violence Together), which is the country’s key network of prevention and intervention services, has quite a strong message about the gender of sexual violence on its website page “What is Sexual Violence?”:

Overwhelmingly, sexual assault of adults is perpetrated by men against women. It is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality. Figures reported to New Zealand Police indicate 99% of adult sexual violence is perpetrated by men. (TOAH-NNEST 2013b; *emphasis in original*)

Similarly, in some parts of the website, “social norms of respect and equity” – in relation gender, as well as race, class, sexuality, disability – are referenced as key to primary prevention (TOAH-NNEST 2013c). Nevertheless in a more front-facing framing of what primary prevention is (one, rather than two clicks from the home page), it is described in gender neutral terms as “creat[ing] an environment which increases the protective factors which foster equitable, loving, respectful relationships and reduces the risk factors that support and enable sexual violence” (TOAH-NNEST 2013a).

A critically inclusive gender analysis of sexual violence must be underpinned by recognition that indeed anyone – of any gender or sexuality – can be subjected to sexual violence. But to put a conceptual full-stop after this point precludes us from recognizing that the dynamics and experience of sexual coercion and sexual assault are affected by gender *in ways that matter* enormously (see also Gotell and Dutton 2016). Holding these two “truths” together proves conceptually tricky in practice, as we see in these examples where the relevance of gender is sidelined either explicitly (in the case of the NZLC report and RAINN’s statement) or implicitly (in the virtual invisibility of gender on the RAINN website, and in the website placement of different messages used by TOAH-NNEST).<sup>14</sup>

So why is gender so fundamentally relevant in ways that are covered up in these kinds of gender neutral framings of sexual violence, and why is that such a problem? One way it is relevant relates to how we make sense of the close-up interpersonal context of rape and sexual coercion, and how we interpret the acts and experiences of persons claimed or observed to be perpetrators or victims/survivors. How we understand what is happening in these intimate contexts affects what we imagine the problem of sexual violence to be, and how we think about stopping it. In relation to this, I will critically discuss Lara Stemple and colleagues’ recent research, which has been widely cited as upsetting contemporary conventional wisdom on the gendered realities of sexual violence. When we pan out to a wider angle, attention to gender is also fundamentally relevant to noticing and understanding the nature of the cultural conditions of possibility for sexual violence – the norms and scripts, and the value we associate with masculine and feminine, and how they arguably provide the scaffolding for rape and sexual abuse

(as I discussed in *Just Sex?*). In the final part of this chapter I will come back to this – arguing that contra the claims that we see in the NZLC report, for instance, a gendered analysis is not only crucial for understanding men’s sexual violence against women, but is valuable for understanding sexual violence against all persons, and informing how we respond to it.

### Men as victims of female perpetrators?

Lara Stemple and her colleagues’ articles on the sexual victimization of men (Stemple and Meyer 2014) and female perpetrators (Stemple, Flores, and Meyer 2017) have generated publicity in recent years, prompting headlines like “The hidden epidemic of men who are raped by women” (Blum 2016), “The understudied female sexual predator” (Friedersdorf 2016), and “Sexual offending by women is surprisingly common, claims US study” (Jarrett 2017). Their research is based on identifying patterns in data pooled from large surveys like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) and the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics’ National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). In a *Scientific American* article, Stemple and Meyer (2018) write that the “pervasive cultural understanding that perpetrators of sexual violence are nearly always men” “belies the reality, revealed” in their study. One survey, for instance, appeared to show that “men and women were equally likely to experience non-consensual sex, and most male victims reported female perpetrators.”

Stemple’s (2009, 2011a) position is interesting, in that she wants to draw attention to the problem of sexual violence against men and boys from a feminist perspective that insists on the relevance of gender to understanding and addressing it. As a human rights lawyer working with an international organization that seeks to end sexual violence of imprisoned and detained people, she became frustrated with the limited tools applicable for male victims within an international human rights framework. The context of international law, as she describes it, is strongly shaped by a gendered worldview. Stemple refers to United Nations treaties and documents that address violence against women, yet pay virtually no recognition to sexual violence against men (see also Storr 2011). She further observes a wider resistance within international law to acknowledging male vulnerability (Stemple 2011a; see also Bergoffen 2014). Stemple’s (2009, 2011a) points are important. Some of the key elements of her argument resonate with concerns I also raised in *Just Sex?*, and that many other feminists have raised, about the risks of reiterating stereotypes of male aggression and invulnerability and female passivity and vulnerability. As Stemple (2011a: 829) highlights, in the case of sexual violence against men in contexts like “prison cells, on battlefields, in church rectories” not looking beyond such stereotypes leads to two serious problems. Practically, it prevents us from recognizing that men are also subject to abuse, and providing humanitarian intervention. Theoretically, it is also problematic, as it frosts over the complex nuances of gender-based violence, hindering recognition of *how* gender actually works to (re)produce violence. (Note that perpetrators of rape in contexts of war

and violent conflict are overwhelmingly, although not exclusively,<sup>15</sup> men.) Critically, failure to notice sexual violence against men can perpetuate the cultural myth of men's invulnerability, and bolster a collective denial of male vulnerability. Given that such denial is arguably culturally and psychologically implicated in men's aggression – a point that Stemple and Meyer (2018; see also Stemple 2011b) nod to (and which I return to below) – this, too, begs concern. As Stemple (2011a: 826) herself says, “undoing rape requires thorough attention to gender [in] all its forms.”

Stemple's (2009, 2011a) efforts to draw attention to the problem and neglect of male rape are important. And her feminist legal perspective applies well to thinking through the challenges and necessities of better addressing gender-based violence against men in situations that are structured and animated by institutional, state, and other forms of authoritarian power (prison, war, the military, the church, etc). However, it is her later collaborative empirical work using social science methodologies (Stemple and Meyer 2014; Stemple *et al.* 2017) that has attracted recent (and wider public) attention. While this work continues to argue for expansively interpreted feminist approaches (Stemple *et al.* 2017) and “gender-conscious analyses that avoid regressive stereotyping” (Stemple and Meyer 2014: e25), it ultimately trips up on some of the pitfalls familiar to critical social scientists who caution against reductive positivist approaches to “data.”

Conclusions drawn from the analysis of large data sets (like the NISVS and the NCVS that Stemple and her colleagues used) can deliver powerful-sounding figures. But what this kind of research often sacrifices is finer grained thinking about what the numbers actually represent. For instance, what does it mean when a man answers affirmatively to the question, “How many people have ever used physical force or threats to physically harm you to make you ...” “have vaginal sex?” or to “try to make you have vaginal sex with them, but sex did not happen?” (questions used in the NISVS).<sup>16</sup> This kind of conceptual unpacking is especially important when statistics representing complex psychosocial phenomena seem, on the face of it, counter-intuitive. Do the new statistical findings reveal something that was previously misunderstood or even uncover knowledge about a phenomenon that has been thoroughly suppressed? Or is there a risk that such statistics misrepresent the phenomenon we are interested in because of the way the variables (the categories and outcomes measured) are defined and packaged? Or is the truth somewhere in between?

The first thing to say about Stemple *et al.*'s (2017) “surprising” findings about female perpetration, and Stemple and Meyer's (2014) findings that “challenge old assumptions” about the extent of male sexual victimization, is that they aren't completely new! As I discussed in the original edition of *Just Sex?* a body of social science research going back to the mid-late 1980s was finding that a significant proportion of men report having experienced sexual coercion by a woman (see Chapter 7 for my discussion and critique). These claims need new critical attention, however, now that they are being headlined as if they are new truths.

We still understand very little, in my view, about men's experiences of sexual violation by women (of a similar age) – like what kinds of acts, in what kinds of situations, are experienced as victimizing, and for what kinds of reasons. Being

conscious of gender requires us to ask these questions, because we know that while gender stereotypes are reductive, limiting, and harmful, and that they don't adequately reflect the diverse experiences of being men or women, they are far from irrelevant in shaping how people understand themselves and permit themselves to behave. One of the few studies I've seen that explores men's narratives of "unwanted sexual experiences with women" (Fagen and Anderson 2012: 263) reveals just how complicated and heavily inflected by the weight of masculinity these experiences are.

Fagen and Anderson (2012) conducted in-depth interviews with 20 men, aiming to allow men to tell their own stories not "limited by structured questions that reflected [the researchers'] – or society's – gendered assumptions" (ibid.: 263). The study is a very useful supplement to Stemple and colleagues' work, because both draw from more general populations (rather than from clinical populations or survivor groups), and both methods of data collection frame the focus of the research for participants as "unwanted" sexual situations, rather than "abuse" more directly. Hence they are likely to tap into similar sorts of experiences. Fagen and Anderson's analysis should be required reading for anyone interested in thinking critically about the kind of data that Stemple and her colleagues draw on, because it shows how specifically gendered dynamics and experiences might underlie men's reports of sexual coercion or force by women – in ways that do not always look like sexual victimization as we usually think about it. This is not to deny that such experiences can be aggressive or harmful, but listening to how men describe what they experienced and how they felt about it should make us question any straightforward conclusions about the nature and extent of women's sexual victimization of men (as a broad category, on the basis of research like Stemple and colleagues). Although the men interviewed by Fagen and Anderson described a range of different kinds of situations and encounters, using terms like "sexually coercive" or "forced," most of the unwanted sexual experiences they described did not fit "under the rubric of what is traditionally defined as sexual aggression" (2012: 264). In fact, like some of the earlier research I criticized in *Just Sex?* for confusing female sexual initiation with aggression, several of the incidents men spoke about reflected this same conflation. In general, the men seemed ambivalent about their experiences, mostly not distinguishing between "pride and victimization" (Fagen and Anderson 2012: 264). Tellingly, most of the men spoke of feeling powerful even during those encounters where women had used force.

One young man implied "aggressive girls" were "stupid" for putting themselves in the path of men who will take advantage of them, reflecting a way of responding to being the object of sexual aggression that I have never heard used by a woman speaking about facing a sexually aggressive man. Talking about his ex-girlfriend, who he described as "kind of coercive," he said:

she shouldn't be lying in my bed naked like looking for this like she should know that I'm taking advantage of her ... her control over me was her having sex with me ... her having sexual acts with me or whatever. But, in the long

run, it just proved that I kind of got annoyed with it. It wasn't any fun anymore; like I knew that I could just go have sex with this girl. I ... like I could do whatever I want with her and where's the fun in that? I'd rather have a girl who's a lot more like ... there's more of a pursuit, I guess.

(“Justin”; quoted in Fagen and Anderson 2012: 265)

Justin favourably contrasted his current girlfriend with this ex-girlfriend, describing the current girlfriend as “very innocent” and “reserved”: “it’s like I’m the aggressor now kind of instead of having to deal with this girl who’s always all over me” (ibid.).

Other examples from this study show how some men can perceive sexual force or coercion in the absence of any direct interpersonal force or even verbal pressure – in some cases, implying they were unable to refuse or extricate themselves from an encounter initiated by a woman because of the effect of her beauty or attractiveness, rather than anything she did or said. In a different sort of scenario, two of the men described situations where they seemed to find a woman’s sexual interest in them amusing, in one case deliberately “being hard to get and seeing what I could get her to do” (“Carl”; ibid.: 264). Fagen and Anderson noted that hostility ran through some of the men’s talk, as they described women as “sluts,” and displayed irritation with how they perceived women’s explicit sexual interest to be usurping their proper masculine role as sexual initiators. Such experiences can perhaps be understood as coercive in a cultural sense. That is, the perceived risk to their masculinity becomes a pressure that constrains their choices. But it would be far-fetched to count these sorts of experiences as examples of sexual violence. In fact, ironically perhaps, in at least some of the narratives, the threat (often not direct) men experience from a woman’s sexual initiation is to his place on the gender hierarchy (with the cultural license that gives him to be the sexual pursuer of women). And this threat can be brought about simply by a woman moving outside the implicit gender norm that denies her this same license, at least in relation to men. Against this pattern, Fagen and Anderson did discuss two men’s narratives about experiences that had more in common with how we might usually think of sexual assault. In both cases, unique circumstances would have (in one case, and possibly could have in another) shifted the dynamics of power and embodied capacity in ways that created more plausible conditions of possibility for a woman to sexually assault a man. In one case the man was not conscious, in another he was a hitchhiking passenger alone with female driver.

Another study that injects some “ethnographic realism” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832) into our picture of men’s experiences of (hetero)sexual pressure comes from focus groups on sex education, sexual practices, and so on, with school boys (14–19 years old) in Ireland (Hyde, Drennan, Howlett, and Brady 2014). In these discussions, boys spoke in ways that clearly oriented to a heteronormative script “in which real men are cast as sexual predators who lead and control sexual liaisons” (ibid.: 248). But what is interesting beyond this, is the way that male control and dominance were taken for granted (but also often resisted) by the boys *at the same time* as they revealed the pressures boys face, and the vulnerabilities they feel. For example:

If a girl like came up to you and said like “Let’s have sex” it would be a bit weird but if you didn’t do it you’d get a lot of stick over it because you’re the fella and you’re supposed to be the one that wants to do it, so there’s pressure like. Fellas are expected to want to do it more than girls, so if the opportunity came up and they didn’t take it they’d get a lot of stick over it.

*(Boy from group of 17–19 year olds, Hyde et al. 2009: 244)*

Through many such examples of boys’ talk, Hyde and her colleagues build a picture of a peer culture that vigorously reproduces the myth of masculinity (a concept I will explain later) – through the pull power of heteronormative (and homophobic) norms, as well as through punishing (in this case largely through “slagging”) any perceived deviation from the norm. In passing reference to the wider study, which included focus groups with girls of the same age, the authors note that both boys and girls referenced a sexual double standard, and girls described sexual coercion as “a pervasive feature of their experiences” (ibid.: 243). That observation is, depressingly, nothing new (see Marston and Lewis 2014 for another relatively recent elaboration). But the particular focus of this article on the theme of male vulnerability contributes valuable insights into the doubled nature of the myth of masculinity – providing fascinating reflections from boys of an age when they are learning the ropes of how this works in a specifically sexual context. It shows the weight of masculinity in everyday life – how much it matters for boys, how vulnerable it makes them (at the same time, seemingly, on the basis of the girls’ reports, as it grooms boys to sexually coerce girls).

Returning to Stemple and colleagues’ recent work that purports to up-end orthodox assumptions about the gender of sexual victimization, we don’t know the details of the experiences people have in mind when they answer in the affirmative to any of the questions on an instrument like the NISVS (one of the surveys they drew on). It is possible that all the men who identified having experienced sexual pressure and force by a woman had experienced sexual assault as we usually think about this. But the glimpse we get from Fagen and Anderson’s research, into the way that some men talk about experiences with women they identify as unwanted, coerced, and forced, suggests that some if not many men will be recalling experiences that refer to something else. It also means that women counted as perpetrators of sexual victimization may include many who were guilty only of showing explicit sexual interest to an uninterested man. Whatever is going on, at the very least it suggests that what these surveys count as victimization cannot always accurately be understood in terms of a victim–perpetrator interpersonal dynamic.

As I discussed in *Just Sex?*, this is admittedly complex terrain. Women face many disincentives to identifying experiences of sexual coercion, and even violence, as victimization. Researchers who have looked at boys’ and men’s narratives about sexual abuse and assault note that pressures to demonstrate masculinity may shape what and how men talk about such experiences, framing their experience “in ways that allow them to repair, reclaim, or reassert masculinity” (Weiss 2010: 289; Hlavka 2017). It has become an almost commonsense claim that boys and men still face

stronger disincentives than women to disclosing experiences of sexual violence and to identifying as victims. It is probably impossible to know if this comparative claim is true. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that men do face these sorts of constraints on reporting sexual violence. At the same time, however, the insights possible from more in-depth qualitative research show that the constraints of masculinity also work in other directions to shape certain experiences as injurious in a very different kind of way. At the very least, this sort of research shows that we need to take Stemple and colleagues' claims to have uncovered a surprising new "reality" about the gendered nature of sexual victimization with a grain of salt. Data from large scale surveys come with a gloss that can easily blind us to crucial underlying questions about the validity of the measures used to obtain them, forcing the question, do they actually measure what they purport to measure? The importance of this question is particularly pronounced when the bald numbers jar harshly with the picture we get from accumulated in-depth qualitative investigations, and when that picture echoes and elaborates on what we observe all around us.

Calling into question the validity of these "new" claims is not the same as denying the reality of male victimization, nor that it can be equally serious when it occurs. Quite the contrary: There is incontestable evidence that boys and men experience sexual violence in ways that are without doubt recognizable as such. But when we recognize and understand the specificities of masculine vulnerability, and its complex relationship to cultural ideals of masculine dominance, it is clear that we have to think about it in a much more nuanced way. Just as some women suffer egregious forms of sexual violence and abuse, so too do some men. But as soon as we start to pan out to the cultural scaffolding of these acts and experiences, looking at how they are embedded and enabled by wider patterns, systems, and structures of gender, the folly of simple equivalence stories about sexual victimization (like the kind generated by research like Stemple and colleagues) is clear. Not only are they highly misleading, but they draw the spotlight away from where it is most needed to try and understand and undo the cultural scaffolding of rape – as it affects people of all genders (see also Salter 2015).

Thinking about the gender of rape and the heightened visibility of sexism and misogyny – two issues that on the surface seem either completely unrelated or playing out in opposite directions – brings me back to what I now see as something missing in my formulation of the problem of rape in *Just Sex*? In my original argument I described the cultural scaffolding of rape as "the legitimized, normalized, and normalizing constructions of aggressive male sexuality and passive female sexuality that provide not only a social pattern for coercive sexuality but also a convenient smoke-screen for rationalizing rape (within heterosexual relationships, in particular) as simply just sex" (p. 70). What I overlooked in focussing on the gendered binary of active-passive sexuality (shown most clearly in the normative heterosexual arrangement), was attention to "deeper" dynamics that might be driving and animating it. What might explain persistent *attachments* to the element of male (sexual) dominance – something we see in rape (including the rape of men perpetrated by other men), everyday misogyny, and most mainstream pornography<sup>17</sup>? And, might this dynamic also help explain sexual violence beyond the heterosexual matrix; sexual violence against people of diverse genders and sexualities?

## The “myth of masculinity”

As I said earlier, I think my original framing of the problem of sexual violence was clouded to some extent by a mix of wishful optimism and a dampened political vernacular. A register restricted by what I felt at the time was the risk of unintelligibility if I railed “too much” against prevailing postfeminist logic. What has moved more crisply into view over the past decade and a half are the patriarchal push backs against the possibilities for change: The posture of misogyny we see in the vicious tweets about Marion Bartoli, Trump’s authoritarian executive order to restrict women’s reproductive rights and freedoms, the MRAs’ vitriolic abuse toward feminist researchers and activists, and the arrogant derogation and disregard for girls shown by teenage boys like those in Steubenville and the so-called Roastbusters. It is not always clear how best to think about whatever this “thing” is, and what best to call it. Terms like patriarchy, toxic masculinity, male privilege, male entitlement, all capture some sense of what is driving and defending sexism and misogyny, gender inequality and injustice, and discrimination and violence. Scholars have tried out concepts like tyranny, sovereignty, and empire: Cahill (2014) refers to the “tyrannical” attempts of a rapist, Bergoffen (2012: 54) writes of “fantasies of masculine sovereignty,” Adams (2012) dissects “masculine empire” – and Mann (2014) uses “sovereign masculinity” for the broader task of tethering an understanding of empire as it exists in the United States with understanding “its culture and practices of gender.” A slightly different way of thinking about it – which provides more purchase for understanding the problem in terms we can tackle – comes with Bergoffen’s (2012: 44) term, the “myth of masculinity.” By this, she refers to fantasies of masculinity that rest on the myth of men’s invulnerability: “patriarchal gender codes identify masculinity with invulnerability and translate this abstract concept into the seemingly benign power to protect and the abusive criminal power to rape” (Bergoffen 2014: 174, 2012).<sup>18</sup>

What I like about this notion of the myth of masculinity, is the doubled work it can do. It highlights, but goes beyond, the obvious point that dominant cultural ideas about what it means to be a man (and the structures and systems that give body to those ideas) are a crucial part of the problem. Calling it a *myth* embeds the critical twist that there exists a gap between this cultural code and the experiences, identities, and behavior of men as people. Thinking about this in the Foucauldian terms I outlined in *Just Sex?* means that while dominant norms for masculinity play an important role in shaping how a male-identified person comes to be a man, they are not “over-determining.” Men usually have wriggle room (although not always). But this recognition that individual men are not, do not have to be – and indeed, cannot be – the sum total of what cultures valorize or demand for them *as men*, is extremely important for thinking about the possibilities for change in relation to sexual violence prevention and gender justice and equality more generally.

In gathering and distilling norms for manhood that repudiate femininity and barricade against any whiff of vulnerability, the myth of masculinity burdens men and restricts the kinds of lives they can live. In contexts where masculine norms are strictly policed, or for men in general who for whatever reason are beholden to their pull, the myth of masculinity can have crippling effects – for men themselves.

(I'm thinking here particularly of men's susceptibility to injury and death due to courting risk and danger for pleasure and status, or through working for necessity or desire in unsafe traditionally masculine work environments, as well as from male–male aggression; but also the emotional compression and suffering that can arise from the disavowal of vulnerability and relational interdependence). But at the same time that these norms hurt men, they also enable men – in ways that hurt others. Within the hierarchy of gender, the myth of masculinity casts men as dominant, superior, and entitled to taken–for–granted prominence and authority (although in complicated and uneven ways, shaped by race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, ability, and so on). This is relevant to sexual violence in a doubled way. When men (particularly, but not only, cisgender, straight men) act out this role in culturally authorized ways, they diminish and subjugate women and others in ways that often pass beneath the radar as “just the way things are,” mundane, barely noticeable instances of everyday sexism, homophobia, and so on. By the same logic, (hetero)sexual coercion and some kinds of “everyday” rape, are recuperated within a masculinist world view as “just sex.” But as well as this, because the myth of masculinity rests on psychological impossibilities (repudiated vulnerability, dependency, interdependence, and so on – see Bergoffen 2014; Mann 2014; relatedly see also Gilson 2016; Layton 2014) it is inherently fragile and always under threat. So individual men who are heavily invested in the myth of masculinity, as real, and who disavow their own vulnerability, can become locked in to defending against any (real or perceived) threats to their masculine identity and status in the heteronormative gender order. Perversely, it could seem, this burden of the myth of masculinity can explain both the sexual(ized) harm men can suffer and the sexual(ized) violence some men perpetrate. In particular, it can arguably explain both the humiliation some men feel when a sexually agentic woman usurps their role in the heteronormative script and the nature and severity of injury some men suffer as a result of rape or sexualized violation<sup>19</sup> (two very different phenomena) – *as well as* explaining men's more egregious acts of misogyny and violence against women and others (sexualized and otherwise).<sup>20</sup>

In Lynne Layton's psychoanalytic interpretation of the (not specifically gendered) psychic effects of neoliberalism, she explains how, despite attempts to distance ourselves from socially shameful states like vulnerability and dependency, they “do not disappear without a trace” (2014: 166). One way they can express themselves, she says, is through “relational scenarios marked by the effects of projection of repudiated parts of self onto the other, by domination and submission and by the eroticization of positions of power and weakness” (ibid.: 167). Although gender and sexual violence are not Layton's focus here, this scenario she describes as an expression of the traces of repudiated vulnerability maps extremely well onto thinking about men's violence toward women. If culture and society promote the idea of men as naturally and normatively dominant and invulnerable, this notion presumably becomes part of the everyday taken–for–granted masculine capital that most men carry (in varying degrees). When individual men both invest in gender dominance as their rightful place in the world and disavow their own vulnerability and interdependence, acting out

dominance in relation to women (as well as others, especially those that threaten the heteronormative order) – or fantasizing about it (through, for example, watching men sexually dominating women in pornography) is perhaps one way they attempt to restore this toxic state of equilibrium. Moreover, through a psychic process of “projective identification” (rather than simple projection), one “not only attributes one’s psychic state to others, but acts in such a way as to bring about the attributed state in the other” (Alford 2013; quoted in Layton 2014: 167). This latter scenario, perhaps, more acutely explains what fuels particularly aggressive expressions of misogyny. Layton does not write about these processes as specifically gendered – and it is important to note that many scholars describe these kinds of psychological marks of neoliberalism as affecting, in different ways, all groups of people. But it is clear to see how these effects are compounded in particular ways for men, given masculine ideals are already clustered around qualities like autonomy, strength and courage, and pressed into a narrow emotional range (facilitating anger and aggression, for instance, while discouraging hurt and fear). The states of defensive hostility we witness in the misogynist sexually aggressive tweets against Bartoli, for example, or the pleasure displayed by boys watching other boys violate a girl in Steubenville or the pleasure men seek from watching women being sexually dominated in pornography, and the whole *raison d’être* of the MRAs, can easily be read as psychosocial leakage from the socially encouraged repudiation of men’s vulnerability. As, of course, can many cases of sexual violence. Each of these kinds of experiences and ways of acting presumably offer men a sense of hope and the potential to restore, psychologically, the equilibrium of the gendered order of dominance and submission.

As I imply, I don’t think this extra layer of explanation is always needed for some more “everyday” acts of sexual violence, where masculine capital provides room for men’s seduction to blur into sexual pressure, coercion, and rape. Distinguishing between different general kinds of rape, as I am doing here, can be problematic, and some feminist commentators would be very wary of any attempt to do this because of the risks of trivializing some experiences. I definitely would not want to do that – it is obvious to me that all kinds of sexual violation are wrong and potentially harmful. But recognizing the different elements that enable and shape acts of rape and sexual exploitation helps us to see what we need to target for change. Any close look at the range of different circumstances in different cases of rape forces us, I think, to recognize that both layers of the myth of masculinity (simple masculine capital and defenses of masculine dominance) operate in some rapes, but not in all; and that in some cases they join forces with fantasies of ethnic and racial sovereignty as well. Some rapes can, I think, result from men acting on reflex, with a culturally enabled sense of masculine primacy and sexual entitlement, and an implicit sense of women’s secondary status, without *necessarily intending* to cause harm to the other. One woman I interviewed (Leanne), described how her boyfriend penetrated her when they were in bed together, even though she had made it very clear to him, and he had indicated he understood, that she did not want to have sexual intercourse (Gavey 2007).<sup>21</sup> This kind of interaction is explained well by my original analysis of the constitutive role of

gendered norms for heterosexuality – “women’s passive, acquiescing (a)sexuality and men’s forthright, urgent pursuit of sexual ‘release’.” In this case, she was raped, taken by surprise, by a man intent on pursuing his sexual agenda unfettered by hers. While this sexual violation was made possible by all the resources of masculine capital, and an implicit disregard for women, as somehow secondary, Leanne’s narrative did not indicate that he *intended* to dominate and hurt her. Even though that is exactly what he did.

But what about acts of rape that exceed this kind of sexual domination – rapes accompanied by explicit forms of humiliating and hurtful hostility, racialized abuse, physical assault beyond the force necessary to rape, and torture? Acts that seem fueled by an aggressive and retaliatory intent to humiliate and harm the other, in order to demonstrate and enforce dominance and/or sovereignty. And in some extreme cases physically wound and kill. In obvious cases like this, rape is one part of a violent attack, which might include torture and life-threatening injuries. For example, the kinds of attack described in the near-fatal stranger rape by Brison (2002) and the brutal genocidal rapes described by Bergoffen (2012; where ethnic and nationalist politics were also deeply important). But this sort of intentionally destructive rape also occurs in more domestic contexts, such as the intimate violence described by Le Grice (2017) that clearly shows male partners’ intentions to harm and violently assert dominance (in one case, interwoven with racist denigration). It also flavours the ritualized sexual exploitation described by the Roastbusters boys, in their callous disregard for the girls they abused. The gendered binary norms of heterosex don’t, in and of themselves, explain these extra layers of cruelty and violence. This is where the myth of masculinity helps – to make sense of these kinds of acts that show men’s *commitment* to sexual violence against women (and others). They are forms of violence arguably designed to produce and prove dominance, fueled by the more fragile and more dangerous layer of the myth of masculinity

The good news is, not all men are invested in the myth of masculinity. And of those who are, it is not always by choice. Exposing this myth and its harms, and helping boys and men to reject its trappings, is *one* of the key directions I think we need to move our efforts to prevent sexual violence. And it must be approached through a broader movement for gender equality and justice that joins the dots between everyday sexism, misogyny, and sexual violence (see Gavey 2014a) and other intersecting systems of dominance. There’s no question that this is a very big challenge – letting go of privilege is easier said than done (see Pease 2014a; see also Pease 2014b). But unpacking and dismantling contemporary hegemonic norms for masculinity will be necessary over and above challenging the binary norms for gendered sexuality alone. The specificity of both tasks must not get lost amongst overly broad (and bland) general calls in the name of sexual violence prevention to “foster equitable, loving, respectful relationships” (TOAH-NNEST n.d.) or to enhance “personal safety” and the “safety” of others (RAINN n.d.; see also Messner 2016). In particular, honing in on the role of vulnerability (and its repudiation) rather than dominance, per se, flips the possibilities for how we might think about tackling change. That some men who act violently in intimate relationships

apparently say they don't feel dominant or powerful, might tell us something about both the psychological precariousness of dominance as well as its resilience to change – and hence the need to think more laterally about where, when, with whom, and how to intervene.

Of course, men have been addressed in sexual violence prevention (and prevention of violence against women more generally) for some time (see, for example, Flood 2011; Jewkes, Flood, and Lang 2015; Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz 2015; Messner 2016). But, as critical masculinities scholars, in particular, have noted, efforts to date have often been imperfect, and sometimes problematic. Too often, men have been invited “to help” in ways that bring into play, rather than challenge, conventional modes of masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Jewkes *et al.* 2015; Messner 2016; Murphy 2009; Pascoe and Hollander 2016). As a result, some popular forms of men's participation in anti-violence work can end up “simultaneously reaffirm[ing] many qualities that typify hegemonic masculine forms and dominance” (Bridges and Pascoe 2014: 251). For example, in the acclaimed “My Strength Is Not for Hurting” campaign (see McGann 2009; Murphy 2009), visually arresting posters call upon men to act as both bystanders and as sexual partners proud to respect another person's (usually a woman's) sexual boundaries. Through a close reading of the visual and textual form of the posters' messaging, Murphy (2009: 6) argues that although they espouse an ostensibly anti-rape message, they actually “appear to reinforce some of the very beliefs about race, sex, gender, and sexual orientation that undergird rape culture.” Beyond the more obvious issue that men are asked to draw on the iconically masculine quality of *strength* to stop rape, Murphy identifies an “unreflective misogyny” (*ibid.*: 8) embedded in the visual arrangement of the photographs in the posters. He notices how men are shown gazing directly at the camera, with women typically “occupy [ing] less physical and pictorial space ... often leaning into their male counterparts, surrounded by his arms, or draped around his shoulders like an article of clothing” (*ibid.*: 7). (See also Masters 2010 for discussion of a wider range of anti-rape campaigns in this vein, and Fleming, Lee, and Dworkin 2014 for a similar critique related to the framing of public health interventions – such as one that tells men to “Man up” to help prevent sexually transmitted infections.)

So, not only can such campaigns targeting men inadvertently reinforce the myth of masculinity, but they can also end up more directly denigrating women and femininity. Murphy (2009: 7), for instance, highlighted the “My Strength Is Not for Hurting” posters' tendency to “situate women as dependent objects, marginal accessories to a conversation between male subjects.” Similarly, Bridges (2010) offers a discouraging picture of men's position in relation to gender, among men participating in “Walk a Mile in Her Shoes” marches in the United States. In these marches, men are asked to “literally walk one mile in women's high-heeled shoes” (Walk a Mile in Her Shoes n.d.) toward an overarching goal of “rais[ing] men's awareness about and opposition to violence against women” (Bridges 2010: 6). Bridges observed men often drawing on, and making fun of, clichéd, belittling stereotypes of femininity and gay masculinity; putting a lot of work into acting in ways that secured “some form of ‘appropriate heterosexual masculinity’” (*ibid.*: 17).

McCaughey and Cermele (2017) argue that these problematic gender politics are exacerbated in the context of United States college campuses where there is, at the same time, strong resistance to including women's self-defense within primary prevention. This leaves women and girls "viewing these campaigns as the ones who are acted upon," implicitly reliant on the benevolence of men to stop rape (ibid.: 294). They refer to this as a "hidden curriculum" that delivers a set of conservative messages about gender – including that men have strength but women do not – which "preserves a gender status quo even while it strives for change" (ibid.: 287).<sup>22</sup>

### **Sexual violence against LGBTQ people**

My original analysis in *Just sex?* focussed on unpacking the cultural scaffolding of rape by men against women. It did this through a critique of the gendered norms of heterosexuality, and concluded with calls to de-naturalize rigid gender binaries and to challenge sexual imperatives more widely. The book's relative neglect of sexual violence against LGBTQ people now stands out as a more prominent gap – as progressive demands for recognition by people of diverse genders and sexualities have gained increasing visibility and political traction. In many ways it is deeply unsatisfying, and unsatisfactory, to address this gap in postscript fashion, as it is a subject that needs much fuller attention.

One way that researchers, policy writers, and prevention workers have responded to concerns about inclusivity is through adopting a substantively gender neutral approach to sexual violence (as I discussed above). De-gendering the language, for instance, so that all analyses, policies, services, laws, education and activist messages, and so on, ostensibly apply to all persons. But, it seems to me that the essential work of recognizing and working against high levels of sexual and gender-based violence against queer and transgender people is sold short by this approach. I think the challenge is more complex. This solution arguably offers inclusion within a framework that obscures some of the underlying causes or conditions of possibility for this violence, and hinders the opportunity for the kinds of more radical critique that are necessary for real transformation. Some queer writers argue that to be effective, anti-sexual violence work must "intentionally include and center the experiences of queer people, trans women, people who are gender non-conforming, sex workers, trans men, people of color, gay men, those who have been previously incarcerated, lesbians, bisexual identified people, and the myriad of intersections in between" (Patterson 2016: 10). Others have challenged us to question what we are asking for in the name of inclusion and equality (although their primary targets are "the institution of marriage, the U.S. military, and the prison industrial complex via hate crimes legislation" [Against Equality 2011]; see also Spade 2015; Weiss 2012).

My formulation of the cultural scaffolding of rape was only indirectly, and partially, relevant to understanding sexual violence beyond the matrix of heterosexuality.

Something more is needed, and I think it should be informed by these more provocative critiques, and by more in-depth narrative and ethnographic types of research to help critically illuminate the dynamics of sexual violence against different groups of queer and transgender people, and the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions that surround it. While it won't be the whole story, I think an ongoing analysis the role of gender, as I have been arguing for in this chapter, is likely to be an important part of this picture. While the myth of masculinity is deeply interwoven with heteronormativity, it actually exceeds it. And this makes the concept valuable for thinking about the gendered dimensions of sexual violence beyond a heterosexual matrix of sexually aggressive men and submissive women.

As with men's rape and sexual coercion of women, men's rape and sexual coercion of men can manifest in both everyday and more flagrant forms. In *Just Sex?*, I referred to research lead by John Fenaughty, looking at men who have sex with men's experiences of sexual coercion (e.g., Braun, Schmidt, Gavey, and Fenaughty 2009; Fenaughty *et al.* 2006), in which we found men reported a wide range of coercive experiences, quite similar to those women describe. There were some features of men's experiences that were specific to their being gay or bisexual men or takatāpui tāne – and which are related to gender, heteronormativity, indigeneity for some men, and marginality. For example, the relative invisibility of gay male sexuality within the wider culture left some young gay men with fewer cultural resources to draw on when negotiating early sexual experiences – leaving them vulnerable to coercion from older, more experienced sexual partners. But the range of dynamics of coercion, overall, quite closely resembled those described by heterosexual women; coercive male partners were portrayed as acting out a gendered script that naturalizes and normalizes the importance of men's sexual needs and entitlement to sex. In these situations, one side of the socially constructed heteronormative binary is arguably at work, with one man acting out a dominant masculine sexuality, forcing the coerced partner into the submissive position. Masculine capital is marshalled by one man resourcing him to act selfishly and aggressively against another.

But the doubled nature of the myth of masculinity is more helpful, I think, for explaining other kinds of men's sexual violence against LGBTQ people (which also relates to some of the experiences described by men Fenaughty interviewed – they are not mutually exclusive forces). This is the kind of sexual violence that I have been arguing is fueled by the psychic defenses of men who are deeply invested in the myth of masculinity: The kind of sexual violence that is carried out with the intention not only to dominate, but to prove dominance (to themselves and sometimes also to their peers), by deliberating subjugating and in some cases attempting to destroy a person perceived as a threat to his status within the gender order. For some cisgender men who are heavily, but insecurely, invested in a straight identity or a manly identity (remembering that is by no means all men), it is possible that anyone who

transgresses the strict rules of “men should be manly and dominant – women should be feminine and submissive,” may be perceived as mocking and undermining their status. For example, men who have sex with men, men who are feminine, women who eschew men’s sexual interest (including lesbian and bisexual women) and/or reject their secondary position in the gender order, and transgender people who in varying ways threaten the very gender order itself. For some such men, it is possible that (sexual and sexualized) violence is a crude effort to resolve this psychic threat through attempts to symbolically, and in some cases, physically, obliterate these others – thereby overcoming the disavowed fragility of their position and confirming or reinstating their own masculine dominance. (While this might explain direct violence, perpetrated by a relatively small number of men, it may also explain the far more common and everyday verbal and online homophobic and transphobic abuse, in forms much like the misogynist abuse I described earlier.) While this portrayal does envisage violence and abuse springing from a kind of fragility (of varying degrees), men acting from this position can be so dangerous because of all the masculine capital embedded in structures and systems (bodily, psychological, relational, cultural, social, technological, economic, political) that prop up their capacity to act violently.

Sexual violence perpetrated by women is more difficult to explain in terms of the gender order and the myth of masculinity. Women are much less commonly associated with the kinds of dominating acts that attempt to violently police the heteronormative order. As Pascoe and Hollander (2016: 76) note, “dominance work doesn’t characterize normative femininity in the way it characterizes normative masculinity.” It is not part of women’s gender capital. But this does not mean that some women do not take up this kind of work, in general, and through sexual violence. As I noted in *Just Sex?* research shows that some lesbian women experience sexual abuse from partners (see also Dickson 2016); and women have been documented as perpetrators of wartime sexual violence (although they are rare [Sjoberg 2016]). This might mean that masculine scripts for sexual primacy and dominance are not the only thing that is relevant; or it might show that they can be taken up by people in ways that cross the borders of gendered bodies. While the script is gendered, with the role of sexual initiator, pursuer, and potential aggressor written for men, this does not perhaps mean that others can’t use it (or attempt to), just as it does not of course mean that all men do act it out, or want to act it out. Alternatively, women’s perpetration of sexual violence might simply be an indication that the psychology of sexual dominance, created or fueled through the repudiation of vulnerability, is not inherently linked to masculinity even though it strongly overlaps with it. We certainly know that beyond the world of gender and sexual politics, dominance is enacted across gender lines, through our complicities in holding in place structures of colonialism, imperialism, racism, and economic disparity (see Layton 2014). One thing we need to be careful about, however, in speaking of women’s perpetration of violence, is that we don’t mistake any act of female sexual agency (that is

unwelcome by another) for sexual violence. Seeing the difference, in some cases, requires a more nuanced and contextual view.

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In this chapter, I have introduced an expanded formulation of the cultural scaffolding of rape – identifying the myth of masculinity as an important additional element that contributes to the cultural conditions of possibility for sexual violence. Specifying this new dimension of the problem has been necessary to account for the persistent attachment to male sexual(ized) dominance we see manifest in everyday online misogyny, popular mainstream pornography, and other streams of popular culture, as well as for explaining many kinds of men’s sexual violence against women. It also helps to explain overtly hostile forms of men’s sexual violence against queer and transgender people, as well as against straight cisgender men – which were not so well explained by the gendered binary norms of heterosex alone. The doubled nature of the myth of masculinity spells out a problem that is more complex than what we see on the surface of male dominance or patriarchy. Recognizing this challenges us to think very differently about sexual violence prevention. It forecasts a difficult path, deeply interrogating the gendered order that in many ways we take for granted. And it is a path that is deeply cross-cut with other difficult marks of social dominance and inferiorization (around race, sexuality, ethnicity, wealth, ability, and so on). But if we can collectively muster the courage to embark toward such ambitious and profound psychosociocultural change, it ultimately offers liberation, of different kinds, for all people.

## Notes

- 1 Even in the context of a talk at a Women’s Convention, in which I critiqued the gender neutral “family violence” discourse and policy in New Zealand (Gavey 2005), I did not once use the words sexism or misogyny.
- 2 I know this does not mean that it wasn’t happening in many places, but just not so publicly, in ways that were normalized.
- 3 <https://everydaysexism.com/>
- 4 Investment in the myth of masculinity is not a male-only prerogative. As Halberstam (2016) observes, commenting on the fact the majority of white women voters in the United States voted for Trump: “many of these women voted willingly for boorish, violent, contemptuous masculinity. ... They voted to continue being what Simone De Beauvoir called ‘the second sex’.”
- 5 Sections of my discussion of Roastbusters appeared originally in a blog (Gavey 2013). I recognize the ethical dilemmas in reproducing material from such social media accounts. I have justified doing so on the basis that without knowing how some people talk about these phenomena, we are less well equipped to understand and respond. I have not anonymized this material given the boys were named in the media, and some of it was reported there.
- 6 Not all societies, of course, had the “luxury” of this kind of postfeminist forgetting.
- 7 Many feminist scholars – myself included – have emphasised that this distinction between active and passive is an oversimplification. Women’s sexual role within heterosexuality has never been literally passive (even being an idealized submissive

partner involves a performance of some kind). But as Laina Bay-Cheng (2015) argues, in recent years the old terms of the traditional sexual double standard have been shaken up by neoliberal ideals that emphasise the importance of individual agency. As this manifests in a sociocultural context that has at the same time become increasingly sexualized, neoliberal and postfeminist rhetoric promote ideals of women knowing what they want and actively going about getting it – as long as they stay in control. Although this sounds “empowering” on the surface, it comes at a price. One of the downsides of this discursive shift, is that it creates conditions ripe for self- and other blame when something goes wrong. The neoliberal valorization of individual choice and responsibility – discursively stripped of recognition of gendered power dynamics that mold and constrain choices – sets women up to need to minimize sexual pressure (they should be in control, after all) and attribute any negative outcomes to what they judge as their own personal failings (see Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras 2008; Moran and Lee 2014).

8 She describes it like this:

it is not ‘fixed’ in the sense that it can never be changed, nor taken up and lived differently. But it is ‘heavy’ in the sense that such change is not likely to be easy, and if it comes violently, or in the form of cruelty, it is often utterly devastating.

(Mann 2014: 1)

- 9 <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence> [accessed April 2, 2018].
- 10 <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/scope-problem> [accessed April 2, 2018].
- 11 <https://www.rainn.org/safety-prevention> [accessed March 21, 2018].
- 12 <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/perpetrators-sexual-violence> [accessed April 2, 2018].
- 13 This has happened on the back of many years of resolutely gender neutral formulations of interpersonal violence within policy (e.g., Gavey 2005) that I believe were driven by postfeminist “mind over matter” thinking about gender equality and anxiety about backlash. (By contrast, New Zealand’s legal definition of rape, however, remains controversially specified in relation to sexed genitalia [McDonald *et al.* 2017].)
- 14 In an analysis of publicly available online New Zealand sexual violence prevention resources in 2017, Mamie Harris and I found that attention to gender was mostly sidelined in deference to the promotion of consent in gender neutral “healthy relationship” terms. Some Australian material does a much better job of tackling gender – for example, The Line (2018).
- 15 In Sjöberg’s (2016) book-length study of women as wartime rapists, she argues for the importance of studying such women and the way they are regarded even though, she says, they are very few in number.
- 16 These are examples of verbatim questions used in the 2011 NISVS and are available at <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/24726> [accessed March 6 2018]. This telephone-administered survey uses specific behaviorally worded questions – it is relevant to note that the language used to introduce and frame the questions pertaining to sexual violence is “unwanted and uninvited sexual situations” (for further details see Breiding *et al.* 2014).
- 17 See note 29, pp. 47–9.
- 18 In working with this notion, I acknowledge that many scholars have written in and around the philosophical and psychoanalytic roots to these kinds of ideas, and in this abbreviated context I am only scratching the surface of this complex body of scholarship. (See note 10, pp. 200–1 Douglas’s 2016 account of his rape experience in relation to the myth of masculine invulnerability.)
- 19 Scholars sometimes comment that the harm of rape and sexual violation for men is entangled with the way it is experienced as feminizing – a point that speaks to the profoundly devalued nature of femininity where this is the case (e.g., Bergoffen 2014; du Toit 2009). In a perhaps extreme case that illustrates this point, Mann (2014) presents the case of Dhia al-Shweiri, a young Iraqi man, who described his experience of being forced by United States forces in Abu Ghraib to “strip and then bend over with [his] hands on a wall in front of [him], while Americans looked on” (*ibid.*: 1). Though he had

previously experienced extreme torture by Saddam Hussein's regime ("Al-Shweiri said that while jailed by Hussein's regime, he was electrically shocked, beaten and hung from the ceiling with his hands tied behind his back," Faramarzi 2004), this sexualized and racialized humiliation by his United States jailers was, in Shweiri's eyes, far worse:

They were trying to humiliate us, break our pride. We are men. It's OK if they beat me. Beatings don't hurt us, it's just a blow. But no one would want their manhood to be shattered. . . . They wanted us to feel as though we were women, the way women feel and this is the worst insult, to feel like a woman.

*(Dhia al-Shweiri; quoted in Mann 2014: ix)*

Mann listens to Shweiri's testimony as poignant evidence of the ontological *weight* of gender – something so heavy, so powerful, that he told journalist Scheherezade Faramarzi it would have been better to have been shot and killed than to have had this done to him (and his fellow prisoners) (quoted in Mann 2014: 2). (While this could be read as a culturally loaded example, Mann situates it alongside another [non-sexual] example of a white male United States physicist who spoke of the silence that fell among his colleagues when he spoke out of line during a war planning session by expressing some sentiment for human life: "It was awful. I felt like a woman" [ibid.]

- 20 It is interesting to note that in Lisak's (1994: 537) study of men's narratives of childhood sexual abuse, he observed that the small minority of those who "largely succeeded in denying the feelings associated with their victimization" "reinforce[d] this denial" by taking on "hypermasculine attributes and dispositions."
- 21 It would be a mistake, by the way, to think there is any straightforward correspondence between the harms (or potential harms) of these different kinds of rape. From the perspective of the person who is violated, there is no predictable, linear relationship between the observable "facts of the case" and its impact. In my own research, interviewing women about the impact of rape, Leanne described one of the more profound life-changing impacts of any of the women I interviewed.
- 22 For a more inspiring response to currently topical angsting over masculinity troubles, see New Zealand illustrator and comic artist Toby Morris's (2018) take.

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