


2009

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Recommended Citation

Zanni, Juliette, "Rape Myths as Cultural Mandate and Their Impact on the Recovery of Sexual Assault Victims" (2009). *Honors Projects Overview*. 12.

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RAPE MYTHS AS CULTURAL MANDATE AND
THEIR IMPACT ON THE RECOVERY OF
SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS

By

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An Honors Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Honors

In

The Department of Anthropology

School of Arts and Sciences

Rhode Island College

2009

Rape myths as cultural mandate and their impact on the recovery of sexual assault victims

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In this paper, I examine the relationships among societal and cultural perceptions of rape, as disseminated through rape myths and media images, and the ability of rape victims to recover from their attacks and subsequent psychological injuries. How do our thoughts about rape affect the recovery of rape victims? What problems arise through this treatment of rape, and how can they be solved or avoided? If a victim's response to her rape diverges from the model suggested by rape myths, she may not be taken seriously or may not be considered to have suffered psychologically. If a victim responds in the culturally "appropriate" way, her recovery may be hindered or even prevented. I argue that rape trauma can be aggravated by the existence and prevalence of culturally prescribed responses.

A version of this paper was presented to the Northeastern Anthropological Association in Providence, RI 13-14 March 2009.

Our culture, the dominant Western culture of the United States, teaches us to expect certain expressions of trauma in the behavior and psychological state of a rape victim (Franiuk, et al. 2008). The roles that rape victims are expected to play are coded in our cultural perceptions and in media depictions of rape and rape victims (Franiuk, et al. 2008, Hesford 1999). Some of the perceptions about rape that are held by members of our culture can be harmful to rape victims. If a victim's response to her rape diverges from the model suggested by the rape myths that are contained in both entertainment and news media representations of rape, she may not be taken seriously as a victim or she may not be considered to have suffered psychologically (Estrich 1987, DuMont, Miller, and Myhr 2003, Ruch and Chandler 1983, Williams 1984). According to the myths that direct our cultural perceptions about rape, the evidence of a sex act's criminality can be found in the victim's response and condition. These cultural perceptions are harmful to rape victims whether or not the women behave according to the mandated roles. If a woman who has been raped responds in a culturally appropriate way, she may be at risk for self-blame, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and other seriously harmful pathologies. If a woman does not respond in the prescribed way, she may be challenged if she decides to report her attack or talk about it, and she may be accused of lying if she discusses her experience with others (Williams 1984, Franiuk et al. 2008). She may be told, directly by other individuals or indirectly by the mythology contained in popular culture and the media, that she was not really raped, that she consented to the

encounter, that she misinterpreted the event, that she has not been harmed psychologically, or that her pain and trauma are invalid (Franuik et al. 2008, Hengehold 2000). This can be harmful to victims of sexual assault because it impedes their recovery, mandates that they behave in a specified way, and prevents them from being able to respond and behave in the ways that help them deal with their experiences (Monahan, Marolla, and Bromley 2005). Many researchers of sexual violence maintain that while there have been many useful studies on the causal factors of sexual assault, little effort has been made to learn about the effects that rape has on its victims. Patricia Rozée (1993) and Minturn, Grosse, and Haider (1969) note that little ethnographic literature exists that deals with the experience, reaction, and recovery processes of a woman who has been raped, and that most of the body of ethnographic data on rape uses a narrow, androcentric definition when discussing its prevalence. The World Health Organization, in its first *World Report on Violence and Health* (2003), calls for increased attention in research on sexual violence to be paid to the consequences that rape has for its victims and for society.

What is rape?

Rape has been defined by sexual violence researchers as “the act of forcing, or coercing through the threat of force, a nonconsenting woman to have sexual intercourse” (Palmer 1989, 2), “sexual relations without the consent of the woman involved” (Minturn, Grosse, and Haider 1969, 303), and “lack of female choice in genital contact” (Rozée 1993, 502). The *World Report on*

Violence and Health, published by the World Health Organization, defines rape as “physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration—even if slight—of the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body part, or an object” (2003, 149). The Organization, in its definition of rape, includes: stranger rape, acquaintance rape, intimate-partner rape, the rape of males, and rape during armed conflict. Sexual Violence also includes sexual harassment; the sexual abuse of elders and handicapped persons; the sexual abuse of children; forced marriage and child marriage; differential access to food, water, or medical care for girls and women; forced gynecological examinations (usually to test for virginity); sex trafficking and forced prostitution; and female genital cutting.

For the purposes of this paper, rape is defined as any non-consensual sex act that involves contact between the genitals, anal region, or mouth of one person and the genitals, mouth, hands, (or foreign object) of another person, regardless of any pre-existing relationship, friendship, or acquaintanceship the victim and rapist may have. Any objects that may be used by a rapist to assault a victim should be considered as an extension of the body of the rapist. Penetration, while not necessary, nonetheless typically occurs in some form. Penetration may be slight, but includes vaginal, anal, or oral penetration by a penis, tongue, hand or fingers, or other object. Non-penetrative assaults that would be included in this definition of rape include, but are not limited to, non-consensual touching of the external genitals or anus (a rapist may touch a victim’s vulva or force her to manipulate his penis or anus with her hands or

mouth) or non-consensual oral sex that is performed on a victim. This definition of rape is based the definitions given above, but has been expanded to include additional sex acts that may be identified by a victim as rape. Non-consent includes forced acts against conscious or unconscious individuals, consent obtained under force, by coercion or threat, or under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Non-consent is not necessarily signaled by explicit verbal communication; it can be expressed legitimately through situational implication or body language.

This paper only deals with the rape of adult females. While I recognize male rape and child rape and sympathize with the victims of these assaults, these are distinct social problems and are associated with different cultural perceptions and myths. However, some of the conclusions offered by this paper may be applicable to studies of male rape and child rape. I also recognize that females sometimes rape males and other females. Because this paper deals with the experiences and reactions of rape victims, these rapes will not be excluded from the scope of this paper, though they will not be discussed separately from other forms of rape against women. Because of the overwhelming dominance of male-perpetrated rapes, male pronouns will be used to refer to rapists and female pronouns will be used to refer to victims of rape.

Rape myths, the classic rape narrative, and appropriate responses

Rape myths are “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (Burt 1980, 217). Rape myths “have serious consequences for sexual assault victims” (Franiuk, et al. 2008, 290). The rape myths that most significantly affect victims are those that try to dictate the appropriate experiences and reactions of women who have been raped. These myths address the prevalence of rape (e.g., that it happens infrequently and to only few women) and allege that rape is an act committed by strangers, that most rapes are violent and leave victims badly injured, that real victims must struggle with the attacker as much as possible, and that victims will be so severely damaged psychologically that they will withdraw from normal activities, especially sexual activities, and never be able to recover from their rape experience (DuMont, Miller, and Myhr 2003, Franiuk, et al. 2008). These myths collectively form the “classic” or “traditional” rape scenario (described in Estrich 1986 and 1987, Williams 1984, Anderson 2005, Hengehold 2000, DuMont, Miller, and Myhr 2003, Alexander 1980, Giacomassi and Wilkinson 1985, and Monahan, Marolla, and Bromley 2005). In this paper, the scenario for rape that is described by the rape myths is referred to as the *culturally-prescribed* scenario. The term “culture” is used in this paper to refer to the set of all relevant social norms, behavioral expectations, traditional or widely-held beliefs and ideas, and popular culture. In her 1986 article, simply titled “Rape”, Susan Estrich narrates her own rape experience:

Eleven years ago, a man held an ice pick to my throat and said: 'Push over, shut up, or I'll kill you.' I did what he said, but I couldn't stop crying. A hundred years later, I jumped out of my car as he drove away. I ended up in the back seat of a police car. I told the two officers I had been raped by a man who came up to the car door as I was getting out in my own parking lot (and trying to balance two bags of groceries and kick the car door open). He took the car, too (1986, 1087).

Estrich acknowledges that she had been the victim of a culturally-prescribed rape. She also offers a fictional narrative, which she calls "traditional rape", to further illustrate the points of correctness according to the myths: "A stranger puts a gun to the head of his victim, threatens to kill her or beats her, and then engages in intercourse". Michelle Anderson offers the following narrative as an example of the kind of rape which, despite statistically being the least common, is nonetheless culturally regarded as most legitimate and correct scenario for rape:

A fair young woman is walking home alone at night. Gray street lamps cast shadows from the figure she cuts through an urban landscape. She hurries along, unsure of her safety. Suddenly, perhaps from behind a dumpster, a strange, dark man lunges out at her, knife at her throat, and drags her into a dark alley where he threatens to kill her, and beats her until she bleeds. The young woman puts up a valiant fight to protect her sexual virtue, but the assailant overcomes her will and rapes her. Afterwards, she immediately calls the police to report the offense (2005, 625-26).

This scenario, while common in media and popular culture, is not an accurate summation of the most common forms of rape. Most rape victims do not experience an attack like the one described above and so may not identify the experience as rape and may not report the attack. In Table 6 of the Bureau of Justice Statistics report of Criminal Victimization of 2006, it is stated that female

victims of violent crimes, including rape, are acquainted with the attacker in 70% of all reported cases. Intimate partners commit 21% of all attacks, relatives commit 10%, and friends or other acquaintances commit 40%. It is probable that the actual rate of non-stranger rape is significantly higher than implied here—most non-stranger rapes are never reported, as this report (and articles by DuMont, Miller, and Myhr 2003, Franiuk, et al. 2008, Estrich 1986 and 1987, Williams 1984) acknowledges. This is due in part to the culturally imposed status of acquaintance rape as less traumatic, illegitimate, incorrect, or even nonexistent. The most common form of rape occurs between acquaintances or intimate partners and does not usually involve the use of violent force. Non-consent may be explicitly conveyed or consent may simply be ignored, and the victim may be too afraid, confused or stunned to react by resisting forcefully. Many women feel that they will not be able to avoid being raped by resisting, and that attempting to resist will only cause them more physical injury (Hesford 1999). Another fictional narrative, also described by Anderson, describes a scenario representative of this more common form of rape:

A male and a female student meet at a party and begin to talk, drink, and flirt. Later, she wanders to a quiet place with him. Once there, he pushes her down, pins her, and begins kissing her aggressively. She does not want to be rude. He must have misunderstood, she thinks. The alcohol is getting to her, she feels dizzy, and she wonders if she is going to throw up. She says, "Ummm . . . wait . . . please . . . I'm not sure that this is what we should do." He ignores her and begins taking off their clothes. She cannot seem to get away, and her panic rises. She cries as he penetrates her. Shamed by the experience, she does not tell anyone until three years later when she confides in a trusted friend. She never calls the police (2005, 626).

Estrich compares the two forms of rape:

Where less force is used or no other physical injury is inflicted, where threats are inarticulate, where the two know each other, where the setting is not an alley but a bedroom, where the initial contact was not a kidnapping but a date, where the woman says no but does not fight, the understanding is different (1986, 1092).

A study of the prevalence of these cultural perceptions

In order to collect information about the prevalence of rape myths and how rape is identified, an anonymous survey was conducted among participants of diverse sex, age, and racial backgrounds. Flyers were posted in and around Providence, Rhode Island requesting volunteers to take the survey. When volunteers contacted me to participate in this study, I sent the survey to them through e-mail or postal mail or administered it in person. There were 44 survey participants. 64% of participants are female and 36% are male. 39% of participants identified their age as being between 18-29, 14% indicated that they were between 30-39 years old, 25% identified as being 40-49 years old, 20% identified as being 50-59 years old, and 2% identified as being 60 or over. This survey consisted of a questionnaire requesting participants to identify whether twenty-one sexual encounter scenarios present rape or non-rape situations (Table 1), to select the most accurate statistic for rape in the United States, to indicate a time frame for the recovery of a rape victim, and to answer other multiple-choice and qualitative questions about rape, rape victims, and rape myths (see Appendix A for the full questionnaire).

	Sexual Encounter Scenario
0%	A male and a female have sex after going on a date together.
7%	A sixteen-year-old female has sex with a nineteen-year old male.
9%	An eighteen-year-old female has sex with a forty-year old male.
0%	A female has sex with her boyfriend or husband after he makes physical advances, like kissing and touching, toward her.
95%	A female has sex with her husband or boyfriend because he forces her.
2%	A female has sex with her boyfriend or husband after she makes physical advances, like kissing and touching, towards him.
36%	A male and a female meet at a bar. She becomes very drunk and he
95%	A male forces his girlfriend to have sex with him.
95%	A male and a female meet at a bar. He drugs her beverage to make her unconscious, and then he has sex with her.
0%	A female has sex with her husband because they both want to feel emotionally intimate.
100%	A male forces a female friend to have sex with him.
100%	A male forces a female that he has taken on a date to have sex with
100%	A male forces his wife to have sex with him.
4%	A female agrees to have sex with a male if he pays her.
25%	A male agrees to pay a female to have sex with him, but after having sex he changes his mind and does not pay her.
100%	A male has strong feelings for a female, but she does not have feelings for him and has rejected him. He forces her to have sex because he wants to feel emotionally intimate with her.
0%	A male has sex with a female because they both want to feel sexual pleasure
98%	A male forces a female stranger to have sex with him, but he does not injure her physically.
2%	A female has sex with her husband or boyfriend after he gives her an expensive gift.
100%	A male forces a female stranger to have sex with him and injures her physically.
100%	A male forces a female stranger to have sex with him, and then he murders her.

Table 1: Sexual encounter scenarios and the rates at which they were identified as rape scenarios

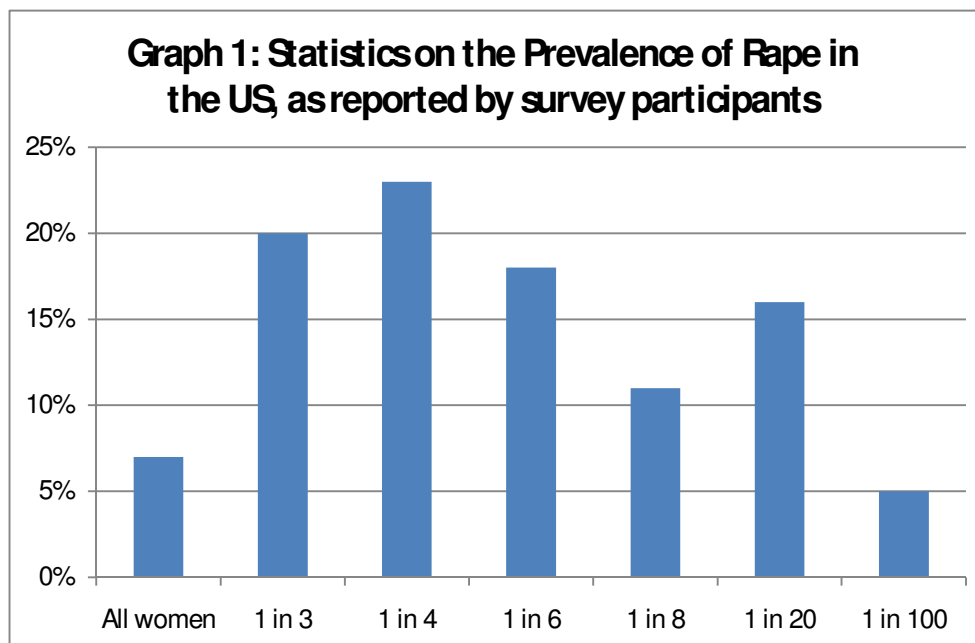
In a multiple-choice question that asks about the time frame of a victim's recovery, with 7 options ranging from "A woman who has been raped has been damaged psychologically and will never heal" to "A woman who has been raped psychologically and will heal eventually, but it will take more than six years", including a choice that states, "A woman who has been raped has not been damaged psychologically", 47% of informants indicated that a rape victim would never heal, and 34% indicated that it would take more than six years for her to recover. 2% said that a woman who had been raped would heal psychologically in about one year, 7% said that a woman who had been raped would recover in about two or three years, and 5% said she would heal in four to six years. 5% of participants did not select an answer for this question and wrote on the survey that rape victims recover at different speeds.

In a true-or-false question that stated, "A woman who has been truly raped will never recover psychologically from her experience", 54% said that the statement was false, 39% said the statement was true, and 7% did not select an answer, but wrote "it depends on the woman" or "it depends" next to the question. 14% of participants were inconsistent in their answers to these two similar questions, giving one answer to the multiple-choice question and a contradictory answer to the true-or-false question.

In three true-or-false questions, 100% of participants chose the same answer, identifying the following rape myths as false: "A woman cannot be raped by someone she knows. If she has sex with a man she knows against her

will, it is not rape,” “All women who are raped report the rape to the police,” and “If a woman has not been injured physically (meaning no broken bones, serious cuts, or serious bruises), she has not really been raped or she consented to have sex”.

When asked whether a woman who had been raped would ever be able to enjoy consensual sex again, 5% of participants said that she would not and 95% said that she would. When asked whether a woman who had been raped should try to forget about her experience, 16% said that she should and 84% said that she should not. 98% agreed with the statement, “A woman who has been raped should talk about her experience if it makes her feel better,” but 2% disagreed.



When asked in a multiple-choice section about the prevalence of rape in the United States, 5% of participants said that one in one hundred women has

been or will be raped at some point in her life, 16% said that one in every twenty women has been or will be raped, 11% said that one in every eight women has been or will be raped, 18% said that one in every six women has been or will be raped, 23% said that one in every four women has been or will be raped, 20% said that one in every three women has been or will be raped, and 7% said that all women have been or will be raped at some point in their lives (Graph 1).

Qualitative answers and discussion of results

This survey contained an optional written-answer section, which 82% of participants chose to fill out. The questionnaire asked participants to define rape, asked what a victim should do after being raped, and how a rape victim might respond, think, or feel after being raped. Participants were also asked to give examples of media images of rape that they were familiar with and comment on them (See Appendix A for the full questionnaire).

Participants were asked to define rape, and most responses indicated an understanding of rape that is consistent with many of the definitions given above, though 14% specifically limited it to nonconsensual vaginal or anal intercourse. 42% of participants included males as potential rape victims (and three participants scolded me for using feminine pronouns while referring to rape victims). Some of the definitions of rape given by survey participants are listed in Table 2.

When asked what a woman who has been raped should do, 86% of participants said that she should report the rape to police and/or press charges. 61% indicated that a victim

<p>"Rape means the act of sexually forcing yourself onto another individual, without that person's consent"</p> <p>"Rape is when one is unwillingly forced to have sex with another"</p> <p>"Sexual intercourse that is performed without mutual consent, with or without violence, threats, or force"</p> <p>"Physically forcing a male or female to have sex with you"</p> <p>"One human being forcing another to partake in a sexual act"</p> <p>"Non-consensual sex, no matter the circumstances"</p> <p>"Forced sex upon a woman by a man, or sex with someone who does not understand what is going on (i.e., drunk, drugged, asleep, or mentally incapable)"</p> <p>"To force a sexual act on a male or female with the intent to do so"</p> <p>"A man forcing himself on a women sexually when she does not want him to"</p> <p>"Non-consensual sex"</p>
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Table 2: Survey participants' definitions of rape

would need medical attention and 36% said that she should seek therapy or counseling. 19% mentioned that she should receive a rape kit or sexual assault evidence-collection examination, and 28% implied that the burden of proving rape belonged to the victim ("She shouldn't do anything but report it and prove (sic) evidence"). 14% said that a victim may be afraid to report the rape or talk about it because she would be fearful of being attacked by the rapist again.

When asked what a rape victim might feel or think or how she might react, 17% said that she might want to take a shower immediately after being raped, 22% said that she would feel dirty or unclean, 28% said that she would feel worthless, 33% said that she would blame herself for the attack, 19% said that the victim would suffer depression, and 8% said that she would be likely to harm herself or attempt suicide. Several other forms of reaction were reported, including feelings of anger, fear, shame, embarrassment, emptiness, guilt, "a new sense of untrust", "unacceptable as a mate or partner", "confused, second-guessing herself", and that she has been violated or is unsafe. One participant wrote that "she may be hysterical, may experience uncontrollable shaking, crying, fear, pain, hurt." Whether or not these are the responses that most rape victims actually display, they are the responses that are expected or considered to be normal. If a victim behaves in ways that do not conform to these expectations, she may not be considered to have suffered or to have been attacked. However, 42% of participants noted that rape victims do or should react in individual-specific ways without being prompted, which is extremely positive and encouraging. While many participants did answer these questions with culturally-indicated behaviors, several specified that they do not expect victims necessarily to follow these standards of behavior. "There is no 'right' way to respond", wrote one. Others answered: "I would assume that there is no 'normal' response", "I don't think that any response is normal, each person responds in their own way. Each is affected different in that situation", "I

think a female rape victim should cope with her emotions and deal with it however she can in a positive manner”.

When asked about media representations of rape, 80% of respondents omitted this question or wrote that they could not think of any examples. Many of those who did answer listed rape clichés, noting that women who are raped in films, television programs, or books are often portrayed as “promiscuous” or otherwise deserving of blame: “More often than not in the media, women ‘bring it on themselves’ or they ‘have provoked it’”. One informant wrote that in television crime dramas, “Defense attorneys try to make the victim feel she is at fault.” 11% of participants wrote that many media portrayals of rape depict attacks as being perpetrated by strangers, while most rapes, participants said, are committed by acquaintances of the victim: “The media shows that strangers rape females, but in the real world I believe that most rape attacks are from men that are either friends or related to the female”. One woman, who confirmed in the written section that she had been raped, wrote that some films shown on the Lifetime network portray “overdramatized” rape scenes that she finds hard to take seriously. Another participant wrote that “the media casts rape as the worst experience a woman can have. Rape is marketed as a trauma that is defining and signifies a persona of victimhood”. Another confirmed that media images of rape can affect the experiences of rape victims: “The media can sometimes make women think that they have brought the rape on themselves... To me it is very discouraging”.

Among survey participants who identified their age as between 18-29 (n=17, or 39% of participants), 64% said that 1 in 3 (29%) or 1 in 4 (35%) women in the United States has been or would be raped. 53% of participants in this age group indicated in the written-answer section that rape victims should or do react to their attacks in individual-specific ways. Many of the participants in this group are likely to have been exposed to educational programs about rape and other forms of sexual violence and domestic abuse in high school or in college, and may especially have been exposed to the “1 in 4” statistic that was proposed by Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski in 1987.

Problems with statistics and estimates regarding the prevalence of rape

Name of organization or researchers	Year of Survey	Ratio of victims to non-victims	Percentage of victims
Mary P. Koss (survey includes college students only)	1985	1 in 8 identified by Koss, 1 in 14 self-identified	12.7% identified by Koss, 7.2% self-identified
Rape in America	1992	1 in 8	About 12.5%
Tjaden and Thoennes, U.S. Department of Justice	1998	1 in 7	14.8%
Mary P. Koss, et al. (survey includes college students only; includes attempted rape)	1987	1 in 4	27.6% (15.5% for completed rapes)
United Nations (as reported by Carey; includes all forms of sexual and domestic violence)	1998	1 in 3	About 33%

Table 3: Differing statistics on the prevalence of rape

Because rapes are so rarely reported and because many victims never identify themselves as having been raped in surveys, it is exceptionally difficult to

estimate accurately the prevalence of rape in the United States (see Table 3). According to the *Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence against Women Survey* conducted in 1998, nearly 15 million women in the US identify themselves as having been raped and about two million self-identify as having suffered attempted rape. This means that about one in seven women has been raped. The report *1992 Rape in America* found that about one in every eight women is raped. The authors worked directly with a small sample size of about 4,000 women and worked collaboratively with about 370 other centers, whose researchers may have had different working definitions of what constitutes rape. The most widely-selected statistic for rape in the United States, selected by 23% of survey participants, was one in four women. This number was presented in 1987 by Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski as the result of the Sexual Experiences Survey, which was administered to about 6,000 college students. The Sexual Experiences Survey asked female participants about their sexual experiences and possible victimization by men and asked male participants about their experiences and possible victimizing of women. The survey conducted by Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski did not use the words "rape" or "victim", but described different scenarios and asked if participants had experienced them. Koss and her team then counted all affirmative responses to situations that met the legal definition of rape as cases of rape. Using these methods, the survey found that 15.5% of female college students had been raped and 12.1% has suffered an attempted rape. They estimated that 27.6%, or

about one in four, college women had experienced rape or attempted rape, though these women did not have the opportunity to self-identify their experiences as rape. This ratio may be frequently misinterpreted, as 23% of my survey participants indicate that it is the figure for completed rapes. It has been advertised extensively and cited in many college and high-school sexual and domestic abuse education programs. Among participants in my survey aged 18-29, 35% identified this statistic as accurate and 29% said that one in three women would be raped. In 1998, The United Nations released a report that stated that one in three women worldwide will suffer some form of sexual or domestic abuse or discrimination including sexual assault and sexual abuse; genital cutting; child marriage; differential access to food, water, or medical care; forced abortions; mandatory examinations for virginity; defloration rituals; and other forms of sexual violence. This number has received a great deal of media attention since it was presented in 1998, and may be frequently misinterpreted by the public. This ratio was reposted by my survey participants as an accurate statistic for rape in the United States with a frequency (20%) second only to the "one in four" statistic presented by Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski in 1987.

The "one in four" ratio presented by Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski in 1987 does not reflect the results of Koss's original survey, which was conducted in 1985, and used an earlier version of the Sexual Experiences Survey. In this survey, 2016 female college students were asked about their sexual experiences. Koss

did not use the words “rape” or “victim” in her survey—she described different sexual encounter scenarios and asked whether the women had experienced them and asked at the end of the survey, “Have you ever been raped?” Only 7.2% (about one in fourteen) of her survey participants answered affirmatively to this question, but 12.7% of participants indicated that they had had sexual experiences that meet the legal definition of rape. Koss designated all 12.7% (about one in eight) of these women as rape victims, regardless of their identification as such. Despite the smaller sample size used for this survey, the results were hugely inconsistent with those of her 1987 survey, which used slightly different methods. While some of the women in the 1982 survey who were designated by Koss as rape victims, and who did not identify themselves as such, may not have had a good understanding of what is encompassed by “rape”, it is questionably ethical for Koss to determine who is a rape victim. This is an definition that can only be assigned to an experience by a victim herself, and women who have experiences that meet other people’s definitions of rape may have good reasons for not identifying themselves as victims (as explained in Hengehold 2000). Rape is an ambiguous crime that may not involve overt physical violence, and the criminality of a sexual encounter depends on the consent of the woman involved. Only the woman involved can determine and express consent, so only she can identify an encounter as rape. Koss used this approach in her 1987 survey as well, but she did not provide any opportunity at all for participants to self-identify as rape victims.

Cross-cultural data

There is very little ethnographic or cross-cultural data available regarding the experiences and recoveries of rape victims, but the presence and scope of rape in other cultural contexts has been discussed at length. One comparative examination of the existence and prevalence of rape in other cultures was conducted by Craig Palmer in 1989. Palmer compared about thirty societies and found that ethnographic records included some form of rape for all of them, but his definition of rape did not include a female emphasis and often excluded socially-sanctioned forms of non-consensual sex as rape. Another study emphasized the importance of female-centered definitions of rape in cross-cultural studies: "Narrow definitions of rape have the effect of masking the true incidence of rape by excluding many genital contacts that are outside the realm of female choice" (Rozée 1993, 500). Rozée commended an earlier study for including this kind of definition of rape (Minturn, Grosse, and Haider 1969). Minturn, Grosse, and Haider surveyed 135 cultures and found that they all contained rape in various forms, but that rape was more severely punished in some societies than in others. In the Marshallese and the Baiga, rape was found to be considered a socially preferred and legitimate form of sex and went unpunished in most cases. Rozée confirms that rape is socially approved in some societies:

Social approval of rape is considered present if there is no punishment for the male or the female only is punished; if the rape itself is condoned as a punishment for the female; if the genital contact is embedded in a

cultural ritual such as an initiation ceremony; or where refusal is disapproved or punished by the community (1993, 503).

Socially-condoned or “normative” forms of rape were found to occur in 97% of the cultures surveyed by Rozée (1993).

According to the World Health Organization (2003), reports of rape are much lower in many developing nations than in the United States. This is because many women do not have the opportunity to report their rapes or because reporting a crime may have serious consequences for them. They are most likely raped by their husbands, relatives, or even police officers and have few resources available to them to prosecute the crime or to protect them from retaliation (WHO 2003). Between 1992 and 1997, 0.8% of women aged 16 and older in Gaborone, Botswana reported being raped. In Harare, Zimbabwe, 2.2% of women reported being raped; in Beijing, China, 1.6% of women reported being raped; in Manila, Philippines, 0.3% of women reported being raped; in Budapest, Hungary, 2% of women reported being raped; and in Bombay (now Mumbai), India, 1.9% of women reported being raped (WHO 2003).

Statistics available on the consequences of rape vary cross-culturally. While in the United States, 5% of women who experience forced vaginal intercourse become pregnant as a result of a single rape, a survey of young Ethiopian women found that 17% reported becoming pregnant as a result of the rape and a report compiled by Mexican counseling centers found that 15-18% reported becoming pregnant (WHO 2003). Surveys of adolescent rape victims

found that 15% of Canadian victims and 6% of Ethiopian victims have attempted suicide. A study of Brazilian rape victims also indicated a positive correlation between sexual assault and suicidal ideation and behavior (WHO 2003).

Impact of the myths on victims

The myths surrounding rape are so prevalent that they reach women and begin affecting them well before they are even assaulted. Women are preconditioned to believe in the constant threat of rape and instructed to behave in certain ways to avoid being raped. According to the mythology, if they behave appropriately, they will never be raped. If she is raped, she will have been set up to believe that it must have been her fault. When a woman is forced to have intercourse or engage in other sex acts by an acquaintance, friend, lover, or spouse, she may not identify the experience as rape even if she later suffers from rape trauma (Hengehold 2000). This is because rape myths and rape representations in the media do not discuss these kinds of rape or identify them as such (Hesford 1999). If an attack was not physically violent or if the victim did not struggle forcefully, she may feel that she has no right to identify the experience as rape, that she or her attacker misinterpreted the situation, or that she did not actually indicate her non-consent (O'Byrne 2008). Even if she does identify the experience as rape, she is not likely to discuss it with friends or family and even less likely to report it as a crime (McGregor, et al. 1999, Martin and Powell 1994, Williams 1984). She may believe that she will not be taken

seriously or trusted, or she may be afraid of retaliation or subsequent attacks by the rapist, who likely knows her and perhaps her other acquaintances personally on some level (Franiuk, et al. 2008). Additionally, the rapist may be a person upon whom she is dependant financially or emotionally, thus reporting the crime or pressing charges may result in her loss of support (Hengehold 2000). Women who are raped by their relatives or by cohabitating husbands or boyfriends are at particular risk of great personal loss if they report their rapes, as they could potentially lose their homes, family relationships, friendships, inheritances, and other economic assets or social support if they report the attack or threaten to do so (Hengehold 2000).

“A woman who recognizes herself as raped risks conceiving of herself as a victim in ways that may frustrate attempts at recovery” (Hengehold 2000, 189). When a woman who has suffered a sexual assault decides, actively or subconsciously, to identify her experience as rape, she must then identify herself as a victim and behave in the culturally dictated ways (Hengehold 2000). If she wishes to bring charges against the man who attacked her, she must adjust her behavior to match the behavior that is considered appropriate and expected from a rape victim. If she is not the victim of a culturally-prescribed form of rape, she must present herself as one in the most accurate way possible, reconfiguring her experience and memories if that is what is made necessary to prosecute her rapist. A woman who chooses not to identify her experience as rape may reconstrue it as accidental miscommunication, as a misunderstanding or as

being her own fault, but she is still quite likely to suffer from rape trauma. She may be somewhat more at liberty to express her trauma in an individual-specific way (providing she does not make her trauma expression public), but she will never be able to prosecute her rapist and she may be hindered in her healing if she cannot identify the source of her pain or focus on it as a distinct injury.

Women are traumatized beyond their rapes by the experience of having to express trauma in culturally-mandated ways. A rape victim is expected to express her trauma in very specific ways. In "Reading Rape Stories: Material Rhetoric and the Trauma of Representation," Wendy Hesford describes the rape and subsequent trauma of a colleague, referring to "nightmares, phobias, fear of sex, avoidance of men, (and) fear of empty public places" (1999, 192). A rape victim must seem unable to control her trauma, she must cry when she describes her experience, and she must publicly mourn her loss of self-control (which has been stolen by both the rapist and the mythology that prescribes her expression) by discarding her ability to function normally. According to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (2000) and the Women's Center of the University of California in Santa Barbara (2008), symptoms of acute rape trauma include feelings of helplessness, anxiety, anger, fear, embarrassment, self-blame, confusion and worthlessness, anxiety attacks, hysteria, crying spells, mood swings, depression, problems with sleeping (including insomnia or hypersomnia), eating disorders and digestive problems (including anorexia, compulsive eating, indigestion, nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting), and difficulty

making simple decisions or completing daily tasks. "A survivor may cry, shake or appear to be agitated and restless, or seem calm, controlled, 'spacey,' or laugh hysterically, as if an assault had never occurred" (UCSB Women's Center 2008). If a victim makes her attack and trauma public, she must behave in culturally appropriate ways that follow the suggestions of the rape myths or else she may be at a high risk for accusations of adultery or promiscuity, retribution from her attacker, or public embarrassment in legal courts or social judgments (Hengehold 2000). There can be consequences for women who make their attack and trauma public without behaving in the expected ways. "Victims who respond stoically may seem less credible, especially (and ironically) as rape trauma syndrome comes to be considered a sign of 'genuine' trauma" (Hengehold 2000, 201). Victims must not only suffer the consequences of the myths that establish the culturally-prescribed rape scenario; they must also endure the mythology that constructs "appropriate" responses and behaviors for the legitimate expression of trauma.

Impact of sexual assault on the victim's health and well-being

According to the World Health Organization (2003), rape victims are three times more likely than women who have never been raped to suffer from depression, 26 times more likely to abuse illegal drugs, 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol, and four times more likely to experience suicidal ideation or attempt suicide. Additionally, rape puts victims at risk for contracting sexually-transmitted diseases like human immunodeficiency virus, human papillomavirus,

gonorrhea, syphilis, viral hepatitis, and herpes simplex. Women who are not impregnated or who do not contract infections may suffer from stress and anxiety while they wait for pregnancy or STD test results or for their menstrual periods to begin. Women who have been raped may also suffer from pain, soreness, and infections associated with any other injuries they may have received. Women who have not received any other physical injuries may suffer from gynecological complications such as vaginal or rectal pain or bleeding, non-sexually-transmitted vaginal or urinary-tract infections, and reduced or absent sexual desire (WHO 2003).

Victims who experience vaginal intercourse have a 5% chance of becoming pregnant as a result of a single rape (WHO 2003). The physical and emotional experience of carrying the child of her rapist may further traumatize a rape victim by continuing the bodily invasion of the rape experience. The consequences of unwanted pregnancies resulting from rape are severe; these women must either abort the fetus, which may violate their religious or ethical beliefs, or carry the pregnancy to term. Women who have been impregnated by their rapists may not be able to afford any of these options, especially if there is no aid available to them, as both abortions and pregnancies are expensive in costs of time, money, and other resources. Either option may also force her to take time out of work, which she may not be able to afford, and may stigmatize her by making it public that she has been raped or implying that she has morals that may conflict with those that are predominant in her community (WHO

2003). Further, if she carries the pregnancy to term, she will have to choose between placing the child for adoption and raising it herself.

The significance of physical violence in the prosecution of rape and the trauma experiences of victims

Myths regarding the violence of rape are longstanding and have affected not only victims of sexual assault and the perceptions held by members of our culture, but also the ways that rape is criminalized and prosecuted. This is discussed extensively by both Hengehold (2000) and Anderson (2005). Any rape, no matter the amount or extent of force or threat that is used to coerce a woman to engage in sex acts, is violent. The act of forced penetration is violent in many ways, not the least of which results in physical injury to a woman. When a rapist manipulates the body of his victim with his own, he uses his body as a weapon against her. Virtually all rapes that consist of vaginal or anal intercourse result in some degree of tearing or bruising to the vagina or anus, ranging from slight irritation and soreness to severe lacerations that require medical attention or stitching (WHO 2003). Forced penetration is an invasion of the victim's body by an object (the rapist's body) that is not only a weapon that can injure her by causing tears, lacerations, bruising, and hemorrhage, but can also infect her with sexually transmitted diseases. Many rapists, according to Anderson (2005) and others, ejaculate into the bodies of their victims, which can cause them to feel unclean or dirty and can cause them to develop potentially life-threatening infections. The act of

penetration, and especially ejaculation, can introduce a great number of pathogens into the body of the victim. Because forced penetration often results in tears to the walls of the vagina or anus, especially in younger or sexually inexperienced victims, pathogens are more easily able to enter the body and cause infections (WHO 2003).

The problems of sexually-transmitted diseases and emotional trauma are considered secondary by our culture to the more visible physical injuries that a woman may, though often does not, suffer. The degree to which a victim is injured, i.e., sustaining bruising, broken bones, cuts, scratches, or other injuries, is considered evidence that she truly did not consent and that she fought her attacker or attempted to escape. The absence of serious visible injuries can cast doubt on the victim's narrative and detract from her claim that she was assaulted and forced to engage in sex acts against her will (Martin and Powell 1994, DuMont, Miller, and Myhr 2003). It is the physically violent aspect of rape (often excluding acquaintance rape) that is criminalized and prosecuted (Anderson 2005, Hengehold 2000). The sexual aspect of rape, the penetration of a woman or the non-consensual manipulation of her body, is only culturally perceived as a crime if it is accompanied by not-explicitly-sexual injuries or, at the very least, a legitimate and immediately identifiable threat thereof. Rapes that are not clearly physically violent (those that do not leave physical injuries like visible bruising or cuts, bleeding, or broken bones) can be damaging in ways that more visibly violent rapes are not. Women who suffer "incorrect" or non-

culturally-prescribed rapes and who do not suffer physical injuries may not only be blamed for their attacks by external forces like police, confidantes, and media, but are also much more likely to blame themselves for their attacks (Estrich 1987). These women constantly refer to their memories of the experience because they continuously question whether or not they have been raped (Anderson 2005). In order to gain some retroactive control of the event, they place blame on themselves and feel guilty about any identification of victimhood that they may have (Monahan, Marolla, and Bromley 2005, Hengehold 2000, Marcus 1992, DuMont, Miller, and Myhr 2003).

Many rapists even try to “normalize” rape attacks, to reduce their own guilt and try to justify attacking women, by trying to equate them with normal, consensual sexual encounters (Monahan, Marolla, and Bromley 2005). Normalization refers to attempts by the rapist to have a casual conversation with the victim or cause some sexual pleasure for the victim. Attempts at conversation, which occur before, during, or after the sex act, are often reciprocated to some extent by the victim. This is usually part of a defensive strategy on her part. They include not only quotidian topics or phatic expressions, but also forced reciprocations in which the victim is commanded to say that she is enjoying the sex act, that the rapist is attractive or a skilled lover, or that the act is, in fact, consensual.

Any behavior by the victim that perpetrators could take as evidence of victim desire served to diminish perpetrators’ feelings of guilt and ambivalence. Perpetrators could believe at least to some extent that they

were not forcing and victims were not resisting. From the victim's perspective, creating the appearance of a normal relationship might reduce the likelihood of injury and increase the probability the rapist would believe the victim would not later report the rape (Monahan, Marolla, and Bromley 2005, 305).

In an interview with a convicted rapist, Monahan, Marolla, and Bromley report the following admission of normalization: "A perpetrator reported that 'I treated her as if it was normal, I tried to get her as high as me. . . . I was trying to please her. . . . We did it like normal sex, with foreplay'" (ibid., 305). Sexual pleasure during rape can be a huge source of guilt for a victim.

Whether or not the rapist makes attempts to please the victim sexually, it is possible for some women to have some signs of sexual arousal during rape experiences. Despite the nonconsensual nature of this crime, some sexual responses are involuntary and can sometimes be triggered by nonconsensual encounters (Levin and van Berlo 2004). This is not to say that any women might enjoy being raped—potential sexual pleasure is undesirable and is a huge source of guilt in rape victims and is possibly one of the most traumatic elements of rapes that are not outwardly physically violent. The presence of sexual arousal or feelings of pleasure are bodily responses to stimulation, not enjoyment. The occurrence of sexual pleasure cannot, under any circumstances, be construed as evidence of enjoyment or retroactive consent:

Human sexual arousal occurs as a mental state and as a physical state; in normal sexual arousal both occur simultaneously. However, it is possible to be mentally sexually aroused without showing any genital manifestations of arousal (vaginal/clitoral blood engorgement and vaginal lubrication for

women, penile tumescence or erection in men). *Contrarily, it is possible to exhibit these genital manifestations of arousal but not feel mentally aroused* (emphasis mine) (Levin and van Berlo 2004, 82).

Laboratory tests and interviews with rape victims have confirmed that sexual pleasure and even orgasm sometimes occur in non-consensual, undesired instances of traumatic sexual activity. Roy J. Levin and Willy van Berlo have recorded rates of 4% and 5% of self-reported sexual pleasure in rape victims, though they note that the actual rate is likely to be higher due to the tremendous guilt, shame, and embarrassment that women who experience sexual pleasure during rape are likely to suffer. (While there is some literature available on feelings of sexual pleasure in children and men who have been sexually assaulted, there is virtually none regarding its occurrence in women.) Responsible and sympathetic discussion of the presence of potential sexual pleasure in rape victims should be encouraged, as it would likely benefit victims of sexual assault to recognize that these undesired responses are not outside the realm of normalcy and should not be such a heavy source of guilt and trauma. It is important for victims to recognize this in order to discourage them from thinking, erroneously, that their feelings of undesired sexual pleasure could negate the trauma of their experiences.

Mythology in the legal process

Even when rapes are reported, rapists are rarely prosecuted or convicted of their crimes (Rand and Catalano 2007, Franiuk, et al. 2008). Because of the many failings of our criminal justice system with regard to victims of sexual

assault, and because of the difficulty of proving that a sexual encounter was nonconsensual, many victims realize that reporting a sex crime will potentially cause them more pain and trauma without providing any closure for them or punishment for their rapists. The decision to report a rape is one that many victims must consider for a long time before taking action. Many women who suffer acquaintance rape or who do not suffer visible physical injuries do not report their attacks because they believe that they will not be taken seriously or that they will not be able to provide sufficient evidence to convict the rapist (DuMont, Miller, and Myhr 2003, Williams 1984). A woman who reports her rape may be met with official skepticism from police, and she may risk retaliation from her rapist or his friends and relatives if she makes the attack public (WHO 2003). She also may have an emotional or financial attachment to or dependence on her rapist. She may not wish to bring shame to the rapist or his family because it carries increased risk of retaliation or personal embarrassment for her or her family.

Any woman who reports her rape must tell her story in detail to police and in court and if she reports the crime immediately, she will have to relive the experience repeatedly before she has a chance to begin to heal. Many women are comfortable with discussing their rapes after some time has passed and they have begun to heal psychologically, but it can be uncomfortable or traumatic to explain the experience when it has just recently occurred.

Women who report rapes immediately or soon afterwards are often subjected to a medico-legal or forensic examination where she will be inspected for the presence of physical evidence (i.e., semen, saliva, blood, skin cells under her fingernails, and loose hairs on her pubic area). This can be another cause of trauma and, despite ethical and legal policies, rape kits or sexual assault examinations are sometimes performed without the informed consent of the victim (Parnis, DuMont, and Gombay 2005).

Defense attorneys who represent alleged rapists often refer to rape myths during the questioning of witnesses and alleged victims (Franiuk, et al. 2008). It is undoubtedly traumatic for victims to be told that they misinterpreted the experience or miscommunicated their non-consent, especially when many women who report their rapes have already struggled with these doubts in their decision to identify the experience as rape. Because of the prolonged trauma that prosecution includes, the decision to prosecute a rape and the process of prosecution can adversely affect a victim's recovery and lengthen her period of healing (Hengehold 2000). Additionally, the victim's lifestyle and sexual history are likely to be held up to unfair scrutiny and subsequently denounced. If she has had many previous consensual sex partners, if she often dresses in revealing or even flattering clothing, if she has a flirtatious personality, if she often drinks alcohol or uses other drugs, or if she has had a prior relationship (sexual or other) with the rapist, the defense attorney is likely to try to use that information to cast

her as a woman who is either responsible for her rape or who is lying about or misinterpreting a consensual encounter.

One of the most difficult things to prove in a rape trial is that the victim did not consent to the sexual encounter. When accused of rape, the most common defense used by rapists is an admission that a sexual encounter occurred, with a caveat that the encounter was consensual and that the complainant is lying for either personal gain or in a deliberate attempt to defame the accused (Franiuk, et al. 2008). In the absence of eyewitness testimony, surveillance videorecordings, or serious physical injuries, non-consent is a matter of credibility. If a woman can be made to look sufficiently unreliable by a defense attorney using rape myths to further undermine the claim, the defendant will probably not be convicted of a crime (Estrich 1987).

Recovery: Is it allowed by the myths?

A woman who has been truly raped, according to our mythology, will never recover completely from her assault. If she does seem to recover, she may be considered as not having been harmed psychologically at all, as the kind of trauma that a rape victim suffers ought to damage her permanently and profoundly. This concept is portrayed repeatedly in media representations of rape.

Rape scenarios in popular media that are considered legitimate or culturally prescribed are rewarded with appropriately traumatic victim responses, while invalid rape scenarios, such as date rape or acquaintance

rape, are treated as desirable experiences that should be valued by a victim. This works to prevent women who suffer from mythologically illegitimate rapes from identifying their attacks as rape, which impedes their psychological recovery.

Cultural perceptions of rape and rape victims in popular media

Rape myths are disseminated through popular entertainment media, like films, songs, and literature (Franiuk, et al. 2008). An example from popular music can be seen in the 1996 song "Sullen Girl", written and performed by Fiona Apple (see Appendix B for full text). This song, which was written about the singer's own rape experience, explains the feelings of a woman who has been raped and her abandonment of the life that she enjoyed prior to being attacked (McClean 2006). It is implied that the rape happened some time ago, but the narrator still says that "there's too much going on", and that she still doesn't know how to deal with her experience. She retreats from the external world and isolates herself, causing people who don't know about her experience to label her "a sullen girl". The image that Fiona Apple uses to market her music is one of a damaged, unhealthy, permanently "fucked-up" young woman (Marcus 2009, in a review of one of Apple's albums). This is consistent with the ways that other victims of rape are encouraged and expected to behave, partly through Apple's image and adherence to rape myths.

Another example of popular music that conveys rape myths is the 1976 song "Tonight's the Night (Gonna Be Alright)", written and performed by Rod Stewart (see Appendix B for full text). This song could be (and often is) interpreted as a consensual and desirable seduction, but it contains many references to the girl's non-consent or resistance to the narrator's sexual advances. In this song, a man describes in the present tense how he coerces a young woman, possibly underage (he calls her "baby", "virgin child", and "girl"), to have sex with him by giving her alcohol ("a good long drink") and repeatedly asking her to have sex with him, even though she seems to protest. He tells her not to refuse him repeatedly, which implies that she has already indicated non-consent, which he ignores. The narrator's indications that imply her refusal to have sex with him include: "Don't say a word, my virgin child,/ just let your inhibitions run wild". "Don't you hesitate", "Ain't nobody gonna stop us", and "Don't deny your man's desire./ You'd be a fool to stop this tide". He also manipulates her actions and location by commanding her to "Stay away from (the) window", "Disconnect the telephone line", and "Draw that blind". One version of this song features a very young-sounding girl speaking in French. This song thus can be interpreted as an adult man coercing an intoxicated, possibly underage, sexually inexperienced girl who may not speak English and who has already indicated that she does not want to have sex.

The situation described in this song has been reconfigured to represent a desirable experience that young women should welcome and interpret as

favorable. This song suggests to women that it should be acceptable for men to ignore their consent and that an experience like this one should be considered either non-rape or simple miscommunication, rather than a rape experience. The mythology communicated in this song contributes to the cultural perceptions that regard acquaintance rape as accidental or even non-criminal.

A popular 1974 crime-drama film, *Death Wish*, tells the story of a man who becomes a vigilante after the attack on his wife and daughter by a group of thugs. The two women, Joanna Kersey and her daughter Carol Anne Toby, are running errands together. A group of three young men see them in a grocery store, where they have bought some groceries and asked the clerk to deliver them. The three men steal their address from the box of groceries that are to be delivered and follow the women home. They ring the doorbell and claim to be delivering the groceries, but when Carol Anne opens the door they pick her up and run into the house. The three men ask for money while restraining her and vandalizing the white walls of the house with spray paint, and they spray-paint the crotches of the women's skirts with red paint as well. When the women surrender their purses, the men are angry that they have only a few dollars and begin to beat Joanne while they undress Carol Anne and spray-paint her buttocks red. One of the men threatens to rape Carol Anne vaginally and anally, though this is not shown on screen. She is forced to perform oral sex for one of the men but she is not shown to be seriously injured physically, unlike her

mother. It is implied later in the movie that she suffered additional forms of sexual assault aside from the oral penetration that is shown. While the men are preoccupied with Carol Anne, Joanne attempts to telephone for help but one of the men stops her and continues to beat her until she is dead. The men leave immediately when they realize that Joanne is dead, and Carol Anne crawls over to the telephone, seemingly in great physical pain, and calls the police.

In a later scene, Carol Anne's young husband calls her father to tell him that Joanne is dead and that Carol Anne has been hospitalized. Carol Anne has been so traumatized by her experience that she is in a kind of catatonic state and is unresponsive to the presence of medical staff or her father and husband. Carol Anne does not recover and is later sent away to an "institution".

This is a faithful portrayal of the classic rape scenario because of the unambiguously violent nature of the attack, the fact that it was perpetrated by strangers, and because of the culturally-prescribed response of the victim— Carol Anne ceases to function in any normal way and allows her rapists to seize control of the rest of her life. She exhibits the precise form of trauma that our culture teaches us to regard as normal.

Carol Anne's and Joanne's frailty is referred to in an earlier scene. The women ask for their groceries to be delivered to their home, but they seem to have purchased only a few things— they request delivery for a small enough load of items that each woman would only have had to carry one light bag to their apartment, which is only a few blocks away. On their way home, they walk

past a moving van where two men are carrying a heavy sofa across the sidewalk. They idly walk in front of the men, who wait for the women to pass while they hold the sofa. These women are cast as stupid, naïve, and vain, as if to allow the audience to blame the women for their rapes. These are proper, frail, upper-class ladies who would have been expected to die before surrendering their sexual virtue and if they were raped, despite their forceful resistance, to react with such dramatic trauma as to never be able to function normally again in a social, emotional, sexual, or even cognitive way. These characters instruct other women to behave in the same way. (This plot structure is echoed nine years later in *Sudden Impact*, one of the more popular installments of the *Dirty Harry* series.)

Rape myths in news media

The dissemination of rape mythology is not constrained solely to popular culture and entertainment media. News reports on television and in print are also dispersers of the rape myths. The news media pay a great deal of attention to many of the rape cases that are reported to police or prosecuted in court, and often enforce myths through their handling of rape narratives. These cases are presented in the most lurid, shocking, and violent ways possible because they hold the attention of the public while presenting and reinforcing rape myths. The news media “serve to prime and reinforce rape myths in those who already hold them but also may construct these thoughts for those who do not already have them” (Franiuk, et al. 2008, 291). Legitimacy and credibility are

given to the prototypical, traditional, or culturally-prescribed rape sequence even when factual rape narratives that conform to the mythological version are fairly and objectively reported in the news media, and rape narratives that are culturally-designated as illegitimate are further stressed as inaccurate or incorrect (ibid.).

In a 2008 survey of news reports of the Kobe Bryant rape trial, in which professional athlete Kobe Bryant was accused of raping a woman who went on a date with him, Renae Franiuk, et al., found that rape myths were present in about 42% of 156 printed newspaper and news website articles that referred to this case. The most popular myths that were found in these articles indicated that the woman was lying about a consensual sexual encounter, that she implied consent by going on a date with him, or that only promiscuous women are raped. Only about 10% of these articles contained statements that countered popular rape myths.

The woman who accused Bryant of raping her was forced to withdraw charges after her identity was leaked to the news media. She was repeatedly harassed by journalists and fans of the athlete, and multiple death threats were made against her (MSNBC 2004).

Rape myth as murder defense: fact and fiction in the Aileen Wuornos case

The 2003 film *Monster*, directed by Patty Jenkins, is based on the life of the prostitute and killer Aileen Wuornos. In the film, Wuornos begins her career as a serial killer after she murders a client who brutally rapes her. During her trial, she

claims that all of the subsequent killings are also in self-defense, though it is shown in the film that this is not true—in some cases, she kills because she perceives a threat, but in others she kills simply for material gain (money and cars). The rape scene in this film is based on one of the several conflicting accounts that she gives in interviews and in her trial. In this scene, she is soliciting clients on a roadside when Vincent Corey (based on Richard Mallory and played in the film by Lee Tergesen), pulls over and she gets into his car. As they drive into the woods, they share a drink of alcohol and discuss the specific acts and price of the sexual encounter that they are about to have. Wuornos suggests that she perform oral sex for twenty dollars, but Corey wants to have intercourse, which Wuornos says will cost thirty dollars. Wuornos asks for the money before they have sex, but he refuses to pay her until afterwards. Corey parks the car in the woods and Wuornos is visibly uncomfortable, but they begin the sexual encounter. She complains that he is being too rough and won't undress. He tries to force her to perform oral sex, but she refuses because he says that he won't pay extra for it. He then punches her. In the next scene, Wuornos wakes up with dried blood all over her face. Her hands are tied with rope, and she is leaning over the front driver's-side car seat, which is now covered with a plastic sheet. Corey is standing behind her. He violently penetrates her vaginally or anally with a tire iron. She screams and writhes in pain. He kicks her repeatedly and exclaims they "have some fucking to do". He pours rubbing alcohol over her anogenital area and she screams again while he opens the

trunk of the car. She is able to loosen the ropes around her wrists and reach a gun in her purse, and as he approaches her again she shoots him several times. She hits him with the gun, screams, and shoots him again before she collapses, wailing, on the ground. She drags his body away and covers it with a carpet from the car and returns to his car. In the open trunk, she finds more rope, duct tape, and a handsaw in a bag. She is sure that he had planned on killing her.

Later in the film, when her lover Selby (based on Wuornos's real-life partner Tyria Moore) discovers that Wuornos has killed several men, Wuornos claims that all of these men have raped her or attempted to rape her. She also uses this as a defense in the court scene, but she is convicted of six murders and sentenced to death. When the sentence is delivered, Wuornos shouts, "May you rot in Hell, Judge! Sending a raped woman to die!?"

In the factual case of the Aileen Wuornos murders, the killer exploited some of the myths that deal with rape trauma and the appropriate responses of rape victims. Wuornos suffered from both real and perceived abuse throughout her life, and she tried to justify the murders of seven men (six of whom she was convicted of killing and one whose remains were never found) by claiming that the trauma she suffered as a result of this abuse caused her to kill. Her accounts were extremely inconsistent and she has been portrayed as an unreliable rape victim, though she used the real or imagined abuses and threats to justify her killings as defensive actions (Basilio 1996). Wuornos acted as though she was responding "quite rationally to imminent threats to her body and life. The

murders were, according to her, a rational response to the concrete knowledge available to her about the world and about men" (Heberle 1999, 1110). In her defense, Wuornos played upon the cultural ideas about rape trauma that suggest that genuine rape victims have lost self-control and cannot necessarily be held responsible for their actions. Wuornos claimed that she could not be held responsible for her actions because she acted out of trauma or that she killed because she was afraid of being victimized further. The documentary film *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (Broomfield 1992) contains many videorecordings of Aileen Wuornos during interviews with the director and testifying in court. In one court scene, she testifies that she was raped violently by a client, Richard Mallory (discussed above), who had previously been convicted of attempted rape and served ten years in prison. She says that she was threatened, restrained, and violently penetrated anally and then vaginally, suffering tears to the walls of her vagina and rectum. She says that Mallory used a Visine bottle to squirt rubbing alcohol into her vagina, rectum, and nostrils after raping her and that he threatened to injure her eyes as well (in this testimony, she quotes him as saying, "I'm saving your eyes for the grand finale."). She shot him when she was able to reach a gun that was in her purse because she was afraid that he would kill her. In an excerpt from a book that she co-authored with Christopher Barry-Dee, she says that Mallory only attempted to rape her but that she killed him in self-defense. She also said that she killed the other five men because they tried or would try to rape or otherwise hurt her. Later in an

interview with Nick Broomfield in *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1992), she said that two of the men raped her and that five attempted to. In another court statement and in her book, she said, "I wanted to confess to you that Richard Mallory did violently rape me as I've told you. But these others did not. They only began to start to" (203). In another of Broomfield's documentaries, *Aileen Wuornos: The Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (2003), Wuornos says, "Richard Mallory was not self-defense. Richard Mallory, I killed (because) I needed his wheels to move stuff and he had exactly the right amount of money I needed to move into the apartments (Wuornos and Tyria Moore were living in a motel at the time)." Aileen pleaded no contest to the murders of all six men, and when the verdict of guilty was delivered in the 1991 Volusia County Trial for the murders of Charles Humphreys and David Spears, she said, "Thank you, and I will be in heaven while y'all are rotting in hell. May your wife and kids get raped, right in the ass... I know I was raped, and you aren't nothing but a bunch of scum." When she was sentenced to death, she cursed the judge for "putting someone that was raped to death." Aileen Wuornos was executed by the State of Florida by lethal injection on 9 October 2002, after twelve years on death row.

Conclusions: The necessity of encouraging individual-specific responses

The definitions of rape that are used by state lawmakers and local police vary, but often exclude rapes that are ambiguous or not overtly violent (Anderson 2005). In order to best serve justice, these definitions should be

standardized and expanded to include acts of rape that are not physically violent or do not include intercourse. Legal definitions of rape should depend more heavily on victim-defined experiences and the sentences given to rapists should reflect the desires of victims. Victims should be encouraged to report rapes and should be given increased forms of protection inside and outside of the courtroom, not only from their rapists but also from the damages that can be caused by the use of rape myths in the trial. In many cases, rape victims should be given the right to anonymity. The burden of proof should belong to the rapist, not the victim, as long as she has some documentation of her attack.

The culturally restricted ways that rape victims are taught to deal with their assaults are not the only, or the most useful, ways of dealing with rape. Rape victims must be encouraged, through responsible and sympathetic discussion and media representation, to respond to their experiences and trauma in individual-specific and personally-meaningful ways. It was encouraging to see that so many of my survey participants recognized this and reported as much in the written section of my questionnaire, but greater efforts should still be made to promote awareness of individual-specific recovery behaviors, expressions of trauma, and responses to rape, which is such an individual-specific experience. Awareness of the importance of individual-specific coping strategies and expressions of trauma could be promoted through responsible media representations of rape and rape victims. No behaviors, responses, or expressions of trauma should be considered mandatory or indicative of

“genuine” rape or rape trauma, and those that are culturally regarded as mandatory should be represented and discussed as potentially mythological. It may be useful to consider rape experiences and trauma as the victim’s property, a notion suggested by Nils Christie (1977), whose paper “Conflicts as Property” discussed conflicts and crimes as possessions of the victim. If we view rape trauma as the property of rape victims, it would follow logically that victims would react in individual-specific ways. The victim would feel entitled to respond in ways that are constructive and meaningful to her and, not only in ways that are prescribed by cultural mandates. The victim of rape should be the only person to determine appropriate reactions to her experience and should respond in ways that help her to heal and make her feel as comfortable and valid as possible.

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

Demographic Information

What is your age group? Please select one answer.

- 18-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

What is your sex or gender? Please select one answer.

- Male
- Female

What is your race or ethnicity? Please select all that apply.

- White/ Caucasian
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic
- Native American Indian, Alaska Native or Pacific Islander
- East or South Asian
- West Asian, Arabic, Persian, or Middle-Eastern
- Multi-racial (please select all that apply)
- Other

1. Which of the following do you consider to be acts of rape? Please select all that apply.
 - A male and a female have sex after going on a date together.
 - A sixteen-year-old female has sex with a nineteen-year old male.
 - An eighteen-year-old female has sex with a forty-year old male.
 - A female has sex with her boyfriend or husband after he makes physical advances, like kissing and touching, toward her.
 - A female has sex with her husband or boyfriend because he forces her.
 - A female has sex with her boyfriend or husband after she makes physical advances, like kissing and touching, towards him.
 - A male and a female meet at a bar. She becomes very drunk and he has sex with her.
 - A male forces his girlfriend to have sex with him.
 - A male and a female meet at a bar. He drugs her beverage to make her unconscious, and then he has sex with her.

- A female has sex with her husband because they both want to feel emotionally intimate.
 - A male forces a female friend to have sex with him.
 - A male forces a female that he has taken on a date to have sex with him.
 - A male forces his wife to have sex with him.
 - A female agrees to have sex with a male if he pays her.
 - A male agrees to pay a female to have sex with him, but after having sex he changes his mind and does not pay her.
 - A male has strong feelings for a female, but she does not have feelings for him and has rejected him. He forces her to have sex because he wants to feel emotionally intimate with her.
 - A male has sex with a female because they both want to feel sexual pleasure.
 - A male forces a female stranger to have sex with him, but he does not injure her physically.
 - A female has sex with her husband or boyfriend after he gives her an expensive gift.
 - A male forces a female stranger to have sex with him and injures her physically.
 - A male forces a female stranger to have sex with him, and then he murders her.
2. How common do you think rape is in the United States? Select one answer.
- a. All women are raped at some point in their lives.
 - b. One out of every three women has been or will be raped.
 - c. One out of every four women has been or will be raped.
 - d. One out of every six women has been or will be raped.
 - e. One out of every eight women has been or will be raped.
 - f. One out of every twenty women has been or will be raped.
 - g. One out of every one hundred women has been or will be raped.
3. How do you feel about the psychological trauma and healing of a woman who has been raped? Select one answer.
- a. A woman who has been raped has not been damaged psychologically.
 - b. A woman who has been raped has been damaged psychologically and will never heal.
 - c. A woman who has been raped has been damaged psychologically and will heal in about six months.
 - d. A woman who has been raped has been damaged psychologically and will heal in about a year.

- e. A woman who has been raped has been damaged psychologically and will heal in about two or three years.
- f. A woman who has been raped has been damaged psychologically and will heal in about four to six years.
- g. A woman who has been raped has been damaged psychologically and will heal eventually, but it will take more than six years.

True or False: Please select one answer for each question. You may add comments or explain your answer if you wish.

- 4. A woman cannot be raped by someone she knows. If she has sex with a man she knows against her will, it is not rape.
 - True
 - False
- 5. All women who are raped report the rape to the police.
 - True
 - False
- 6. If a woman has not been injured physically (meaning that she has no broken bones, serious cuts, or serious bruises), she has not really been raped or she consented to have sex.
 - True
 - False
- 7. A woman who has been raped will never be able to enjoy consensual sex again.
 - True
 - False
- 8. A woman who has been raped should talk about her experience if it makes her feel better.
 - True
 - False
- 9. A woman who has been raped should try to forget about her experience.
 - True
 - False
- 10. A woman who has been truly raped will never recover psychologically from her experience.

- True
- False

Short Answer (Optional)

11. Please define rape. What does this term mean to you?
12. What might a woman who has been raped feel or think?
13. What kind of response is normal for a rape victim to have after she is raped? How should she act or think and what should she do after she is raped?
14. What should a woman do if she is raped? What should she do after she is raped?
15. What are some media representations (images or descriptions in movies, books, television shows, or music) of rape that you are familiar with? Please give some examples if you can. Do you have any thoughts about them?

Appendix B: Lyrics to "Sullen Girl" and "Tonight's the Night (Gonna Be Alright)"

"Sullen Girl", written and performed by Fiona Apple (1996)

Days like this, I don't know what to do with myself.
All day, and all night,
I wander the halls along the walls and under my breath,
I say to myself:
I need fuel to take flight.

And there's too much going on.
But it's calm under the waves, in the blue of my oblivion.
Under the waves in the blue of my oblivion.

Is that why they call me a sullen girl, sullen girl?
They don't know I used to sail the deep and tranquil sea.
But he washed my shore and he took my pearl,
And left an empty shell of me.

And there's too much going on.
But it's calm under the waves, in the blue of my oblivion.
Under the waves in the blue of my oblivion.
Under the waves in the blue of my oblivion.
It's calm under the waves in the blue of my oblivion.

"Tonight's the Night (Gonna Be Alright)", written and performed by Rod Stewart (1976)

Stay away from my window.
Stay away from my back door, too.
Disconnect the telephone line,
Relax, baby, and draw that blind.

Kick off your shoes and sit right down,
Loosen off that pretty French gown.
Let me pour you a good long drink,
Ooh, baby, don't you hesitate, 'cause

(Chorus)
Tonight's the night,
It's gonna be alright.
'Cause I love you, girl,
Ain't nobody gonna stop us now.

Come on, angel, my hearts on fire,
Don't deny your man's desire.
You'd be a fool to stop this tide,
Spread your wings and let me come inside.

(Chorus)

Don't say a word, my virgin child,
Just let your inhibitions run wild.
The secret is about to unfold,
Upstairs before the night's too old.

(Chorus)

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mary Baker for her constant support and help in the process of receiving approval for this project. I would also like to thank Peter Allen, the Anthropology Departmental Honors Committee, and the Rhode Island College Department of Anthropology.

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