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# Rape Culture: Tools of Oppression


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Rape Culture: Tools of Oppression

William Wehrs

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## Abstract

My paper explores the topic of rape culture. This paper demonstrates that there is an oppressive system of sexism designed to boost toxic masculinity and keep women passive, and unwilling, or unable to fight back. This oppressive system is fortified by rape culture. Therefore, my first chapter starts by tracing the history of rape culture from biblical times up through modern day American history. It then shifts to examining schools and how they condition people to live and participate in rape culture. The second chapter looks at the toxicity that makes up rape culture by showing how there was a backlash to the feminist movement of the 1960s from a variety of sources whether it be cultural writers, films, or even United States Presidents. It then shows how many of the ideas this backlash promulgated have manifested in Men's Activist Websites today. These websites are intent on spewing vitriolic comments about women and anyone who considers her or himself a feminist. For my third chapter, I show that the ideas that make up rape culture is heavily present in our media, such as video games or films. Finally, in my conclusion I offer hope moving forward as well as suggest ways we can address this pervasive toxicity.

## Rape Culture

On September 23, 2018, Republican Party representative, Steve King, was speaking to his Iowa constituents on the sexual assault allegations by Dr. Christine Blasey Ford against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. King defended Kavanaugh saying that he was a victim of “character assassination.” King went on to say that the allegations posed a dangerous new standard that in his view could mean men would never be able to serve on the Supreme court again.<sup>1</sup> The next day, *Fox News* pundit, Jeanine Piero, attacked Ford claiming that she was a victim of hypnosis: “My question is, if there’s something awry going on, was there hypnosis, are they using confabulation?”<sup>2</sup> This skepticism towards Dr. Ford continued as President Donald Trump, a man who has a long history of sexual assault allegations himself, attacked a second accuser, Deborah Ramirez, claiming she was “drunk” and that the whole thing was a “con game” concocted by Democrats.<sup>3</sup> Taken in isolation each of these statements are awful remarks, but together they represent a pattern of women fighting against an oppressive system of sexism that is designed to boost toxic masculinity and keep women passive and unwilling, or unable, to fight back. This oppressive system is fortified by rape culture.

One key element of rape culture is a pattern of disbelief towards women who have suffered sexual violence. One account from a woman who survived rape at gunpoint in

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<sup>1</sup> Aris Folley, “GOP lawmaker on Kavanaugh: What man wouldn't face such an allegation?” *The Hill*, September 23, 2018, <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/408001-gop-lawmaker-on-kavanaugh-what-man-wouldnt-face-such-an>.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Papenfuss, “Fox News’ Jeanine Pirro Ties ‘Hypnosis’ To Accusations Against Brett Kavanaugh.” *The Huffington Post*, September 24, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/jeanine-pirro-brett-kavanaugh-accusations-hypnosis\\_us\\_5ba95ad8e4b069d5f9d5a772](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/jeanine-pirro-brett-kavanaugh-accusations-hypnosis_us_5ba95ad8e4b069d5f9d5a772).

<sup>3</sup> Emily Stewart, “Trump attacks Kavanaugh’s second accuser, saying she was ‘totally drunk,’” *Vox*, September 25, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/9/25/17901566/trump-united-nations-kavanaugh-deborah-ramirez-drunk>.

Baltimore in 2010 is telling. After the ordeal, she went immediately to the police who, according to the *Baltimore Sun*, responded with a series of skeptical questions: “Why had she waited two hours to call police? Why didn't she flag down a squad car? Where was she coming from before she was assaulted? Who was she with?” Eventually her frustration grew to the point where she decided to drop the report, as it was clear she was not getting the police to listen.<sup>4</sup>

This refusal to listen to the accusations of women is quite common and flies in the face of an assortment of numbers that paint a sobering picture of a pattern of sexual violence. According to the CDC, one in five women, will report surviving rape in their lifetimes. Additionally, one in three will face some form of sexual violence.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, a recent study by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission found that one in four women are sexually harassed at work, and this is probably far too low as the study also found that 75% of women will not report the harassment. Even those who do report do not see much change according to a recent study by the Trades Union Congress, which found that of those who reported their harassment, 80% of women saw no change and 16% saw the situation worsen.<sup>6</sup>

Women also face constant objectification, which was made fully evident in a 2014 study on street harassment. Holly Kearl a consultant for organizations like the United Nations, the Aspen Institute, and the US State Department and founder of Stop Street Harassment, a non-profit organization designed to documenting and ending street harassment, asked 1,141 respondents a variety of questions pertaining to sexual harassment. The results she got were staggering: 95% said they had been leered at, nearly 95% said they had been honked at more

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<sup>4</sup> Justin Fenton, “City rape statistics, investigations draw concern,” *The Baltimore Sun*, June 27, 2010, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-md-ci-rapes-20100519-story.html>.

<sup>5</sup> “Sexual Violence Protection,” CDC, April 5, 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/features/sexualviolence/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Kristine Udice, “It’s Not Just Harvey Weinstein: Why Sexual Harassment In The Workplace Goes Unreported,” *FairyGodBoss*, <https://fairygodboss.com/career-topics/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace>.

than once, over 87% said they were the target of sexual harassment, nearly 82% said they had received a vulgar gesture, nearly 81% had received sexually explicit gestures, nearly 57% reported being touched or grabbed, more than 37% had had a stranger masturbate in front of them, and about 27% had been assaulted.<sup>7</sup> A simple review of these numbers suggests the problematic nature of our culture; yet when discussing these numbers with people, they are often reluctant to concede there is a problem.

To experiment, I decided to present these numbers to someone who I was having an online conversation with about the Kavanaugh allegations. His response to my presentation was telling in how many people attempt to avoid dealing with the sobering portrait painted by the study. When I told him about these numbers, he quickly dismissed the findings claiming that “the internet was a cesspool of misinformation” and that “people don't even need motivation to lie to themselves, they just do.” When I pressed him about why he didn't believe the word of so many women, he claimed that I was guilty of “emotional thinking on logical problems.” Much as I would love to say this conversation represented an isolated incident, instead it represents a pattern, as many others have sought to avoid the realization that the world they live in is inherently flawed. Consider an article from the *Irish Times* by journalist Fionola Meredith who claimed “wolf whistling” at women or making sexist jokes is not evidence that Rape Culture exists since she believes these are merely innocuous actions.<sup>8</sup> Another example can be found in a conversation with my father who, after I told him about the number of women who face sexual assault at college, replied with saying “That number seems too high.” For me, this resistance to

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<sup>7</sup> Holly Kearl, “Statistics – Stop Street Harassment Studies,” *Stop Street Harassment*, 2014, <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/resources/statistics/sshstudies/>.

<sup>8</sup> Fionola Meredith, “Flawed notion of ‘rape culture’ is lacking in logic,” *Irish Times*, November 8, 2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/flawed-notion-of-rape-culture-is-lacking-in-logic-1.3283053>.

the depressing statistics suggests people want to resist the realization that their culture has deep rooted flaws that need addressing.

This paper will demonstrate that rape culture is an endemic problem that is both unconsciously and consciously cultivated and maintained. I will do this by exploring the phenomenon of rape culture from multiple angles. The first chapter will historicize the topic. I will explore some of the key texts and historical movements that helped bring awareness to this issue. I will then go on to explain the history of how rape has been treated in America. I will discuss how cultural ideas became ingrained into our culture by drawing on Susan Brownmiller's work, which shows how some of our ideas on gender come from famous works like the Bible.<sup>9</sup> This also critically ties into how I plan to utilize Michel Foucault's idea of "docile bodies," the idea of which is that society cultivates people to not only be easily controlled, but also to control others.<sup>10</sup> While Foucault was referring to the training of 18<sup>th</sup> century soldiers, I will show how his ideas are relevant to a discussion on rape culture. This will lead to an explanation of how organizations like schools ingrain toxic ideas of gender into people. For example, the idea that being a boy means being dominant, whereas being a girl means being passive, have been hegemonic.

In the second chapter, I will explore societal indoctrination, as it relates to men's rights activists. They represent a modern manifestation of how men come to believe toxic ideas about women and, thanks to the internet, distribute their ideas with more ease than ever before. Men's Rights Activists represent what civil rights theorist, Lani Guinier, argues is the most dangerous form of majority rule: "When the majority is fixed and permanent, there are no checks on its

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<sup>9</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

ability to be overbearing.”<sup>11</sup> When Men’s Rights Activists gather online, they rarely face challenges which only encourages their desire to oppress what they see as the minority, in this case women. Websites, *A Voice for Men*, *Return of Kings*, and the Redditt discussion page, *The Red Pill* represent some of the leading websites espousing the ideals of Men’s activists. For example, *A Voice for Men* has 150,000 viewers every month. Ideas from these websites will be collected and analyzed to show a pattern of derogatory treatment towards women, as well as show how the websites try to present their ideas in a way that seems rational.

Finally, my third chapter, demonstrates that the ideas presented in these websites do not exist in a vacuum. Ideas on these websites are reflected in works of popular culture, whether it be controversial video games like *Super Seducer*, or the immensely popular *James Bond* film series. These works are immensely popular, culturally persistent, and have enormous effects on peoples’ lives. After all, consider how Roger Ebert described the character of James Bond as someone every boy wants to be like: “Not every man would like to be James Bond, but every boy would. In one adventure after another, he. . . seduces, or is seduced by, stupendously sexy women.”<sup>12</sup> Additionally, I will discuss how these ideas are reflected by the response to current events with a more in-depth look at the response to the Kavanaugh sexual assault allegations.

Rape culture is a colossal issue, indeed a defining system of support in the oppression of women of our lives, and thus my discussion will focus mainly on the United States. Exceptions include cultural works that were created in other parts of the world, but have influenced this country. The Bible is one example. In order to supplement my own analysis and to maintain transparency about my own subject position as a cis-gendered white man with a certain degree of

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<sup>11</sup> Lani Guinier, *The Tyranny of the Majority: Fundamental Fairness in Representative Democracy* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Roger Ebert, “Goldfinger,” *Chicago Sun Times*, January 31, 1999, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-goldfinger-1964>.



privilege, I will periodically utilize anecdotes from my own life. Doing so allows me to confront, reflect on, and assess the privileges that come with my subject position.

Obviously, I cannot speak to things like what it is like to being cat called, as that has never happened to me. I cannot also enter the emotional life of a woman who only feels comfortable walking along the street only if she has some form of defense like a can of mace. This is something I have simply never had to worry about though of course I still possess empathy for women who have to worry about this. I would argue, however, that my possessing this privilege makes the paper all more important for me to write. I must confront the protection I have received by virtue of being a white cis-gendered man and reflect on it. Over the course of my research I have already attempted to subtly change my behavior, such as noting each night how many times I talked over a woman and attempting to rectify the behavior the next day. I also have attempted to be much more vocally encouraging whenever I hear a woman doubting herself or I hear something questionable. For example, the other a day a female friend of mine was complaining about how she was too fat. Before, I might have just stayed silent wondering if there was anything I could really do. After all, women complaining about how they look and male befuddlement at knowing what to say is something often played for laughs in our media. Instead of playing into this cultural trope, I instead told her she looked fine. Another example came over the summer when a male worker at the school dining hall was harassing another female friend of mine. I eventually managed to convince her to talk to the dining hall supervisor, and he promptly gave the dining hall worker a firm reprimand. I cannot say as if I felt I did enough as the dining hall worker still works on campus and thus I worry about if he will prey on other young women.

One thing I will consistently do throughout the paper, indeed as one can see I have already started, is occasionally interject insights from own life. I believe this is critical as

confronting the things I have witnessed and realizing that these things were wrong is important to my growing as a person. It also shows things that might seem to be isolated incidents are actually an endemic problem. Finally, my writing this paper is important as there is a severe lack of male scholars writing on this subject. Over the course of my research, there were very few male writers who came up, which I find distressing. There is a tendency to view this topic as a woman's issue when really it is a human issue.

## CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL AND SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT OF RAPE CULTURE

### **Growing Awareness of Rape Culture**

Denigrating treatment of women is arguably as old as history itself. We can see this in our foundational fables such as the bible or the tale of Pandora. Closely connected to that is the dismissive treatment of women who have suffered sexual violence. Today, systems like schools function both actively and passively to condition people to continue this historical legacy by conditioning women to be passive objects, while simultaneously encouraging men to embrace toxic masculinity and participate in rape culture. An example of this is the pep rallies I attended in high school where for twenty minutes we were encouraged to watch cheerleaders dancing in front of us. It was a grotesque practice that invited male leering. Thus, this chapter will trace the historical roots of rape culture and shows how it people are habituated to live and participate in it from pre-school onwards.

Though the term rape culture is quite prevalent today, it is relatively new. Award winning writer, Emile Buchwald, argues that rape culture is a society where “violence is seen as sexy” and where “both men and women assume that sexual violence is a fact of life.”<sup>13</sup> To further build on that, I am defining rape culture as an environment where male sexual dominance over woman, not just in terms of what we think of as traditionally violent, is normalized and pervasive. Additionally, it is an environment that shames women or men for being survivors of sexual violence, rather than putting the onus on the actual attackers. Despite the modern-day prevalence of the term, it was only in the 1970s that the term began to emerge. The 1970s saw what is called the “second-wave feminist” movement emerge and with it a new recognition of rape being a problem that plagued many women. Scholar Flora Davis explains that it is not that

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<sup>13</sup> Emile Buchwald, *Transforming a Rape Culture* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1993), v.

people did not know there was such a thing as rape, rather that they considered rapists to simply be sick individuals. The 1970s feminists, however, began showing that rape was something with a long history, as well as being something that many societies had consistently allowed to take place. A major moment in this growing awareness came when feminist activist and journalist Susan Brownmiller organized The New York Feminist Speak-Out on Rape, during which thirty women spoke about their experiences of surviving rape, and also held a weekend conference on the subject. The stories she heard made her realize that there was more to rape than the narrative that rape was mainly comprised of false accusations.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, she was inspired to write the transformative book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. In her book, Brownmiller confesses that she had been personally slow to open her eyes to the problem of rape: “I found myself forced by my sisters in feminism to look it squarely in the eye.”<sup>15</sup> Hence, the book’s style feels like an entreaty for others to realize the problem of rape, and indeed the book succeeded in its goal. As Sascha Cohen of *Time Magazine* explains, this was the book that brought the treatment of rape into mainstream culture: “The bestseller was one of the first books to define rape as a political problem rather than an individual crime of passion . . . *Against Our Will* brought the ideas of the feminist anti-rape movement into the mainstream.”<sup>16</sup> A look at New York City around the time when the book was published clearly reveals the problem the book was writing in response to. In 1971, there had been 2,415 rape complaints but only eighteen convictions.<sup>17</sup> These numbers were obviously highly distressing and painted a sobering portrait of a culture that was normalizing rape.

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<sup>14</sup> Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women’s Movement in America since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 308-309.

<sup>15</sup> Brownmiller, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Sascha Cohen, “How a Book Changed the Way We Talk About Rape,” *Time Magazine*, October 7, 2015, <http://time.com/4062637/against-our-will-40/>.

<sup>17</sup> Davis, 311.

While Brownmiller was doing important intellectual work, there was activist work being done as well. The 1970s saw many rape crisis hotlines being opened. For example, there was a Boston Area Rape Crisis Center that provided aid for women as shown by this 1975 advertisement that displayed having a 24-hour hotline that would serve any women who had been raped or attacked near Boston.<sup>18</sup> The advertisement also emphasizes how rape is not a unique phenomenon, as it explains how “every minute in this country a woman is raped” and “it is a crime committed by all types of peoples.”<sup>19</sup> Though, this advertisement might appear to be simply about sexual violence, I would argue that the fact that it emphasizes how every minute someone rapes a woman makes it critical to the discussion on rape culture as well. It reassures the woman who has survived rape that she is not alone and notes systematic nature of the problem. During the 1980s and early 1990s the definition of rape culture expanded further to include things like so-called acquaintance rape or how sexual violence was something normalized in U.S. culture.

This expanding definition increased the idea that rapists were not strangers in a dark alley, but rather people who lived all around us. One important essay that started to explore this phenomenon was “Sexual Violence and How it Affects Us” by psychologist Judith Herman. This is an article from 1985 that attempted to bring awareness to the epidemic of sexual violence. It explains how “thirty-five percent of . . . college men. . . would be willing to attempt rape if they were sure they could get away it.”<sup>20</sup> Another study it cites says that at the University of New Hampshire, 24% of 500 women surveyed said they had had forced sexual experiences. Yet another study found that 83% of college women reported they had suffered some kind of “sexual

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<sup>18</sup> Monica Edelman, *Rape!* In *Frontline Feminism: 1975-1995: Essays from Sojourner's First 20 Years*, Ed. Karen Khan (San Francisco: Sojourner Incorporated, 1995), 375.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Judith Herman, “Sexual Violence and How it Affects Us” in *ibid.*,

aggression” with 32% saying “they had experienced at least one forceful attempt at intercourse in a dating situation.”<sup>21</sup> Herman explains that though there is more awareness of sexual violence, there is still not enough on how deeply sexual violence affects people.<sup>22</sup>

Another important work on expanding the definition was journalist Robin Warshaw’s book, *I Never Called it Rape: The Ms. Report on Recognizing, Fighting, and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape*. Warshaw built on a 1982 report on what was then not talked about extensively, date rape. Beyond its major contribution to the understanding of rape culture, the report collects surveys from numerous schools to display the unsettling things people believe about sex and relationships. For example, it reports on studies done by the University of Miami and the University of Auburn that found 59% of men believe women provoke rape by their appearance and 41% of men believe a woman should be responsible for preventing her victimization.<sup>23</sup> These numbers are clearly appalling and suggest a widespread toxic view of women at these universities. The book additionally collects numerous accounts by women of their experience both during the rape, and their struggle afterwards to prove the assault took place. Therefore, by the early 1990s, an awareness of rape culture had entered the American consciousness with the idea that rape is everywhere and the idea that rape is not often done by strangers but rather by people the victim knows.

### **Historical Origins of Rape Culture**

Demeaning and dehumanizing ideas towards women and their veracity are built into Western culture. One example of this comes from the way language is constructed. The word

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Robin Warshaw, *I Never Called it Rape: The Ms. Report on Recognizing, Fighting, and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape* (New York: Harper&Row Publishers, 1994), 46.

hysteria which means exaggerated or uncontrollable comes from the Greek word for Womb.<sup>24</sup> After all, as scholars Kolmar and Bartkowski note, language constructs assumptions about gender along with other cultural understandings.<sup>25</sup> Another example of demeaning and dehumanizing ideas towards women being built into Western culture can be seen in key cultural texts. For example, the first humans in both Greek Mythology and the Bible cause humanity to be flung out of paradise due to the actions of an “impetuous female.” In Greek Mythology it comes when Pandora opens the box and releases all of the world’s ills, and in the Bible it comes when Eve first eats a fruit from the forbidden tree of knowledge and then convinces Adam to do the same.

There are many other demeaning attitudes expressed towards women in the Bible, the work that arguably influenced Western Culture’s views on women for a historically long time. For example, Brownmiller discusses the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife where she falsely accuses him of rape which leads to his being imprisoned.<sup>26</sup> The negative attitude toward women in the Bible was not an attitude that existed in a vacuum. Rather, it was reflected in Hebrew law where if a woman were raped outside the city, then she would be forced to marry her rapist. Additionally, when women were raped inside the city, the penalty was to be stoned to death. The logic of this was that if a woman had truly been raped, then she would have let out a scream.<sup>27</sup>

It was from within the context of this misogynistic past that the United States has initiated its own long and problematic history when it comes to dealing with rape. While the Puritans, strict Protestants who were some of the earliest European settlers of the United States, had strict laws that punished the rapist. This began to change with the codification of colonial

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<sup>24</sup> Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 123.

<sup>25</sup> Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski, *Feminist Theory: A Reader* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005), 50-51.

<sup>26</sup> Brownmiller, 22.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

law. Prosecution was often a tricky matter, as for example, the Massachusetts rape statute demanded that there be two witnesses or otherwise the evidence was not admissible. This meant that in all cases tried, only one third of men were found guilty. While this number might actually seem high, it is important to remember that many of those convicted were men of color. Scholar Estelle Freedman notes that Native Americans and men of African descent were disproportionately punished compared to whites. For example, in eighteenth century Connecticut, they comprised two-thirds of those who were actually indicted for sexual violence. Additionally, in North Carolina, fourteen white men were accused of rape with no convictions, whereas twelve African American men were accused and summarily convicted.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that men of color were held under considerably more scrutiny in regard to their possible sexual relations with women than white men.

There were also cultural works that asserted women enjoyed being raped, such as the popular poem “The Agreeable Rape” by Bennett Allen. The poem was circulated in many papers and magazines throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century. In the poem, Allen argues that women desire sex, but are too modest to admit it. Therefore, one has to rape them in order to have sex with them.<sup>29</sup> The military culture of early United States also played a significant role in women being treated as objects. It was during this time that wording like “thrusting” began to be commonly used in public parlance. Additionally, one British poet compared women to a fortress that needed to be conquered.<sup>30</sup> Another example comes from a New York lawyer who described a woman’s promiscuity as “surrendering the citadel.” Historian Sharon Block astutely explains

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<sup>28</sup> Estelle B. Freeman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 13-14.

<sup>29</sup> Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 50.

<sup>30</sup> Block, 20.



the significance of this language as she argues that by codifying relationships as a battle, this meant that ideas of consent became incredibly blurred.

The legal system was not immune to this ideology as there was notable British jurist, Lord Matthew Hale, who while lamenting on the evil of rape also claimed it was a crime that women sought to make up and exploit men who would have trouble clearing themselves. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, these ideas were incorporated into American legal manuals and accusations of rape began to be regarded with increased skepticism.<sup>31</sup> A clear example of the approach the colonies were taking can be found in the trial of Harry Bedlow who, after being accused of rape, defended himself with the claim that if the jury found him guilty it would be because of the words of a woman. After a deliberation of a mere fifteen minutes, the jury found him not guilty, which paints a troubling portrait of judicial bias towards the words of men over the words of women. Meanwhile, attitudes of the Enlightenment began to increasingly discredit women with famous men like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson arguing that women were a corrupting influence unless they stayed in traditional domestic roles.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Benjamin Franklin claimed that women were designed to gratify men's passions.<sup>33</sup> As a result, by the American Revolution, many men in the United States were seemingly united in their disregard for the word of a woman.

With the founding of the United States came new beliefs and with them, we can see the formation of two ideas that are now highly prevalent in American culture and, indeed, elsewhere

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<sup>31</sup> Freedman, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 17. Jefferson had a dim view of women, as he saw no reason why women should be allowed to vote, as well as believing they must take care to dress appropriately. For more information go to <https://www.varsitytutors.com/earlyamerica/jefferson-primer/jeffersons-views-women>. As for Rousseau, he argued that women were not capable of higher thought and that by choosing to be mothers, women helped keep society together. For more information go to <https://www.jstor.org/stable/191721>.

<sup>33</sup> Freedman, 17.

in the world. The first of these ideas is that of “slut shaming” as now purity became something increasingly valued. This was often something that was highly classist for wealthy women were more likely to be believed than poorer women. Regardless, courts followed a new standard that if a woman had had sex before, then she no longer had the right of consent. Thus, questioning the morality of a woman’s character became standard in court rooms across America. For example, an 1838 Judge ruled against a woman’s claim that she had been raped, as he claimed she was known to be promiscuous.<sup>34</sup>

Another idea that began to be pervasive was that if a woman does not fight, then she cannot have been possibly raped. A New York court appellate ruling in 1874 concluded that if a woman does not fully struggle then “must it not be that she is not entirely reluctant?”<sup>35</sup> A criminal treatise from 1876 noted that women have been given the ability to fight back, and it was highly unlikely rape had occurred if there was no physical evidence.<sup>36</sup> This idea continued throughout American history, such as in a 1915 article from the medical journal *International Critics*. In it, Dr. Gurney Williams claims, “the mere crossing of the knees absolutely prevents penetration and taking into consideration the tremendous power of the pelvic and abductor thigh muscles, a man must struggle desperately to penetrate the vagina of a vigorous, virtue-protecting girl.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, rather than blaming the man for the act of violation, the woman was to blame for not struggling enough to protect her “virtue.”

Outside of these ideas, rape culture can also be found in the white treatment of African Americans and Native Americans. From the very beginning of colonization, Africans were

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<sup>34</sup> Block, 19-25.

<sup>35</sup> Freedman, 25.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Gurney Williams quoted in Carol Harrington *Politicization of Sexual Violence: From Abolitionism to Peacekeeping*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 37.

regarded as sexual deviants with many writers noting that in Africa all of the folks seemed to lie around naked and women slept with whomever they wanted.<sup>38</sup> The seeds of rape culture were planted here as European travel writers judged women based on perceived sexual moral transgressions. There was also the reduction of the non-white woman to her body with many white colonists sexualizing the indigenous women by noting things about their breasts rather than anything about them as people.

This treatment of African peoples continued with the rise of chattel slavery in the United States. Black women's procreative powers often meant they would be put in certain social categories. Female bodies soon became something to be used such as in 1791 when a Virginia slave owner bought two fifteen year-old female slaves on that the grounds that they would be useful for his son.<sup>39</sup> In South Carolina, slave owners treated the enslaved like animals as they seemingly sought to "breed" slaves. Thus, they actively encouraged female slaves to have five or more bedfellows. Women were rewarded for getting pregnant with things like a new pig or dresses. If they had a lot of children, then some had the chance at freedom. Slave masters would also often force slaves to take part in forced breeding, as they sought to ensure fertility. The child of a female slave staying a slave also meant there was an added economic value to white slave masters raping women. Additionally, thirteen percent of South Carolina wills purposely asked that certain enslaved men and women be put together.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, this controlling of black female sexuality also served as a means to terrorize African American women and diminish "[b]lack women's will to resist, and to remind them of

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<sup>38</sup> Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 16.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, 87. Since the plantation owner notes the slaves are "breeding," I am concluding that he bought these women for his son to have sex with.

<sup>40</sup> Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 25-29; and Morgan, 100.

their servile status.” Critically, the laws either ignored the problem of rape, (Louisiana excluded African American women from protection), or had provisos that prevented reporting as many states did not allow slaves to testify against their masters. In the aftermath of the Civil War, and since African American women were ostensibly freed, they tried to fight back against the sexual violence they had experienced. For example, in 1866 five African Women testified in front of a congressional committee sent from Memphis and told them about their experience. The whites retaliated to this often by using sexual violence such as in the case of Edward Carter from Mississippi who told of his daughter being raped by members of the Ku Klux Klan. As Feimster explains, rape served as a “both a punishment and a threat to black women’s bodily rights as citizens.”<sup>41</sup> This treatment of black women functions in a very similar way as rape culture, as in both cases we see systems designed to keep women passive.

Rape also functioned as a tool of colonization against Native American and African American women as a way to mark them as inferior.<sup>42</sup> Despite the limited number of recorded cases, the intent towards Native Americans was to degrade. From the beginning, Native American women were regarded as polluted by white settlers and thus inherently “rapable.”<sup>43</sup> For example, one case from 1722 discusses a woman who was violated by a stick which was used by a man who additionally invited his friend to join him in the act.<sup>44</sup> This idea still has ripples today as rape is often seen as a way for someone to prove he is a “real man” thus rendering the woman inferior. For example, often to be fully accepted into fraternities, one has to have sex with a woman which often unfortunately leads to men plying women with alcohol until

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<sup>41</sup> Crystal Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 44-52.

<sup>42</sup> Block, 55

<sup>43</sup> Andrea Smith, “Not an Indian Tradition: The Sexual Colonization of Native Peoples” *Hypatia*. Vol. 18, no. 2. (2003), 73.

<sup>44</sup> Block, 83.

they are too drunk to resist a man's advances.<sup>45</sup> The idea inherent to these notions is that a woman is someone or something to be conquered.

Native Americans as a whole were also considered as something that must be conquered. Many whites wrote accounts in which they cut the skin or other body parts from Native Americans' bodies. Significantly, sometimes, these stories took a highly sexual turn with, for example, one white man bragging that he cut a woman's private parts out of her body and brandished it on a stick.<sup>46</sup> Again, the idea of taking sexual trophies has not gone away and is still an important element in rape culture. For example, a Penn State Fraternity posted pictures of two naked women on their Facebook page.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, the ideas of rape culture can also be found in the origins of the United States whether it be the legal system or treatment of minorities.

Many of these historical issues are still pervasive. For example, if a woman does not scream, many people refuse to believe that someone has actually raped her. One would like to think of this idea as antiquated, but it is an idea that has persisted. In 2017, an Italian judge cleared a rapist on the grounds that the woman did not scream, and thus could not have been actually raped. What is more the judge ruled that the woman was culpable for slander of character.<sup>48</sup> Another example can be seen how women are often punished for not coming forward right away. For example, when Senate candidate, Roy Moore, was accused of assault, he defended himself by questioning why the women had waited so long: "Isn't it strange. . . . people have waited till four weeks prior to the general election to bring their complaints? That's not a

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<sup>45</sup> Patricia Yancy Martin and Robert A. Hummer, "Fraternities and Rape on Campus," *Gender and Society*. Vol 3, no. 4. (1989), 463. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/189763>.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, 75.

<sup>47</sup> Holly Otterbein, "Photos of Nude Unconscious Women on Facebook," *Philadelphia News*, March 17, 2015, <https://www.phillymag.com/news/2015/03/17/police-psu-frat-posted-photos-of-nude-unconscious-women-on-facebook/>.

<sup>48</sup> AJ Willingham, "Man acquitted of rape because woman didn't scream," *CNN*, March 24, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/24/world/italy-rape-case-scream-trnd/index.html>.

coincidence.”<sup>49</sup> Moore has a point here as it has become more permissible for women to come forward about their rape than in the past. Nevertheless, many women still receive extensive push back or questioning of why they did not come forward earlier. This represents a punishment for rape victims not symbolically “screaming” as this claim parallels the prior claim that if a woman were “truly raped” she would have cried out.

There is also the historical issue of if a woman does not struggle, then has she been actually raped. Even today, many people still cling to this argument. Sam Seau of the men’s activist website Return of Kings argues that men are physically unable to rape women unless they are able to beat her down and tie her up.<sup>50</sup> There was also the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act from 2011 that proposed tax-dollars should only go to abortions for women who had been “forcibly raped,” hence suggesting that other types of rape were not forcible.<sup>51</sup> Recently, this idea came up again as seen by sports writer Clay Travis’ article on the Dr. Ford hearing in which he claimed her being pushed on a bed and grinded against her was “[an] awkward attempt by a sexually inexperienced high school boy to hook up with a girl.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, in his view Dr. Ford was not assaulted. Ideas inherent to rape culture can be found throughout history.

Another historical issue that continues to persist is the questioning of a woman’s “morality.” This can be seen by a court case from 2011 in which two police officers accused of

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<sup>49</sup> Elise Hu, “Why Some Survivors of Sexual Harassment And Assault Wait To Tell Their Stories,” *NPR*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/15/564443807/why-some-survivors-of-sexual-harassment-and-assault-wait-to-tell-their-stories>.

<sup>50</sup> Sam Seau, “3 SIGNS SHE’S MAKING A FALSE RAPE ACCUSATION,” *Return of Kings*, March 5, 2013, <http://www.returnofkings.com/6886/3-signs-shes-making-a-false-rape-accusation>.

<sup>51</sup> Lizzie Crocker, “Rep. Todd Akin & 7 More Crazy Rape Statements,” *The Daily Beast*, August 2, 2012, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/rep-todd-akin-and-7-more-crazy-rape-statements>.

<sup>52</sup> Clay Travis, “All That and a Bag of Mail.” *Outkick the Coverage*, September 28, 2018, <https://www.outkickthecoverage.com/all-that-and-a-bag-of-mail-43/>.

rape were cleared as it was deemed that the woman was too intoxicated to know what was truly happening.<sup>53</sup> This happened despite conflicting stories from the officers themselves with one claiming nothing happened, and another claiming that he had merely “snuggled” with the woman.<sup>54</sup> Another example came when a gang of rapists, who were caught on video, were initially cleared thanks to their lawyers who argued that the rape victim was someone who was promiscuous: “‘The things she wanted done were done,’ argued one lawyer. Another asked the jury: “‘Why was her vagina and anus completely shaved? Sex! She’s a sexual person!’”<sup>55</sup> This sort of rhetoric clearly has no place in court rooms, and yet sadly it is used. Clearly, ideas inherent to rape culture run throughout history up through the modern day.

### **Conditioning People to Live and Participate in Rape Culture**

Schools serve as a training ground for people to live in and participate in rape culture. I saw this for myself during the mere two years I attended public school. My Spanish teacher said the first day that we were all her babies, and that as long as we behaved ourselves, all would be well. Of course most of the class did not behave themselves, but she never said anything and just continued to coddle us. As a result, she was well liked by my cohorts. In sharp contrast was my pre-calculus teacher who was a very strict woman who once kicked a student out of a class. Practically everyone loathed her. A strict male teacher is unlikely to receive the same amount of student ire since a 2018 study found that female teachers tend to be viewed as worse than male teachers.<sup>56</sup> Hence, we can see society is constantly controlling the behavior of women, whether it

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<sup>53</sup> John Eligon, “Two New York City Police Officers Acquitted of Rape,” *The New York Times*, May 26, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/27/nyregion/two-new-york-city-police-officers-acquitted-of-rape.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Jessica Valenti, “What makes a slut? The only rule, it seems, is being female,” *The Guardian*, June 23, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/23/slut-female-word-women-being-female>.

<sup>56</sup> Colleen Flaherty, “Same Course, Different Ratings,” *Inside Higher Ed*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/14/study-says-students-rate-men-more-highly-women-even-when-theyre-teaching-identical>.

be teachers controlling students, students controlling one another, or even students controlling teachers. This paper will now examine the encompassing form of control that is designed to support toxic masculinity and keep women passive.

To do this, I will be building on the work of French philosopher, Michel Foucault, and his book, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Nevertheless, before I go forward, it is important to acknowledge that Foucault's own attitude towards rape is highly problematic. He believed that rape should not be classified as sexual crime as he claimed in a roundtable interview that rape had nothing to do with sex, and that it was purely about power.<sup>57</sup> As scholar Ann J. Cahill explains, this ignores how the female body is something that is carefully constructed to not be able to go to places that men can for fear of being raped. For instance, for women certain street corners are regarded as unsafe. Rape is the ultimate violation of that secure body women have built for themselves. Hence, rape is not just about power, but also about the male body destroying the female body.<sup>58</sup> Despite this issue with Foucault, his chapters on "docile bodies" and his chapter on what he calls "panopticism" are critical to our understanding of rape culture and how it is cultivated.

Foucault's chapter on docile bodies explores how eighteenth century society helped create people who were ready to be soldiers. Nevertheless, there are clear parallels with how US society creates a culture where masculine dominance is prized and women are marginalized, and how this is essentially treated as normal. Foucault argues that "By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected: a calculated constraint runs

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<sup>57</sup> Ann J. Cahill, "Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body," *Hypatia*. Vol. 15, no. 1. 2000. 43.

<sup>58</sup> Cahill, 55-57. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that rape can happen to other men often with the rapist using a misogynistic rationale such as accusing the survivor being a "pussy" or some other similar gendered insult.



slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making in pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit.”<sup>59</sup> Later, Foucault mentions that “a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved.”<sup>60</sup> Foucault goes on to say this molding makes the body into something that is designed to adhere to the expectations of society: “a question not of treating the body. . . . as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it ‘retail,’ individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon . . . the level of mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity.”<sup>61</sup> The conditioning of the body is something that connects to Judith Butler. Butler claims that gender is not inherent, but rather is something that is performed for society. If one fails to do this, Butler argues that one is punished: “Performing one’s gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect.”<sup>62</sup> Critically, however, for Foucault one cannot create docile bodies in a vacuum as there need to be places where these ideas are instilled.

For Foucault, there have to be places where the body is conditioned, and these places are “enclosures.” He is referring to places like military schools where young men learned to be disciplined as discipline requires a “place of disciplinary monotony.”<sup>63</sup> These enclosures function “to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits.”<sup>64</sup> This essentially means that one no longer has control over one’s body, rather the institution is now the one that controls the body. Relating this to rape culture, one can look at schools as an example of this sort of conditioning. Scholar Bonnie

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<sup>59</sup> Foucault, 135.

<sup>60</sup> Foucault, 136.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-137.

<sup>62</sup> Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* Vol. 40, No. 4. 1988. 528.

<sup>63</sup> Foucault, 141.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

Nelson Trudell makes the critical point that schools function as a tool of indoctrination. They “act as agents of ‘cultural incorporation’ by making available to students a particular selection from a wider pool of knowledge, with certain information chosen for emphasis and other information excluded.”<sup>65</sup> Ethnographer Thone Barrie observed in one study that upon entering school, children were divided by their gender. She also observed how teachers often lumped boys together when giving one set of instructions and girls together when giving another set, but rarely were they put together. Teachers often peppered their classroom language with gendered terms of address with statements like "You boys be quiet," "Girls, sit down," and "Ladies, this isn't a tea party," implying that gender defined both behavior and social ties.<sup>66</sup>

Another important element of gender division is the trip to the restroom which further codifies those gender lines. As Barrie noted, “one of the fourth graders told me that they learned to form separate boys' and girls' lines in kindergarten and had done it ever since.”<sup>67</sup> Any attempt at transgression was considered to be a social taboo as seen by how when one time a boy accidentally got in the wrong line, he was teased: “‘John's in the girls' line’; ‘Look at that girl over there’ -- that quickly sent him to the row of boys. Offbounds to those of the other gender, the separate lines became places of sanctuary.”<sup>68</sup> The temptation when one hears this data is to attribute it to natural behavior. Indeed, scholars Richard W. Wrangham and Joyce Benenson claim that “girls and boys voluntarily segregate into groups that tend to be single-sex.”<sup>69</sup> This idea is problematized, however, as Barrie found that in the playground, there may have been

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<sup>65</sup> Bonnie Nelson Trudell, *Doing Sex Education: Gender Politics and Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 23.

<sup>66</sup> Thorne Barrie, *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 34.

<sup>67</sup> Barrie, 40.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>69</sup> Richard W. Wrangham and Joyce Benenson, “Cooperative and Competitive Relationships within Sexes,” in *Chimpanzees and Human Evolution*. ed. Martin N. Muller, Richard W. Wranghama, and David R. Pilbeam (London: Harvard University Press, 2017), 519.

strict divides by gender, yet this did not hold true for when the kids were home where they would often cross gender lines with neighbor kids and siblings.<sup>70</sup>

I remember as a child playing with a girl and being teased about it. This led me to briefly resolve to play with boys from then on. Because I was homeschooled by a parent who did not fully subscribe to such notions, they were not deeply ingrained but regardless both pieces of evidence suggest a societal role that in Foucault's words "supervise the conduct of each individual."<sup>71</sup> Indeed, there is a pervasive idea in our culture that male/female friendships cannot exist unless romance is involved. This can be seen in romantic comedies like *When Harry Met Sally* where the central argument of the film is that male/female friendship must end with the couple eventually becoming romantic. Another example can be found in the Science Fiction tv series, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* where a male character, Odo, romantically pines for a female character, Major Kira, who considers their relationship one of friendship. Eventually, in the episode "His Way" (dir. Allan Kroeker, 1998), he kisses her and she realizes she has romantic feelings for him too. The problem with this pervasive idea is the assumption that strong relationships cannot exist between men and women unless sex is involved. This can lead to less platonic associations between genders and thus more toxic ideas can develop. Additionally, it can lead to men feeling as if they can be only close to women if they have sex with them, which is an unhealthy outlook.

The codification of gendered behavior does not just take place amongst peers in things like lines. Rather, it can take place in the classroom which leads to another key point by Foucault, the concept of "Panopticism." This is the point that everyone can operate the system of discipline and that is why it has such a firm control. Panopticism" comes from Jeremy

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<sup>70</sup> Barrie, 50.

<sup>71</sup> Foucault, 143.

Bentham's term for a circular prison building that has an observation tower in the center of the building through which prisoners may be watched without seeing the observer. Foucault goes on to explain that this disciplinary mechanism is democratically controlled, with everyone controlling everyone else. In other words, there is no one tyrant, but rather a complex system because one never knows who's watching.<sup>72</sup> One can look at classes to see an example. Barrie observed that in one class, a teacher, Miss Bailey, had the students do a math game: "She designated the teams with two scorekeeping columns on the blackboard: 'Beastly Boys' . . . 'Gossipy Girls.' Several boys yelled, "Noisy girls! Gruesome girls!" and some of the girls laughed in response." Barrie makes the pertinent point of why this is highly problematic: "by organizing boys and girls into separate teams and by giving them names with (humorously) derogatory gender meanings, Miss Bailey set up a situation that invited gender antagonism." Indeed, the name calling became common place and a few weeks later a student, Bill, wrote the words horrible next to girls."<sup>73</sup>

This division established by the teachers then spilt over into other school activities where the children become the tyrants, and thus as Foucault points out, the tyranny is democratic. For example, Barrie found that at the schools she observed, "girl" was consistently used as insult: "There is also a notable gender asymmetry, evident in the skewed patterning of cooties; girls as a group are treated as an ultimate source of contamination, while boys as boys. . . . are exempt."<sup>74</sup> This was very similar to my experiences playing recreational league soccer, which was gender divided, where the coaches frequently said we were playing like girls if we did badly, or that if we kept playing badly we would have to join the girls league. Looking back, this idea is quite

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>73</sup> Barrie, 67.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 74-75

insulting, as it encourages boys to think of girls as lesser and inferior, rather than equals. Early in life, children internalize misogyny which emphasizes a devaluation of women and femininity, and thus facilitates hatred.

The gender division and ensuing misogyny that is created in grade school does not go away, but rather is exacerbated as school goes on. Girls who develop early are frequently more bullied while boys who do reap social rewards. Barrie discusses a girl, Ashton, whose breasts had grown early and was called a cow, as well as being frequently teased and stigmatized. By contrast, John and Nick, the two tallest boys in a classes, were admired by all.<sup>75</sup> As different norms on gender begin to emerge, students often seek to play the game. For example, a student, Amy, confessed that she pretends to be afraid of spiders: “I’m not really afraid of that stuff, . . . but guys like it if you act all helpless and girly, so you do.”<sup>76</sup> Scholar Peggy Orenstein also notes that one of the greatest insults at the school she observed is “Schoolgirl.”<sup>77</sup> The implication being that if a girl is smart, then she is incapable of being personable and popular. Thanks to this insult, most of the girls she observed tried to avoid ever seeming too intelligent when in public. Meanwhile, boys who answer questions often answered the question in a way that seemed designed to show off their “machismo,” such as talking over other people.

It is not just students who begin to apply different treatment depending on which gender a student is, however; teachers often conduct similar treatment. This ties into another important point made by Foucault. He argues that students will automatically recognize certain signals for the rest of their lives: “whenever a good pupil hears the noise of the signal, he will imagine that he is hearing the voice of the teacher or rather the voice of God himself calling him by his

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>76</sup> Peggy Orenstein, *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 22.

<sup>77</sup> Orenstein, 36.

name.” Again, this is present in schools today where students pick up on certain signals of what they are allowed to do and not do that then stays with them for the rest of their lives. It functions as Foucault describes an “apparatus as a whole that produces ‘power’ and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field. This enables the disciplinary power to be both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert.”<sup>78</sup> An example of this can be seen in a middle-school math classroom.

In the math class that Orenstein observed, the female students are marginalized while the male students are allowed to talk over them, or are the ones mainly called on. They also feel free to interject without raising their hands, while the girls try to follow procedure, but are inadvertently punished for it as they never get to talk. Sometimes, however, female students are actively punished. For example, one student Dawn gets a B for “being disruptive.” By contrast, the much louder student, Nate, gets a B+ for participation that would have been an A- if not for failing to turn into an assignment. The teacher explains that for her the difference lies in Dawn’s behavior being “viewed as containable, [whereas] Nate’s [is] inevitable.” This led to Dawn participating less and Nate talking still more.<sup>79</sup> There is a pattern in American culture where women are often silenced. Just as society silences rape victims, sexist norms silence female students. Therefore, silencing women ties in closely with rape culture.

Another major factor in shaping students is sex education classes. Trudell notes how 85% of sex education classes in the United States emphasize only abstinence.<sup>80</sup> Although this book was published in the early 1990s, little has changed with the Trump administration pushing for more conservative policies, as 200 million dollars have been cut from teen pregnancy prevention

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<sup>78</sup> Foucault, 153.

<sup>79</sup> Orenstein, 12-17.

<sup>80</sup> Trudell, 21.

programs. Additionally, Trump’s budget proposal suggests most funds should be allocated to an extension of the “Abstinence Education and Personal Responsibility Education Program.”<sup>81</sup>

Trudell observes at one of the schools, the main teacher of sex education, Mrs. Warren, only spent 9% of her health class on sexual assault, where she failed to challenge male students who objected to framing some of their actions as sexual assault. For example, one student Andrew yelled loudly “You can’t even touch someone on the shoulder anymore.” Mrs. Warren responded with “If a girl is enticing—that’s different.”<sup>82</sup>

Gendered Panopticism is fully internalized by the time students reach high school. By high school, ideas about gender have become highly codified and students increasingly control others and one another. Sociologist C.J. Pascoe’s account of various boys at River High is telling. One boy, Chad, discusses how he frequently pumps girls with alcohol though he hastily notes he has never forced them. Another boy, Connor, noted this sobering fact: “If his friends are talking about it [sex] and they got some, and this guy is like ‘oh man, they’re cool and I wanna *sic* to be cool.’ So they go and do whatever as far as. . . . actually drugging a girl or whatever.”<sup>83</sup> Yet another boy, David, remarked that “If you haven’t scored with someone, then you are not adequate to anyone else, you know?”<sup>84</sup> What’s more, Pascoe observes that the boy’s “Love and leave ‘em attitude” only made a boy more popular.<sup>85</sup>

This stands in stark opposition to how girls are treated if they sleep around. Orenstein notices while observing schools that “Girls may be ‘sluts,’ but boys are ‘players.’ Girls are

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<sup>81</sup> Sarah McCammon, “Abstinence-Only Education Is Ineffective And Unethical, Report Argues,” NPR, August 23, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/08/23/545289168/abstinence-education-is-ineffective-and-unethical-report-argues>.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>83</sup> C.J. Pascoe, *Dude You’re A Fag* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 71.

<sup>84</sup> Pascoe, 71.

<sup>85</sup> Pascoe 73.

‘whores’; boys are studs.” Orenstein goes on to point out the highly pertinent fact that this leads to women being passive when it comes to desire and thus more boys interpret silence and passivity as consent.<sup>86</sup> A student, Amy, recalled how a male student walked into her dressing room during a school play and proceeded to grope her. Eventually she worked up the nerve to tell him to leave, which he did, but with the threat that if she told anyone, her reputation would be ruined.<sup>87</sup> Another student, Evie sympathized with this, saying, “The thing is, we don’t have control. . . . He could just say we were asking for it or that we wanted it. Then everyone will think we’re sluts.”<sup>88</sup> This is echoed by Pascoe who discusses how girls who sleep with boys are labeled as “sluts.”<sup>89</sup>

It is not just students who are controlled, however. Teachers can face discrimination from their male colleagues. For example, Trudell observed a male teacher, Mr. Brunswick, who remarked about his female colleague, Ms. Warren, that she was “top-notch in her field” but then goes on to say “She’s got a young family too. She should – could— be home with her family, but she’s here.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, as Trudell explains, Mrs. Warren was constantly facing the pressure of proving she can be successful in both raising her children and teaching in a way her male colleagues are not.<sup>91</sup> Mrs. Warren also felt constrained by the students who she felt obliged to act towards in a certain way. She disliked grading and tended to give a higher grade than the student actually earned because she feels as if she is obligated to be a “mom” to the students.<sup>92</sup> Mrs.

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<sup>86</sup> Orenstein, 57.

<sup>87</sup> Orenstein, 64,

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>89</sup> Pascoe, 73.

<sup>90</sup> Trudell, 79.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 82.



Warren confessed that her effort to be a “mom” leads to her getting “walked on” and “taken for granted by the kids” but she saw no alternative.<sup>93</sup>

Even school principals are not immune to control. For example, Orenstein observed a female principal, Ms. Murray, who attempted to fight sexual harassment at her school and failed. She started out by attempting to punish the boys for their sexual harassment of girls, but they did not seem to understand why. According to one “All the guys do that stuff [referring grabbing a woman’s breasts] it’s no big deal. The girls don’t mind. I’d beat the crap out of someone if they touched me like that. But girls are different they don’t really do anything, so I guess it’s okay to do.”<sup>94</sup> Ms. Murray also had to deal with parents who are furious that the principal had used graphic words to the girls who had been sexually harassed.<sup>95</sup> The girls also began to be accused of leading the boys on and giving “mixed signals” which led to many other students in the school turning on them. Thus, Ms. Murray decided to stop pursuing harassers and also abandoned her plan to rally community support. She claims she now feels “gun-shy” and that she “wouldn’t try something like this again.”<sup>96</sup> One would think principals would have some control over behavior of students, but instead they themselves are controlled by figures like the parents of the students. As a result, they become “gun-shy” about challenging students which gives them freedom to continue to harass their female classmates. This clearly exemplifies how societal control is democratic in its tyranny.<sup>97</sup>

This is not to say that in high schools, teachers can escape all the blame. Trudell observed teachers in 1993 making in lewd remarks. For example, one coach said about a female gymnast

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>94</sup> Orenstein, 128-129.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 130-131.

<sup>97</sup> Guinier, 4.

pupil “She competed all around for the first time last night—with me anyway.” When this was met with some giggles, he continued “Yes, she’s got some real good tricks – does some great moves on the floor.”<sup>98</sup> Thus, an occasion designed to honor the female gymnasts’ team turns into an opportunity to make lewd jokes that were with met with students and faculty alike laughing “uproariously.”<sup>99</sup> This example of women being joked at by male teachers is similar to an English class of mine where we were reading a play out-loud, and my teacher remarked that he wanted a pretty female student to read one of the parts. He then jokingly said he was ruminating between three of the girls in the class. In sharp contrast, he chose the male readers based on whether they were interested in reading or not. It is not just the male teachers, however. Mrs. Warren also made claims like “girls don’t get into long-distance running” because they “don’t want to get sweaty.” Boys, on the other hand, in her view have far greater endurance.<sup>100</sup> Mrs. Warren also encouraged the girls to stay by their locker rooms as long as they needed, remarking “You’re supposed to be in the locker room getting dressed and looking beautiful.”<sup>101</sup> Male students never received similar remarks.

Finally, there are the high school rituals that further codify women as objects meant to be there for male pleasure. At various schools, the yearbook functions in this manner. While the men are allowed to wear suits that make them seem like working men, the women are encouraged by the school administration to wear sexually revealing dresses: “The girl’s pictures were cropped suggestively just below the top of the black wrap, often revealing a bit of cleavage.”<sup>102</sup> This type of picture framing is quite similar to my high school where all the women

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<sup>98</sup> Trudell, 42.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>102</sup> Pascoe, 40.

were expected to wear low cut dresses while all the men wore tuxes. Another example can be found in the school dress code where women are consistently the target of enforcement with administrators viewing their clothes as too sexually revealing. Conversely, men were allowed to wear clothes like baggy pants which showed off their bottom, yet school administrators never viewed that as potentially distracting for other students.<sup>103</sup> This suggests the idea that women are inherently more temptations than men, which once again effectively reduces a woman to a sexual object.

Many American schools have events that codify women as objects is enforced. For example, Trudell observes that there was the homecoming pep rally during which the male member of the homecoming court was always announced first, and then he was allowed to kiss a young woman whose name is read next. Later, the woman remarked that she did not even know him but felt obliged to kiss him on the mouth anyway. At pep rallies designed for female teams, (something that never even happened at my school), women are not accorded any honors, while the male teams are given cakes and have cheerleaders dance for them. At homecoming, various songs are played depicting traditional gender relations, as well as having female dancers clad in tights and leotards and are often subject to whistles and cat calls that the faculty ignores.<sup>104</sup> At another school, there are dances where girls are expected to dance in front of the boys while they watch.<sup>105</sup> Scholar Pascoe astutely notes that “the administration, for all its fear, organized and funded school rituals that fostered a sexist heteronormativity with girls as sexual objects.”<sup>106</sup> Thus,

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<sup>103</sup> Pascoe, 34;

<sup>104</sup> Trudell, 47.

<sup>105</sup> Pascoe, 42;

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

much like the marching that soldiers had to do, schools now create their own rituals of “subjection that leads to new objects being formed.”<sup>107</sup>

It is fully evident that schools often attempt to condition women to be passive while male dominance is prioritized. This starts from grade school, where girls and boys are often separated and set up against another. In the ensuing years, boys’ boisterousness is considered natural, and attempts by girls to be equally dominant is shunned. Thus, by the end of the first twelve years of school, Foucault’s comments have a degree of resonance when it comes to understanding how people are cultivated to live in rape culture. Instead of the soldier, however, it is young students who have been made “pliable” to the control of society, and indeed they have begun to exhibit control mechanisms of their own whether it be things like “slut shaming” or sexual assault. I experienced these control mechanisms directly as along with my personal aforementioned examples, my school also had a pep-rally every single week where for twenty minutes we had to watch cheer leaders dancing in front of us. It was a practice that encouraged male leering. Therefore, thanks to practices like this and others I have discussed, it is evident by the end of high school, many young people are conditioned to live and participate in rape culture.

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<sup>107</sup> Foucault, 136.

## CHAPTER TWO: NESTS OF TOXICITY

Rape culture, as a key aspect of structural oppression, is not confined to educational spaces. The normalized treatment of women as other is pervasive and spills into things like Men's Activist websites, such as *Return of Kings*, which voiced a strong resistance to feminism. This website served as a platform for men, and occasionally, women to write stories of how they felt feminism was negatively affecting the United States. For example, there is "7 Ways Women Treat Men like Dogs" by Corey Savage. In this essay he argues that men are being taken advantage of by women and that men must fight back.<sup>108</sup> This backlash against feminism is not something that exists in a vacuum, but rather anti-feminist and indeed anti-woman ideas have a history. This chapter traces the resistance to feminism starting with the early 1970s, a moment that marked the resurgence of feminism in the public eye and that also witnessed greater public discussion of the endemic problem of rape. It will then examine Men's Activist Websites, which while being part of a much longer phenomenon, are a relatively new way toxic ideas about women can be spread. These websites will be examined though a linguistic and sociological lens in order to show how these websites are adept manipulators when it comes to the spewing of their ideology. None of this discourse is exactly new, but the internet allows these ideas to spread to a far wider audience than ever before. The internet provides a place that allows ideas that reduce women to merely being passive sexualized objects to be widely disseminated and thus the internet allows rape culture to continue to flourish.

### **Historical and Societal Context of Men's Activist Websites**

During the 1970s, several key publications established the roots of men's anti-feminist activism. Steven Goldberg's *The Inevitability of Patriarchy* claimed that women's liberation ran

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<sup>108</sup> Corey Savage, "7 WAYS MODERN WOMEN TREAT MEN LIKE DOGS," *Return of Kings*, September 5, 2016, <http://www.returnofkings.com/95233/7-ways-modern-women-treat-men-like-dogs>.

counter to the forces of nature and the 1970s saw many other works that also attempted to counter the rise of feminism. There were also books like George Gilder's *Sexual Suicide* and *Naked Nomads* which claimed that men are inherently violent and thus women must leave the public sphere and take care of them. Thus, he claimed feminists will only bring more violence on women. Furthermore, there was Hans Sebald's *Momism: The Silent Disease of America* (1976) that discussed women who realized professional careers made them "psychological wrecks." There also began to be a rise in groups that were notable precursors of modern-day Men's Activist websites. For example, there was Lionel Tiger's Men in Groups that claimed there needed to be more men's clubs to help facilitate male bonding and allegedly provide "sanctuary" from the increasing number of women entering the workplace.<sup>109</sup>

These men did not go unchallenged, since there were also men during the 1970s who sought to reinvent themselves as men with "feminine sides." These were men who believed traditional ideas of masculinity were ideas of masculinity were too controlling, and must be rectified. Men's liberationists argued that men should be more willing to do things like being willing to share their emotions with people around them.<sup>110</sup> The 1980s, however, led to these men being disparaged as "wimps." For example, 1984 democratic presidential candidate, Michael Dukakis, was criticized for his "wimpy" handshake. Additionally, he was accused of being "Kitty whipped" when he claimed he liked to spend time with his family.<sup>111</sup> Thus, misogyny and sexism were used to control Dukakis' behavior in much the same way misogyny and sexism controlled the behavior of the students discussed in chapter one.

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<sup>109</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 198-200.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

Efforts to control feminists through misogyny and sexism also flourished during the Reagan and first Bush years which saw the rise of the New Right. Within this ideological position, there were people like Jerry Falwell, and also the American Christian Cause that claimed Satan had taken the reins of the women's liberation movement. In 1981, the Heritage Foundation warned of the "increasing political leverage of feminist interests" as well as the infiltration of "feminist networks."<sup>112</sup> The New Right began to label itself as pro-family and pro-motherhood which in practice meant taking away rights from women. There were some major female supporters like Phyllis Schlafly, whose grassroots campaigning helped stop the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Additionally, she was a member of Reagan's Defense Policy Advisory Board which helped the mobilize the afore mentioned pro-family movement to support Reagan. Indeed, Schlafly's rallying of evangelicals and social conservatives in the South proved to be a critical factor in Reagan's taking the Southern states.<sup>113</sup> Schlafly was not alone in these efforts as there was also Connie Marishner who claimed that women's fight for rights is silly since women never will achieve equal rights and they should just be cheerful about it.<sup>114</sup> Marishner also claimed organizing women was futile: "You know it's very hard to organize women because they tend to be catty. They get all sidetracked on who will get what title. They just waste a lot of time."<sup>115</sup> There was also Beverly La Haye, director of Concerned Women for America, who claimed that family came naturally to women, and thus feminism was not healthy:

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<sup>112</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (Portland: Broadway Books, 2009), 233-234.

<sup>113</sup> Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 267.

<sup>114</sup> Faludi, 239-244.

<sup>115</sup> Marishner in Faludi, 244.

“Feminism really blotted out motherhood. . . . Family must come first for a woman; it’s just not natural any other way.”<sup>116</sup>

The New Right found a proverbial nesting ground in President Ronald Reagan and his administration, which thrived when it came to stripping away women's rights. Judicial appointments of women fell from fifteen percent during the Carter Administration, 1976-1980, to eight percent during the Reagan administration, 1980-1988. Women on Reagan’s staff also dropped from 123 to sixty-two, with many of the sixty-two being low ranking secretaries. Reagan also disbanded organizations like the Coalition on Women’s appointments. Faith Whitlessly, the highest ranked female Reagan aid, claimed that Reagan’s administration believed the best way to help women was to make sure men made enough money so that women would not have to work. Reagan and his supporters also targeted the Women’s Educational Equity Act Program which worked to combat gender discrimination in schools. In the words of the Heritage Foundation, the program espoused “extreme feminist ideology.” After a series of maneuvers Reagan moved Phyllis Schaffly supporters into staff positions. Those staffers had no interest in educational equity. Meanwhile, Gary Bauer, of the education department believed that to encourage women to stay home, the federal government should give them tax breaks for having children, which would obviously encourage women to stay home and look after their kids rather than going out into the working world. Significantly, it was not just Republicans who were treating women in a regressive fashion, as the Democrats also became increasingly regressive in their treatment towards women. For instance, between 1984-1988 women went from having a gala dinner at the Democratic National Committee party for women to having nothing. What is more, Michael Dukakis’ acceptance speech as nominee made no mention of pertinent women’s

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<sup>116</sup> La Haye in Faludi, 253.



issues like sex discrimination or pay equality. Notably, the only time he mentioned women was in regard to child care, thus indirectly implicating a woman's true value was only as a caregiver.<sup>117</sup>

This animosity in the political sphere was reflected in popular culture of the times as well. There were books like *Playboy* columnist Asa Baber's *Naked at Gender Gap* (1992) which argued that feminism had gotten out of control, as "all it takes to lynch a man these days is the accusation of rape."<sup>118</sup> Such men considered sexual harassment allegations as lies, fueling formation of groups like Coalition for Free Men, and the National Congress for Men.<sup>119</sup> Films, such as *Fatal Attraction* (dir. Adrian Lynn, 1987) and *Die Hard* (dir. John McTiernan, 1988), also reflected this trend. In the first film, we see a woman who has an affair with a man only to become overly possessive and start attacking his family. As Scholar Michel Kimmel points out, the significance here is that the woman is a single career woman. She does not seek heteronormative commitment or devote time and energy to birthing and raising children.<sup>120</sup> Thus the implication is that single career women are mentally unbalanced. *Die Hard* also has a heavily regressive message as at the beginning of the film, the hero, John McClaine is having marital problems with his wife. She wants to take a job promotion and is also using her maiden's name much to his annoyance. By the end, however, he has saved her from terrorists who have reduced her to a stereotypical damsel in distress. Additionally, at the end, she proudly announces to a crowd that her name is Mrs. McClaine. Therefore, the film concludes with what it considers the happy ending of man reclaiming ownership of woman.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 257-274.

<sup>118</sup> Asa Baber, *Naked at Gender Gap* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1992), 112 in Kimmel, 219.

<sup>119</sup> Kimmel, 221.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 223.

The animosity toward feminism was not confined to popular literature and film. The 1990s saw the emergence of two hugely popular radio hosts, Howard Stern and Rush Limbaugh.<sup>121</sup> Howard Stern's shows were notable for misogynistic moments like his frequent use of rape jokes or playing what he called "Butt Bingo." This would involve a member of his studio spanking a stripper to beat of a song that Stern picked out.<sup>122</sup> As for Rush Limbaugh, a major conservative radio host, in 2016 he made the claim that consent was something liberals used to advance their agendas.<sup>123</sup> There were also shows like *Striperella* and *The Man Show* that became hugely popular around this time. *The Man Show's* theme song had the lyrics "Grab a beer and drop your pants. Send the wife and kids to France. It's the Man show! Quit your job and light a fart, Yank your favorite private part. It's the Man Show."<sup>124</sup> The show's host was Jimmy Kimmel who went on to have a hugely successful career, such as hosting ABC's primetime talk show, *Jimmy Kimmel Live*. The rise of rap songs that were demeaning to women also contributed to the era's rape culture. For example, Eminem's song "Kim" has the lyrics, "You ain't nothing but a slut to me" and "rape lesbians while they screamin: 'let's just be friends.'"<sup>125</sup> Books of this period included Randy Thornhill's *A Natural History of Rape* which claims that rape is a "natural, biological phenomenon that is a product of human evolutionary heritage."<sup>126</sup> Finally, there were films like *Goldeneye* (dir. Martin Campbell, 1995) and *The Mask of Zorro* (dir.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>122</sup> Stella Bugbee, "Howard Stern, Donald Trump, My Dad: Lessons in How Men Talk About Women," *The Cut*, May 12, 2016, <https://www.thecut.com/2016/05/howard-stern-donald-trump-dad-objectified.html>.

<sup>123</sup> Lindsey Bever, "'Here come the rape police': Rush Limbaugh reacts to Trump's 'sex-talk scandal,'" *The Washington Post*, October 13, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/10/13/here-come-the-rape-police-rush-limbaugh-reacts-to-trumps-sex-talk-scandal/?utm\\_term=.6cb3163eac35](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/10/13/here-come-the-rape-police-rush-limbaugh-reacts-to-trumps-sex-talk-scandal/?utm_term=.6cb3163eac35).

<sup>124</sup> Kimmel, 245

<sup>125</sup> Kimmel, 257.

<sup>126</sup> Randy Thornhill and Craig T. Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 30 in Kimmel, 260.

Martin Campbell, 1998) that respectively show a woman killing men between her thighs and a man casually cutting clothes off a woman against her will in a scene meant to be comedic.

Critically, these films were taking place in the so-called culture wars of the 1990s where many conservative commentators were lamenting what they perceived as a contaminated society. For example, in 1992, Pat Buchanan gave a speech at the Republican National Convention that lamented democratic candidate, Bill Clinton, and his support of abortion with Buchanan claiming that it was “unrestricted abortion on demand.”<sup>127</sup> Buchanan went on to argue that the 1992 election was not just any election, but rather a “a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself. And in that struggle for the soul of America, Clinton & Clinton are on the other side, and George Bush is on our side.”<sup>128</sup> These sorts of attacks would foreshadow the constant attacks that permeated Clinton’s presidency. Clinton would consistently be attacked: “it was Clinton’s perceived moral lassitude and self-indulgence—far more than his political views—that outraged his critics.”<sup>129</sup> A frequent theme in these attacks was painting Clinton as man who delighted in sleeping with various women. For example, there was Gary Aldrich’s book, *Unlimited Access*, which claimed Clinton frequently visited the Marriott Hotel to meet with various women, and that his female staffers had no underwear. Despite the luridness of these claims, the book was phenomenally successful with it spending nineteen weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list.<sup>130</sup>

Beyond the more shocking examples of this ilk, Clinton and his administration have come under scrutiny for how he personally handled women in his life. One example came from

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<sup>127</sup> Pat Buchanan, “1992 Republican National Convention Speech,” *Patrick J. Buchanan official website*, August 17, 1992, <https://buchanan.org/blog/1992-republican-national-convention-speech-148>.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Jeffrey Toobin, *A Vast Conspiracy: The Real Story of the Sex Scandal That Nearly Brought Down A President* (New York: Random House, 1999), 95.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

Paula Jones who accused Clinton of exposing himself and trying to get her to perform oral, thus leading to her fleeing the room with the proclamation: “I’m not that kind of girl.”<sup>131</sup> The story comes across as slightly dubious, however, when one considers that witnesses recall in the following days of the alleged incident, Jones did not mention the incident and indeed seemed positively ecstatic that she had met him.<sup>132</sup> Regardless of the validity of her story, however, what is clear is Jones was consistently mistreated by the press and Clinton’s lawyers. The press would often shout out tactless remarks, such as “You have mentioned that he asked you to perform a sexual act. . . . Was this something that could have been performed without you taking your clothes off?”<sup>133</sup> Clinton’s lawyers would also ask disparaging questions, such as “Would you tell me what your definition of the word ‘bimbo’ is?”<sup>134</sup> Both of these questions are clearly aimed at making the woman feel reduced to a sexual object rather than a person, and thus both are clear examples of rape culture.

Where Monica Lewinsky fits into a discussion of rape culture is slightly more problematic. At the time of the affair, Lewinsky seems to not have thought of herself as a victim. She flirted openly with Clinton by showing him her thong and would engineer meetings with him.<sup>135</sup> This does not change the fact, however, that she was twenty-seven years his junior, which is highly problematic, since studies have found older people tend to have a better grasp of their emotions than younger people.<sup>136</sup> Equally problematic is how Clinton seemed to use her only for the sex as seen by how Lewinsky would later recall: “I took the small, narrow sliver of

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-87.

<sup>136</sup> Michelle B. Neiss, Lindsey A. Leigland, Nichole E. Carlson, and Jeri S. Janowskya, “Age differences in perception and awareness of emotion,” *Neurobiology of aging* vol. 30, no 8. 2007. 1305-13.

the man I knew and mistook it for the whole.”<sup>137</sup> Finally, there is the fact that she was an intern at the time which means there was a huge power imbalance between the two. Nevertheless, Clinton did seem to strive to help women. He was markedly more progressive than his two predecessors, Bush and Regan, with his appointment of the first female Attorney General and Secretary of State in Janet Reno and Madeline Albright respectively. Additionally, he oversaw the passage of the Violence against Women act.<sup>138</sup>

George W. Bush’s presidency marked a renewed effort to undermine women’s sociopolitical gains. Sociology Professor Barbara Finlay describes how on the Bush presidential agenda webpage, women’s issues were linked with Laura Bush rather than anyone in the Bush administration, thus suggesting women’s issues are not worthy of official policy. Connected to this is how Bush also drastically limited the number of women appointed as his number of female nominees in his first year shrunk from Clinton’s thirty seven percent to a mere twenty five percent. Furthermore, Bush also ignored organizations like National Women’s Political Caucus, closed the White House office on Women’s Initiatives and Outreach which allowed women to discuss issues like equal pay or domestic violence prevention. What’s more, Bush closed the Equal Pay Initiative. His administration also diminished work-place anti-discrimination investigations. They went from thirteen a year under Bush’s three predecessors to only twelve total from 2000-2003.<sup>139</sup>

Bush did not stop with being purely apathetic as he conducted a purge so there was less access to accurate information on the status of women in the United States. For example, twenty-

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<sup>137</sup> Monica Lewinsky, “WHO GETS TO LIVE IN VICTIMVILLE?": WHY I PARTICIPATED IN A NEW DOCUSERIES ON *THE CLINTON AFFAIR*,” *Vanity Fair*, November 13, 2018, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2018/11/the-clinton-affair-documentary-monica-lewinsky>.

<sup>138</sup> “Bill Clinton.” *History*, August 21, 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/bill-clinton>.

<sup>139</sup> Barbara Finlay, *George W. Bush and the War on Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 6-20.

five documents on issues like domestic violence and pay inequality were removed from the Women's Bureau of Labor. Documents on how to deal with Sexual Harassment were also removed, as well as guidelines on how to handle sexual harassment in schools which left only outdated guides. Additionally, a CDC effort to increase information on sex education including things like condom use was shut down.<sup>140</sup> Bush also favored sex education curricula that promoted outdated stereotypes like girls care less about achievement than boys. The curricula also claimed that women needed financial support whereas men needed emotional support.<sup>141</sup> One notable example of the new sex education curriculum can be found in a story that was recommended for third graders. The tale tells a story in which a knight attempts to save a princess from a dragon, but only when she agrees to stop giving advice. "Moral of the Story," the curriculum notes, "Occasional suggestions and assistance may be alright [sic], but too much of it will lessen a man's confidence or even turn him away from his princess."<sup>142</sup> Clearly, Bush was attempting to radically alter school curriculums to define boys as dominant at the expense of defining girls as passive.

Notably, it was not just Bush himself who had these views, but many of his aids as well. There were of course men like Attorney General John Ashcroft who as governor of Missouri vetoed domestic violence protection for women.<sup>143</sup> Bush hired women who often held strongly anti-feminist views. For example, he solicited many women from the Independent Women's Forum organization that had been formed to defend Clarence Thomas. The organization continues to oppose affirmative action and downplay the importance of sexual harassment and

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 46-50.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 32.

discrimination with the claim that is the imaginings of feminists.<sup>144</sup> In 2017, the organization published a glowing profile of a student, Patrick Borum, who challenged his college's claim that there was something called rape culture.<sup>145</sup> Despite all of this though, Bush is not someone who is shamed by society today, but has instead been lauded by both sides of the political aisle with major Democratic political families like the Obamas and the Clintons being quite friendly to him. What is more, on November 12, 2018, he won the National Constitution Center's Liberty Medal with Joe Biden presenting the award to him.<sup>146</sup> This points to the cultural problem of ignoring women's issues on both sides of the political aisle and thus allowing rape culture to continue to operate at every level of society.

Elite members of society practicing discriminatory practices towards women reverberates throughout all of society. Indeed, with the rise of the internet, targeting of women has taken on a new dimension. Famous female stars are often forced to leave social media due to the amount of hate they get, such as the actresses, Kelly Marie Tran and Daisey Ridley, who after the release of the film, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (dir. Rian Johnson, 2017), were both forced to delete their Instagram accounts after receiving abuse directed towards them.<sup>147</sup> There was also feminist sex writer, Petra Davis who received an email directing her to a website that a series of sexually graphic insults and threats. As if this was not awful enough, the website also had images of sexually mutilated women.<sup>148</sup> There is also the case of female video game reviewer, Anita

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>145</sup> Jillian Kay Melchior, "Daring to Dispute Rape Culture," *Independent Women's Forum*, April 13, 2017, <http://iwf.org/news/2803391/Daring-to-Dispute-Rape-Culture>.

<sup>146</sup> Associated Press, "George W., Laura Bush awarded Liberty Medals in Philadelphia for work with veterans," *Delaware Online*, November 12, 2016, <https://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/2018/11/12/george-w-laura-bush-awarded-liberty-medals-biden-bestows-honor/1974567002/>.

<sup>147</sup> Bonnie Burton, "Star Wars actor Kelly Marie Tran deletes Instagram posts after harassment," *Cnet*, June 5, 2018, <https://www.cnet.com/news/star-wars-actor-kelly-marie-tran-deletes-instagram-after-harassment/>.

<sup>148</sup> Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: The Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the alt-right and Trump*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2017), 18.

Sarkeesian, who has been consistently the subject of personal abuse by people. Some examples of things she would be sent included “I’ll rape you and put your head on a stick” and other sexually graphic insults<sup>149</sup> Obviously, this behavior is appalling, but it is so common that there is still a scarcity of female reviewers online and those who do review often take preventive measures like disabling the comments.

Digital platforms have also opened up the door for men to be sexually aggressive towards women. Consider that twenty seven percent of millennial men have admitted to sending so called “dick picks” with twenty four percent of these millennial men also admitting to sending them without being asked. When women are asked, however, they report much higher numbers with a staggering seventy eight percent of millennial women report getting a sexually graphic picture without asking for it.<sup>150</sup> The sobering numbers do not end here. In the United States, seventy nine percent of women in 2018 refused to send “sexy” or naked pictures, they were dumped or faced some form of abuse.<sup>151</sup> When women do send images, their boyfriends frequently use them in what is called “revenge porn.” For example, in 2004 one New York woman, Nora, sent a picture of herself to her then boyfriend only to later find that he had put up the picture on various pornographic websites soliciting people to contact her for oral sex.<sup>152</sup> In the near future, things could take an even worse turn for women thanks to new digital technology used by various online communities to put celebrity faces onto porn actresses.<sup>153</sup> Soon, this technology is going

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<sup>149</sup> Nagle, 20.

<sup>150</sup> Yael Bame, “53% of millennial women have received a naked photo from a man,” *YouGov*, October 9, 2017, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2017/10/09/53-millennial-women-have-received-dick-pic>.

<sup>151</sup> Sarah Magliocco, “Coercion: Young women under pressure to send nudes, says study,” *She Magazine*, 2018, <https://www.shemazing.net/coercion-young-women-under-pressure-to-send-nudes-study-shows/>.

<sup>152</sup> Margaret Talbot, “The Attorney Fighting Revenge Porn,” *The New Yorker*, December 5, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/12/05/the-attorney-fighting-revenge-porn>.

<sup>153</sup> Alex Hern, “AI used to face-swap Hollywood stars into pornography films,” *The Guardian*, January 25, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/jan/25/ai-face-swap-pornography-emma-watson-scarlett-johansson-taylor-swift-daisy-ridley-sophie-turner-maisie-williams>.



to be available in app form which could obviously lead to even more devastating results. Men's Rights Activist Websites are not something that have emerged in a vacuum. Rather, they are symptomatic of a much broader and greater antagonism towards women that permeates all levels of our society.

### **Men's Activist Websites: How They Function and Ideology**

An analysis of the Men's Activist Websites reveals that they often function by assuming everyone agrees with their ideology, use highly active or personal words that make their articles feel like they are directly addressing the reader, have comment sections that encourages reinforcement of the ideology espoused in the articles. The assumption of reader agreements with their ideology is critical, since Norman Fairclough claims, that verbal interactions tend to be more powerful when the interaction assumes a mode of social action and that it presupposes a range of "structures."<sup>154</sup> In this case, structures means a paradigm that the writer believes in and assumes everyone else believes as well. This is important when one examines the rhetoric of these websites as the authors tend to assume everyone is interested and invested in the structures of discrimination the authors claim women have created. This assumption by Men's Activist websites of everyone sharing the same ideology is also inherent to humans. Humans tend to stay with social groups in which they are comfortable and which they, in turn, make exclusive as they often begin to exaggerate the difference between them and the perceived outside groups. As scholar Liliana Mason points out, this derives from how it is easier for the human brain to retrieve information on things that support a person's worldview rather than things that challenge

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<sup>154</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Routledge, 2010), 35.

one's worldview. Hence, it is much easier for the brain to keep reinforcing the false beliefs than to correct them.<sup>155</sup>

Fairclough also says to truly be persuasive verbally, it is important to use verbs that describe human attributes such as “enterprising instincts of individuals.” Or “you as employer or individual must be the driving force.”<sup>156</sup> When one hears these phrases one tends to feel empowered, as one becomes politically and ideologically invested in what the phrases describe.<sup>157</sup> Indeed, many men's rights websites use these active verbs. The emotional state is important as when emotions are aroused in the ingroup, they tend to start to increasingly think of themselves as the ones who are liked and respected. These emotions then encourage ingroups to fight even harder for their comrades rather than any discernable ideology. Hence, the fight becomes more about the group one feels a part of, rather than the actual issues.<sup>158</sup> For example, a study found that more Americans call themselves conservative than liberal, yet they prefer liberal policies.<sup>159</sup>

The website, *A Voice for Men* demonstrates all of the characteristics discussed and thus makes a perfect subject for analysis. The website was founded by Paul Elam who started another website, *Register-Her.com*, in 2011 that published the names of female rape survivors who were labelled as “false accusers” since their cases had not resulted in a full conviction.<sup>160</sup> Elam continues to run *A Voice for Men* which averages around 70,000 viewers a month.<sup>161</sup> He claims

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<sup>155</sup> Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 9-14.

<sup>156</sup> Fairclough, 117 and 120.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>158</sup> Mason, 83 and 108.

<sup>159</sup> Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins, “Republicans and Democrats can't even agree about how they disagree,” *The Washington Post*, September 7, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/09/07/republicans-and-democrats-cant-even-agree-about-how-they-disagree/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.a65e36cbde66](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/09/07/republicans-and-democrats-cant-even-agree-about-how-they-disagree/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a65e36cbde66).

<sup>160</sup> Nagle, 91-92.

<sup>161</sup> “avoicemen.com Traffic Statistics,” *Alexa*, <https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/avoicemen.com>.

on the introduction page that the website harbors no animosity towards women despite what he terms “lies” spread about his website: “You have been told that we are a lobby of privileged white males who are disgruntled at our loss of power.”<sup>162</sup> In an effort to prove that he has no problem with women, Elam presents women who have contributed to the website like Janet Bloomfield. Bloomfield, however, runs a patreon that proudly proclaims that she thinks “feminists are a pack of cackling witches, choking on a daily diet of hypocrisy, double-standards, victimhood and hate. Feminism is an ideology that seeks to privilege women at the expense of men.”<sup>163</sup> Because of the fact that the United States is still a patriarchy, it is possible that Bloomfield’s misogyny is to some extent an internalized sexism, particularly when it comes to women whom she regards as extremists. In other words, one cannot simply say she hates women, but rather that she might hate women she regards as not acting the way women *should act*. Regardless of this subtle difference, Bloomfield does not seem to be an ideal witness to prove that Elam is actually a moderate when it comes to his views on feminists.

On the introductory page, Elam defines feminism as something that “endlessly chides men, infantilizes women and promotes women-only services (very interesting conduct for a movement based on equality), and as it foments hostility between the sexes with victim narratives and false statistics.”<sup>164</sup> Right away, we can see Elam spouting misleading generalizations on what feminism does with the clear expectation that he will not be challenged since he provides no footnotes. Thus, he is using a verbal interaction that emphasizes structures he expects everyone to believe in. This expectation of acceptance on an emotional basis is further

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<sup>162</sup> Paul Elam, “Welcome to AVFM,” *A Voice for Men*, June 5, 2014, <https://www.avoicemen.com/a-voice-for-men/welcome-to-avfm/>.

<sup>163</sup> <https://www.patreon.com/janetbloomfield>.

<sup>164</sup> Elam, <https://www.avoicemen.com/a-voice-for-men/welcome-to-avfm/>.

evidenced, as there are no citations or facts to support his assertions. After a few token efforts to appeal to an outgroup through claiming that he has no animosity towards women, the introduction is primarily based in the ideology of an ingroup.

One article of note on the website is Mark Dent's "Believe Women." Dent is a primary school teacher and brags on his bio page that he's been "fighting feminists in [his] own small way for 25 years."<sup>165</sup> The article argues that one should avoid believing women and throughout the article, Dent uses the word "you." When one hears or sees one's own name in print, one's brain activity becomes heightened and more alert.<sup>166</sup> Since writers obviously cannot actually use the reader's name, they tend to use the word, "you" instead to capture the reader's attention, and Dent uses this adeptly. For instance, one use of "you" intends to make readers feel akin to martyrs if they embrace the ideology of Dent in not listening to women. For example, he states "You will be embraced by countless angry, mentally deranged, illogical, hate fueled hypocrites."<sup>167</sup> Much like Elam, Dent relies on broad assumptions to support his points: "how many of these. . . . women have been friends with or enemies of other girls in high school or college and have bitched to their latest besties about the lies and backstabbing behavior of a former friend?"<sup>168</sup> Thus, the suggestion is that women are constantly out to get one another through being manipulative and lying, and hence cannot be trusted.

Critically, the comment section functions as a solidification of ingroup ties. Examples of the comments include "Women will stab their best friend in the back over a man," or "It's not about believing women. It's about increasing female power over males. Believe the Woman is

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<sup>165</sup> Mark Dent, "About Mark Dent," *A Voice for Men*, <https://www.avoicemen.com/author/boston86/>.

<sup>166</sup> Dennis P. Carmody and Michael Lewis, "Brain Activation When Hearing One's Own and Others' Names," *Brain Res*, Vol. 1116, no. 1. 153-158.

<sup>167</sup> Mark Dent, "Believe Women," *A Voice for Men*, October 11, 2018, <https://www.avoicemen.com/mens-rights/false-rape-culture/believe-women/>.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

just a means to that end and nothing more.”<sup>169</sup> We can see with these comments that the conversations are not about ideas, but rather reinforcement of broad assumptions the men have already made with the emphasis being a reinforcement of the claim that women are liars and will use any amount of trust to their advantage. Furthermore, Nagle mentioned that ingroups become convinced of their superiority, and we can see how both the comments and article are designed to boost up men, while degrading women, and thus make men feel like the superior group.

Another example comes from Contra Mundum’s article on the site, “Women must submit to men for successful relationships.”<sup>170</sup> The article explains that in order for boys to become men they must break away from women and eschew nurturing relationships. He argues that “if men want to be fulfilled in their relationships with women, they should look for women who are going to submit to their will, and take their leadership.”<sup>171</sup> In the comment section, we can see the power of the ingroup mentality as there is actually a challenge with someone expressing dismay with the article by asking “What the hell is this crap?”<sup>172</sup> This is quickly shut down by others, however, as one claims the article has a “valid, reasonable and rational opinion which you obviously don't share.”<sup>173</sup> Critically, however, this response does not actually address why the opinion is valid by explaining why the article has valid points. Instead, the response attempts to purely respond with an emotional basis. We can also see that the response accuses the detracting comment of not being part of the necessary ingroup to understand the article. *A Voice for Men* is not the only Men’s Activist website out there.

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> No biographical information is provided for this author.

<sup>171</sup> Contra Mundum, “Women must submit to men for successful relationships,” *A Voice for Men*, September `19, 2018, <https://www.avoicemen.com/a-voice-for-men/women-must-submit-to-men-for-successful-relationships/>.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

*Return of Kings* was founded in October 2012 by Roosh Valizadeh whose Twitter page boasts a little more than 48,000 followers. One example of an article is “7 Ways Women Treat Men like Dogs” by Corey Savage whose biographical page states he is an “iconoclast” and believes that men must “honor their primal nature.”<sup>174</sup> He also self-published the book, *Man's Fight for Existence: The Primalist Manifesto*. Savage’s article claims that women are attempting to defy their natural biology and make men subservient: “If this trend continues unabated, I expect the entire male population to turn into weak and feckless bonobos who grovel around to serve female interests.”<sup>175</sup> Savage articulates two critical messages. First, feminists are not obeying their biology. The biological argument is not new as in the 1970s, George Gilder made the claim that women were biologically meant to look after men and if they failed to do so, it was natural they would encounter male violence. Second, Savage inverts Fairclough’s claim that one needs to use active words to make people feel powerful. Disempowering adjectives like “weak” and “feckless” are more likely to get people to feel worried about succumbing to these states of being and more likely to listen to his ideas. Savage also craftily ends his article with a sentence that uses the word, “you”: “In today’s feminist society, you either serve the female imperative or you’re a Neanderthal who is out of touch with the times.”<sup>176</sup> As a result, there is the potential for readers to finish the article feeling as if they must do something to “fix” their society that has led to these awful choices being the only options.

The commenters seemingly craving to be part of the ingroup that Savage represents begin to parrot not only his ideology, but also his wording. One particularly notable example questions: “So you know when things really took a wrong ‘left turn?’ It was when women started burning

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<sup>174</sup> “Corey Savage,” *Return of Kings*, <http://www.returnofkings.com/author/skoll>.

<sup>175</sup> Corey Savage, “7 WAYS MODERN WOMEN TREAT MEN LIKE DOGS,” *Return of Kings*, September 5, 2016, <http://www.returnofkings.com/95233/7-ways-modern-women-treat-men-like-dogs>.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

their bras in the 60s. . . . Others might argue you need to go back to the 20s and women's voting rights, but the real attitude rebellion, in action, from females happened in the 60s and has been men have been getting ass raped ever since."<sup>177</sup> We can see in this quote two uses of yous in an effort to enflame readers, as well as once again some general statements with the use of "others might argue." This skillfully gives the illusion of credibility without there actually being any of it. Finally, the comment ends with a remark linking feminism to homosexuality, both of which many misogynistic men connect to being weakened. The fear tends to lead to heterosexual men developing violent feelings towards gay folks.<sup>178</sup>

A fascinating example of how important ingroup status is to the men of *Return of the Kings* can be found in one of the few articles written by a woman, "Feminism is Making it Harder for Feminine Women to Find a Masculine Man," by Layla Jax who describes herself as one the few "genuinely feminine women left in western culture" as well as "an avid crusader against the feminist regime." In the article she claims that she wishes to prioritize the men in her life: "His wish will be my command." She also accuses women of mistreating men: "there are too many women today trying to cuckold men. . . . ride the cock carousel. . . . and generally make minimal effort to even attempt to be of any value to a real man. It's a sorry to state of affairs, and I completely blame it on the female of the species, as usual they've ended up causing more harm than good."<sup>179</sup> As with the religious history discussed in chapter one, it is women who carry the blame. Blaming women is nothing new for this site and on the face of it, Jax's

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Adam D. Hudepohl, Dominic J. Parrott, and Amos Zeichner, "Heterosexual Men's Anger in Response to Male Homosexuality: Effects of Erotic and Non-Erotic Depictions of Male-Male Intimacy and Sexual Prejudice," *J Homosex*, Vol. 57, no. 8. 2010. 1022-1038. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2936486/>.

<sup>179</sup> Layla Jax, "FEMINISM IS MAKING IT HARDER FOR FEMININE WOMEN TO FIND A MASCULINE MAN," *Return of Kings*, August 22, 2018, <http://www.returnofkings.com/188835/feminism-is-making-it-harder-for-feminine-women-to-find-a-masculine-man>.

article would seem to fit with many of the other articles on the website with its claims that feminists are creating too many “feminine men” and that women should prioritize men above anything else.<sup>180</sup>

Yet, the commenters refuse to accept her with one claiming that she is a fake. Another one notes that if the author is ugly, then there is no pointing in listening to her.<sup>181</sup> This points to how perhaps unconsciously the men recognize that if they accept this woman’s voice, which while in complete agreement with them, could still potentially open the door for them being forced to accept that women do have something to contribute to their ingroup. This idea is clearly threatening, so rather than confront the idea, it is easier to simply shut her down. As Nagle pointed out, ingroups tend to start think about protecting and promoting the prestige of one another rather than the ideas they allegedly support. Therefore, the fact that Jax espouses their ideology is a moot point. In the minds of the men, she is not like them and she can never become part of them.

Another common element of ingroups is the tendency to denigrate any ideas that do not match up with the ingroup's ideology. This is fully revealed in two articles that deal with the subject of rape. Mitch Smith’s “My Rape” claims that rape has become akin to a “pet” or an “imaginary friend,” as well as something that has become competitive for women: “Whose was the most embarrassing rape? Who was raped at prom? Whose been raped by a famous person?”<sup>182</sup> Likewise, Rod Berne in his article, “4 Reasons Why Women Make False Rape Allegations” claims that rape has become a fun activity for women since they crave attention and this is a way they can gain social status: “If a girl wants to leap forward in the Victimhood

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Mitch Smith “My Rape,” *Return of Kings*, July 4, 2018, <http://www.returnofkings.com/181576/my-rape>.



Olympics and gain social points, she can falsely accuse a man of rape. Nobody is higher status on a college campus than a rape survivor.”<sup>183</sup> This is obviously false when one considers how women like Dr. Ford receive death threats and are forced to leave their job after her testifying against men like Brett Kavanaugh.<sup>184</sup> Both of these examples show the authors paying little heed any other ideology than their own. Additionally, they deliberately try to exaggerate differences between men and women by painting women as attention seeking creatures, which serves as an attempt to further bolster the status of men.

A final example of a website that serves to bolster the status of men can be found on the Reddit forum page, *The Red Pill*. The page currently has 300,000 subscribers and on their introduction page, the moderator once again shows an assumption of structures by claiming feminism has infiltrated the United States: “Our culture has become a feminist culture. A president cannot be elected today without succumbing to the feminist narrative and paying them tribute. . . . How many times has the debate hinged on women's pay gap - which is a myth that gets lip service because if you don't you're a misogynist!”<sup>185</sup> Curiously, the introduction then goes on to argue that there is no ill will towards feminists, since they have a right to pursue happiness. However, feminism is allegedly a “sexual strategy” as “It puts women into the best position they can find, to select mates, to determine when they want to switch mates, to locate the best DNA possible, and to garner the most resources they can individually achieve.”<sup>186</sup> Therefore, the author argues men have to learn how to adapt and that is what *the Red Pill* is for.

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<sup>183</sup> Rod Berne, “4 Reasons why Women Make False Rape Allegations,” *Return of Kings*, April 9, 2016, <http://www.returnofkings.com/84518/4-reasons-why-women-make-false-rape-accusations>.

<sup>184</sup> Chantal Da Silva, “KAVANAUGH ACCUSER CHRISTINE BLASEY FORD FORCED OUT OF HOME AFTER DEATH THREATS: LAWYERS,” *Newsweek*, September 9, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/kavanaugh-accuser-christine-blasey-ford-forced-out-home-after-death-threats-1127334>.

<sup>185</sup> “Almost a hundred Subscribers! Welcome newcomers,” *The Red Pill*, November 8, 2012, [http://archive.is/20150610190226/www.reddit.com/r/TheRedPill/comments/12v1hf/almost\\_a\\_hundred\\_subscribers\\_welcome\\_newcomers/#selection-2269.1-2269.211](http://archive.is/20150610190226/www.reddit.com/r/TheRedPill/comments/12v1hf/almost_a_hundred_subscribers_welcome_newcomers/#selection-2269.1-2269.211).

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

An example of content from *the Red Pill* is the post, “Having a serious relationship in your 20's [sic] is a waste of time.” The word, “you” and its deviations are mentioned seventeen times in an effort to grab the attention of reader. The post then goes on to spout a generalization made to sound specific as it claims “99% of the girls. . . . are emotional wrecks that don’t have any idea what they want.”<sup>187</sup> Therefore, the poster offers alternatives with two of its sentences starting with active verbs in an attempt to empower its points: “Meet girls and have as much sex as you want” and “Get a good group of guy friends that are loyal to you.”<sup>188</sup> We can also see in these two sentences that is common ingroup behavior, there an attempt to bolster the ingroup at the expense of the outgroup. In this case, other women and men are treated as disposable tools that are only there to bolster the status of the men reading.

Another example of content from *The Red Pill* is the post, “How to stop being a pushover.” This post shows one of the clearest examples of believing in structures and expecting everyone else to when it mentions why it believes women will do whatever they want to men unless they put their foot down: “Women, as many of us know, will do anything they want unless they’re frequently checked and brought back to reality by a man. They won’t hesitate to shit all over other people to make themselves happier.”<sup>189</sup> The use of “as many of know” is a clear example of believing in a structure and expecting everyone to share in that belief. The post then demonstrates a curious contradictory nature as it asserts women actually appreciate men’s confidence:

every woman I’ve been with. . . . has told me how much they love my confidence, and how much they love being told what to do, “even though they’re not normally like that.” That sound coming out of their mouth that sounds like words? That’s complete fucking

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<sup>187</sup> “Having a serious relationship in your 20's is a waste of time,” *The Red Pill*, N.d. [https://www.reddit.com/r/TheRedPill/comments/35qcog/having\\_a\\_serious\\_relationship\\_in\\_your\\_20s\\_is\\_a/](https://www.reddit.com/r/TheRedPill/comments/35qcog/having_a_serious_relationship_in_your_20s_is_a/).

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> “How to Stop being a Pushover,” *The Red Pill*, May 6, 2015, <https://archive.is/Q41K8#selection-1923.409-1923.463>.

affirmation that you have them tied around your finger and that you can do anything you want.<sup>190</sup>

The post wraps up by using a combination of an active verb and the word “you” to make its most critical point: that men have the right to demand sex from a woman: “Tell a girl who has you pegged for. . . . someone in the friend zone – that you don’t have time for her bullshit right now.”<sup>191</sup> Once again, this sentence serves to bolster men by making it seem as they are taking charge of their lives while tearing down women, and thus serves as another key example of ingroup mentality.

Through looking at how rape culture is expressed on these websites, it is evident how toxic ideas are now readily available for people to consume. While once one had to go the bookstore or go to rallies, now one is a metaphorical “click away” from these toxic groups. Also, significant is these posts are not atrociously written from a stylistic perspective. and can seem professional if one is not acquainted with academic writing. This builds on the prior texts mentioned, such as the works by George Gilder which also could come across as authoritative. Combining this with the manipulative way they are written allows them to spin a web on people who do not know better. Their availability is also highly problematic as only *the Red Pill* has a warning before someone starts reading, and that is a disclaimer that there is shocking content if one continues. This would obviously not dissuade most people, and indeed would likely make them more likely to continue. Perhaps most importantly, these essays point to part of the reason why toxicity towards women and feminisms continues to be pervasive, as well as how a culture of misogyny, that is rape culture, continues to be fomented. Exploring how toxic ideas on women

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

are circulated is just one step, however, as the next chapter will show how toxicity truly is everywhere.

## CHAPTER THREE: A TOXIC WORLD OF ENTERTAINMENT

### Rape Culture and Video Games

The toxicity and ideas that reduce women to mere sexual objects found on men's activist websites can be found all across our media, including video games, films, and even news outlets. Additionally, the bullying women face in schools is also in places like video game chat rooms and social media comments. Hence, the media that helps to promulgate these ideas will be examined as well as the potential long-term effects of when one is exposed to the media. After all, it is easy to dismiss something as "just a game" or "something to do for fun." It will be shown, however that flippant disregard should not be casually used on these media products, since the messages they carry have very real and very damaging long-term effects of making one think the portrayals one sees, such as James Bond forcing himself upon a woman, are normal behavior. Recall that rape culture is an environment where male sexual dominance, whether it be seduction or violently assaulting a woman, is normalized and pervasive. The media has a large role in both reinforcing the idea that those things as normal and even something to aspire to.

The video games industry is massive. In 2017, total revenue was around 138 billion dollars world-wide.<sup>192</sup> Furthermore, as of 2015 seventy two percent of teens play video games including eighty four percent of all teen boys.<sup>193</sup> Such is the popularity of games that teams of gamers come together in what is known as eSports where teams play shooter games, such as *Call of Duty* or *Overwatch*. Indeed, eSports are so popular that the eSports league raked in 906

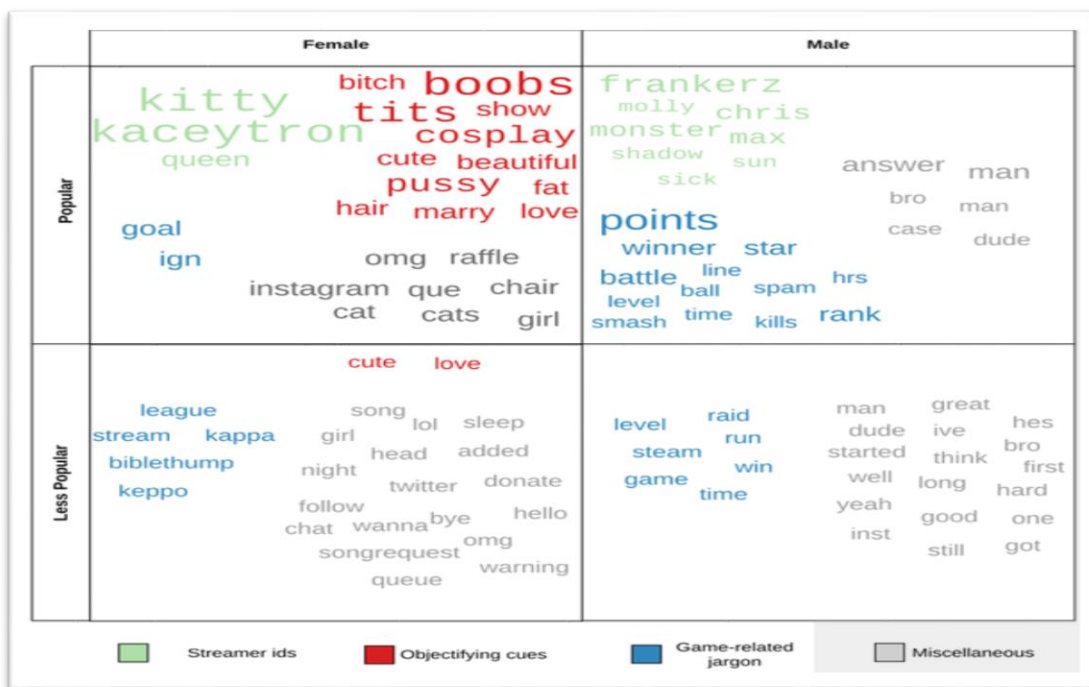
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<sup>192</sup> Kellie Ell, "Video game industry is booming with continued revenue," *CNBC*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/18/video-game-industry-is-booming-with-continued-revenue.html>.

<sup>193</sup> "72% of Teens Play Video Games; Rises to 84% of Teen Boys," *Pew Research Center*, August 4, 2015, [http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/2015-08-06\\_teens-and-friendships\\_3-01/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/2015-08-06_teens-and-friendships_3-01/).

million dollars in revenue in 2018 with the number expected to rise.<sup>194</sup> It is safe to say that video games are one of the most popular and diverse forms of entertainment on the planet. Therefore, it is all the more troubling that many of the games, and indeed the gaming community, contribute to spreading toxic messages about women.

The stereotypical image of a gamer is probably that of a male, but in fact many women play video games as well. In 2015, a study found that fifty nine percent of teenage girls play video games.<sup>195</sup> Despite, or possibly because there are high numbers of women playing video games, women face abuse and harassment from male users. A clear example of this is a 2017 study that looked at men and women playing online games and the words used in the chat which is where games can type messages to one another as one plays. (see figure #1)



<sup>194</sup> AJ Willingham, "What is eSports? A look at an explosive billion-dollar industry," CNN, August 27, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/27/us/esports-what-is-video-game-professional-league-madden-trnd/index.html>.

<sup>195</sup> "72% of Teens Play Video Games; Rises to 84% of Teen Boys," *Pew Research Center*, August 4, 2015, [http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/2015-08-06\\_teens-and-friendships\\_3-01/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/2015-08-06_teens-and-friendships_3-01/).

The study found that when women started playing, the words used went from things like “points” or “winner” to words that are often tied to sexual harassment like “boobs” or “pussy.”<sup>196</sup>

These insults tend to start out with attacking them solely because they are female, and thus the insults bear a striking similarity to the insults seen at schools as discussed in chapter one. For example, gamer Jeena van Deventer was playing *Team Fortress 2*, an online multiplayer game, when suddenly the insults started coming in: “OMMMGGGG YOU’RE A GIIIIIRRLLLL! We got a girl in here, boys!”<sup>197</sup> Before long, however, the insults had elevated sexual harassment with profane questions, such as “Have you got any NUDE pics? Do you fuck guys who like games?”<sup>198</sup> This culminated in her hearing another of the players loudly masturbating on the voice chat which the other male users found deeply amusing. Thus, the solidification of ingroup ties as discussed in chapter two are fully evident here as well.

The ingroup ties are made stark by how Jonathan Quamina, tried to deflect any criticism with the claiming this was just how communities of men work: “As a female you can't get upset if something is said that is obscene if you're hanging out in a room full of guys. It's like going to a strip club as a female and getting upset that the chicks are all naked.”<sup>199</sup> Essentially, the claim here is that women and their feelings do not matter. All that matters is men and the exclusionary communities they form, which again ties back into chapter one and how women and men come to think of themselves as other. After all, van Deventer is not alone as other women as many other women have faced sexual directed remarks. The support group website, “Fat, Ugly, or

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<sup>196</sup> Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia, “Can online gaming ditch its sexist ways?” *The Conversation*, November 16, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/can-online-gaming-ditch-its-sexist-ways-74493>.

<sup>197</sup> Kate O'Halloran, “‘Hey dude, do this’: the last resort for female gamers escaping online abuse,” *The Guardian*, October 23, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/oct/24/hey-dude-do-this-the-last-resort-for-female-gamers-escaping-online-abuse>.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Jonathan Quamina quoted by James Fletcher “Sexual harassment in the world of video gaming,” *BBC News*, June 12, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-18280000>.

Slutty” archived some of the notable attacks, such as “How did my geneticals [sic] feel on your face.”<sup>200</sup>

It is not just women who play the games that come under attack, however, but also women who are willing to call out the toxic elements of the games. As previously mentioned, there is the case of video game reviewer, Anita Sarkesian, who faced an overwhelming amount of abuse. She created a YouTube video series called “Tropes vs. Women in Video Games,” which led to her facing even more harassment. This harassment ties into the broader historical trend of not letting women have “permission” to speak in public. Consider how in Chapter one, a man defended himself against rape charges by claiming that to condemn him would be to believe the word of a woman.<sup>201</sup> As Judith Butler argues, when someone performs one’s gender wrong, it leads to “a set of punishments both obvious and indirect.”<sup>202</sup> Essentially, Butler is arguing that when women go outside of traditionally accept forms of femininity, they will be regarded as more easily attackable.

Therefore, it is fascinating and arguably even more disturbing that Sarkesian faced so much abuse, since she goes out of way to strike an even tone and adhere to what society deems acceptable as feminine practices with one notable exception. At the beginning of her video, she notes “As always, please keep in mind that it’s entirely possible to be critical of some aspects of a piece of media while still finding other parts valuable or enjoyable.”<sup>203</sup> What’s more, she wears makeup and talks in an even tone throughout. She simply explains what she means and shows

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<sup>200</sup> “Soft Touch,” *You Play Video Games? So are you Fat, Ugly, or Slutty*, October 9, 2013, <http://fatuglyorslutty.com/>.

<sup>201</sup> Freedman, 17.

<sup>202</sup> Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 528. doi:10.2307/3207893.

<sup>203</sup> “Women as Background Decoration: Part 1 - Tropes vs Women in Video Games,” YouTube Video, 31:43, “FeministFrequency,” June 16, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZPSrwedvsg>.



examples. It is the most straightforward presentation one could give. Thus, one is forced to conclude that the one exception to her following traditionally feminine behavior is she is a woman talking about things that are regarded “male.” As a result, she receives the punishments that Butler argues people receive when they venture away from what is deemed permissible for them to do. After all, it is not the mere fact that she was talking about and pointing out the problem with the media that was the problem. There is another YouTube reviewer, Pop Culture Detective, who breaks down misogyny in films, but most likely thanks to his being male, his comment section is quite supportive and free of the vitriol Sarkesian attracted.

Some of the vitriol has been previously mentioned as there were epithets sent her way, many of which were of a sexual nature. Things took an even more serious turn when she began to receive threats from one specific twitter user, Kevin Dobson, who had found her home address and claimed he wanted to “rape [her] to death” and “bite the side of [her] neck and drink [her] blood. When she ignored him, these remarks turned even more violent including a threat to kill her parents. As a result, she was temporarily forced to flee her home.<sup>204</sup> Even today, she is someone that much of the male internet world treats with scorn rather than sympathy. As of March 2019, if one types her name into the YouTube search engine, the second result is “8 Anita Sarkesian Fails.” Then if one scrolls down, one finds various videos attacking the people who like her.

Setting aside the gaming community, many of the games themselves carry abhorrent messages about women. This has arguably been the case since the initial creation of the video games. In 1982, the game, *Custer’s Revenge* was released. In that game, the player’s objective

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<sup>204</sup> Adi Robertson, “Trolls drive Anita Sarkeesian out of her house to prove misogyny doesn't exist,” *The Verge*, August 27, 2014, <https://www.theverge.com/2014/8/27/6075179/anita-sarkeesian-says-she-was-driven-out-of-house-by-threats>.

was to play as General Custer while he raped a Native American woman who was tied to a pole. That was essentially it in terms of gameplay, save for the dodging of some arrows as one continued to rape the woman. The substance of this game becomes even more disturbing when one considers that Custer was a man who specialized in acts of total war, such as his raid on Tsêhéstáno, Black Kettle, and his village. He was also well known for taking female Native American prisoners whom he presumably raped.<sup>205</sup> The game thus recreated the abuses of war as something fun for anyone to play. When the game met with criticism, the creator Joel Miller shrugged it off with the assertion that the game was simply depicting seduction, not rape, which intriguingly connects to how the rape of Native American women by United States soldiers is often depicted. The word rape is rarely used as for example, historian Peter Cozzens prefers to use the term “bed fellow.”<sup>206</sup> When one compares that to the discussion of German women who were raped by Soviet soldiers at the end of World War II, one can see the prejudice towards non-white women as discussed in chapter one has not gone away. Still, the game was eventually pulled, but not before it successfully sold over 80,000 copies.<sup>207</sup>

Portraying women in a way that reduces them to purely being sexual objects which men must conquer or exploit through violence is one of the critical elements that make up rape culture, and is a toxic practice in video games that continues today. For instance, just consider the covers of many video games. In 2001, a study found that thirty-six percent of video games rated E for everyone had pictures of people with partial nudity. Of those covers, a whopping sixty-seven percent feature images of women who are partially nude. If one takes into games

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<sup>205</sup> Peter Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 102-103.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>207</sup> Luke Plunkett, “Rape, Racism & Repetition: This is Probably the Worst Game Ever Made,” *Kotaku*, October 7, 2011, <https://kotaku.com/rape-racism-repetition-this-is-probably-the-worst-g-5847507>.

rated “teen” or “mature,” forty-eight percent of covers features characters partially nude with those characters being women seventy-five percent of the time. Furthermore, forty-six percent of those women had large breasts and other highly sexualized features.<sup>208</sup> One might be inclined to dismiss this study as somewhat dated, but one need only look at the cover art for *Grand Theft Auto V* to see that this is very much still in practice (see figure #2).<sup>209</sup>



*Grand Theft Auto V* is a hugely popular game. After all, as of 2018, it had sold ninety-five million copies.<sup>210</sup> This is highly troubling when one considers how many toxic ideas there are in it. In the game, one is given a choice of playing three lead characters, all male, while the women are there to be leered at. For example, one female character has “skank” tattooed across her back.

Another instance is that one of the “missions” the player is given is to assist a member of the paparazzi as he tries to photograph a woman’s genitals.<sup>211</sup> The game’s encouragement of players to sexually assault the women in the game does not stop here, however, as the game also allows one to purchase a woman and then choose from a menu to decide what sexual acts she will perform for the player’s pleasure. Afterwards, the gamer is given the choice of killing her or not,

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<sup>208</sup> Stacy L. Smith and Emily Moyer-Guse, “Voluptuous Vixens and Macho Males: A Look at the Portrayal of Gender and Sexuality in Video Games,” in *Sex in Consumer Culture: The Erotic Content of Media and Marketing*, Eds. Tom Reichert and Jacqueline Lambiase, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 51-67.

<sup>209</sup> Additionally, the woman seems to be coded ethnic which again suggests a degrading treatment of non-white women.

<sup>210</sup> Jeff Grubb, “Grand Theft Auto V is just 5 million copies away from 100 million in sales,” *PC Gaming*, May 16, 2018, <https://venturebeat.com/2018/05/16/grand-theft-auto-v-is-just-5-million-copies-away-from-100-million-in-sales/>.

<sup>211</sup> Tom Hoggins, “Grand Theft Auto V is designed deliberately to degrade women,” *The Telegraph*, October 4, 2013, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10355275/Grand-Theft-Auto-V-is-designed-deliberately-to-degrade-women.html>.

though the game encourages one to kill her so one can get money in the game.<sup>212</sup> Fascinatingly, when I mentioned I found this troubling to a college classmate of mine, he looked at me bewildered for a moment, and then said “Well yeah, but the women are prostitutes” as if that made everything all right. This sort of callousness shows not only how problematic these games are, but also how women and girls are regarded to have little value in our society, especially if they are considered “fallen women.” As previously mentioned, this dates back to at least the Ancient Hebrews who codified if a woman were raped, she would either be stoned or death or be forced to marry the rapist.

Game companies continue to release content that is degrading to women. During the course of writing this chapter, a game called *Rape Day* was released. The game’s description is telling: “Verbally harass, kill, and rape women as you choose to progress the story. It's a dangerous world with no laws. The zombies enjoy eating the flesh off warm humans and brutally raping them but you are the most dangerous rapist in town.”<sup>213</sup> Due to public outcry, the game was pulled, but this is not always the case. *Super Seducer*, which I played in order to better understand, tries to manipulate the viewer into enjoying misogynistic content.

*Super Seducer* was released on March 2, 2018. The game takes players through various scenarios of meeting women or attempting to seduce them.<sup>214</sup> The scenarios can range from greeting a woman walking to the street to moving out of the so-called “friend zone.” The fact that the game seems repelled by the idea of a male-female friendship that is purely platonic is

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<sup>212</sup> Malika Saada Saar, “Grand Theft Auto V and the Culture of Violence Against Women,” *The Huffington Post*, February 8, 2015, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/malika-saada-saar/grand-theft-auto-v-and-the-culture-of-violence-against-women\\_b\\_6288528.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/malika-saada-saar/grand-theft-auto-v-and-the-culture-of-violence-against-women_b_6288528.html).

<sup>213</sup> Tyler Wilde, Evah Lahti, Fraser Brown, “Steam is currently listing a game called Rape Day in which you play as a 'serial killer rapist,’” *PC Gamer*, March 4, 2019, <https://www.pcgamer.com/steam-is-currently-listing-a-game-called-rape-day-in-which-you-play-as-a-serial-killer-rapist/>

<sup>214</sup> The wording “dealing with them” might seem harsh, but I believe it captures well how the game views women as objects.

telling in how it displays its contempt for women. Each scenario begins with shots of the woman who is the focus of the exercise in question, whether it be “Girl on Street” or “Girl in bar.” The scenes are always shot in an incredibly leering way that encourages the player to revel in getting the opportunity to ogle the woman. A player’s typical response to seeing women plays into what psychologists call “System 1,” people’s impulsive response to a stimulus, in this case the assumed male pleasure of seeing pretty women. Normally, there would also be what psychologists call “System 2,” which causes more complicated emotions to take over and help one actually think through the immediate response.<sup>215</sup> Cleverly, however, the game does not give the player time for “System 2” to take effect. Rather than the player developing a response, the game gives the player the response.

The available responses within the game act as advice designed for one to have sex with a woman. What she says or how she acts does not matter in the game’s view. For the game, and thus for the players, what matters is the player and as such the player’s ability to manipulate women. Therefore, throughout the game, women are objects for male pleasure. In case there is any doubt of this, the game has a tutor who talks to the player after each choice. If the player selects the “wrong” choice, he will talk to the player on a bed by himself. If one gets a “half-right” choice, the coach will be flanked by two clothed women. If one selects the “right” choice, then he will be flanked by the same two women clad in nothing but bra and underwear wearing unchanging vapid smiles. Thus, the message is clear: if one is successful at seducing a woman, one can reduce her to nothing more than an object for your pleasure.

History and media studies are apt in their analyses about how such a game may affect society, but they leave the door open for people to dismiss those affected as aberrations.

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<sup>215</sup> Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2013), 21.

Additionally, history and media studies do not capture the change that occurs in a player's brain which is critical to understand, since that change as captured by scientific studies allows us to see that these games are devastating to anyone who plays them for too long. Thus, they are not merely fun "games," but rather tools of oppression that have long lasting damage. Therefore, some use of neuroscience research is useful as scholars in this field help us to understand how the games permanently affect the player's brains. It is important to consider that using scientific sources for seemingly non-scientific works is not unprecedented. For example, Brian Fagan, used tree rings to discuss how Europe was plagued by environmental problems.<sup>216</sup> More pertinently, there is historian, Daniel Lord Smail who used neuroscience for his book, *On Deep History and the Brain*, in which he analyzed how things like prayers affect the brain. Furthermore, he points out that "History is an inherently interdisciplinary practice."<sup>217</sup> What's more I have experience in this regard as in my essay, "Affect and Film Music: A Brief History," I used neuroscience to show how film music affected the brain.<sup>218</sup> Hence, using neuroscience to analyze video games in a paper that has mostly been history and media studies makes sense

*Super Seducer* is not simply a game that has no real effect on the player. Studies have found that video games lead to people feeling the same emotional reactions as the characters they are playing. Hence players "may experience the same affective processes—albeit usually to a lesser degree—as they would if they themselves were in danger or pursuing a goal."<sup>219</sup> *Super Seducer* accomplishes this manipulation often by having the people on screen constantly laugh

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<sup>216</sup> Brian Fagan, *The Little Ice Age. How Climate Made History 1300-1850* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 13.

<sup>217</sup> Daniel Lord Smail, "History Meets Neuroscience," *History News Network*, September 3, 2013, <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/147619>.

<sup>218</sup> William Wehrs, "Affect and Film Music: A Brief History" In *The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism*. Ed. Donald R. Wehrs and Thomas Blake (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 735-752.

<sup>219</sup> Amanda E. Guitart, Daniel J. Glass, Glenn Geher, Michael K. Suvak, "Situation-specific emotional states: Testing Nesse and Ellsworth's (2009) model of emotions for situations that arise in goal pursuit using virtual world software," *Current Psychology*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-9830-x>.

and smile. This is a clever point as it appeals to a human's mirror neurons. Neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni explains what exactly mirror neurons do: "When I see you smiling, my mirror neurons for smiling fire up, too, initiating a cascade of neural activity that evokes the feeling we typically associate with a smile. I don't need to make any inference on what you are feeling, I experience immediately and effortlessly (in a milder form, of course) what you are experiencing."<sup>220</sup> Hence, when the women laugh and flirt with the guy on screen, the player will begin to feel as if they are flirting and laughing with her or him.

Playing these games can have long lasting neural effects, making it impossible for one to simply turn off the game and then revert back to pre-played neural state. Neuroscientists, Chai M. Tyng, Hafeez U. Amin, Mohamad N. M. Saad and Aamir S Malik all argue that emotions allow for one to better remember: "cognition is in the service of satisfying emotional and homeostatic needs. This infers that cognition modulates, activates and inhibits emotion. Hence, emotion is not a simple linear event but rather a feedback process that autonomously restores an individual's state of equilibrium."<sup>221</sup> Thus, because *Super Seducer* is predicated on emotionally arousing the viewer, it makes sure people remember its ideas and absorb them. In other words, playing the game, emotionally arouses the players, causing *him* to seek improvement within the game, while also avoiding depression. This would obviously spill over into one's real life. Additionally, emotional information becomes easier to retrieve, so once one plays the game, there is a strong possibility that one will go back to the memories from this game when encountering women, as there is a positive feeling associated with the memories. This is all

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<sup>220</sup> Marco Iacoboni, interview by Jonah Lehrer, "The Mirror Neuron Revolution: Explaining What Makes Humans Social." *Scientific American*, June 1, 2008, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-mirror-neuron-revolut/>.

<sup>221</sup> Chai M. Tyng, Hafeez U. Amin, Mohamad N. M. Saad and Aamir S Malik, "The Influences of Emotion on Learning and Memory." *Frontiers in Psychology*. August 24, 2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5573739/>

highly problematic when one recalls that the game is designed to make the player view women purely as sexual objects rather than individuals, which can be plainly seen either by how one of the aforementioned scenarios is to get out of the so-called “friend zone” or the aforementioned leering shots.

The damaging nature of video games is extensive. Their concomitant online communities are often ripe with sexual harassment of women, whether female players or women like Anita Sarkesian trying to bring attention to how many video games seek to degrade women. What is more, the games themselves often carry messages that reduce women to mere sexual objects. Video games are an integral force in rape culture, but critically they are only symptomatic of the real world abuse women face, problems that often have ideological, political, and social support. Video games are not alone in creating images that degrade women, however, with films being guilty of this as well.

### **Rape Culture in the James Bond Films**

Films have also been carrying the same misogynistic messages as many video games for far longer. Laura Mulvey’s landmark essay, “the Male Gaze,” discusses how in Classical Hollywood films, women are positioned to be passive objects of men. Men tend to control the narrative of films, whereas women are “isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualized.”<sup>222</sup> Along with the way films are shot, it is important to recognize films, like video games, do not just function as mere entertainment. Rather, films also have a powerful neurological effect on the viewer.

In the book, *Flicker: Your Brain on Movies*, psychologist Jeffrey Zacks describes what he calls the “mirror rule.” When one watches a movie, one feels an urge to do something similar to

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<sup>222</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press 1999), 839-840..



what the characters on screen are doing. The part of the brain that is responsible for this is the pre-frontal cortex which also happens to be the slowest part of the brain to develop, hence why children and teens tend to have more visceral reactions to films.<sup>223</sup> Thus, children and teens are the most likely to internalize what is on screen and attempt to replicate in their own lives. This is troubling when one considers the *James Bond* films, the messages, they carry, and how many children and teens are exposed to them. Recall, Roger Ebert said that James Bond was a character all young boys aspire to be: “Not every man would like to be James Bond, but every boy would. In one adventure after another, he. . . seduces, or is seduced by, stupendously sexy women.”<sup>224</sup> In that quote, we see Ebert flippantly referring to Bond’s attitude towards women. Setting aside that Ebert’s own attitude is problematic, Bond and Bond movies’ portrayal of women needs a far more in-depth analysis

First, it is important to concede that I am someone who enjoys the *James Bond* films. I think the action set pieces they have created over the years are remarkable, their dialogue has often been sharply written for an action franchise, and there is a highly appealing sense of sophistication. None of this changes the fact, however, the film series has over its fifty-year history consistently had a disparaging attitude towards women. It is important to reflect on that, and not just say “Well yeah there’s that problem, but it’s all in good fun.” That is not good enough for the Bond persona is specifically marketed to appeal to men and teenage boys with the idea that Bond is cool, and if one wants to be cool, then one has to act like him.<sup>225</sup> Obviously,

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<sup>223</sup> Jeffrey Zacks, *Flicker: Your Brain on Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6, 18.

<sup>224</sup> Roger Ebert, “Goldfinger,” *Chicago Sun Times*, January 31, 1999, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-goldfinger-1964>.

<sup>225</sup> Timothy M. Hoxha, “The Masculinity of James Bond: Sexism, Misogyny, Racism, and the Female Character,” In *James Bond in World and Popular Culture : The Films are Not Enough*. Eds Robert G. Weiner, B. Lynn Whitfield, and Jack Becker (New Castle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 195.

this is problematic when one considers the misogyny apparent in every Bond film from *Dr. No* (dir. Terrence Young, 1962) to the most recent *Spectre* (dir. Sam Mendes, 2015).

One element of the misogyny is apparent in how the women are shot. There are of course the opening credits of every Bond film which typically consist of silhouetted naked women in a clear effort to titillate the viewer. In the second ever Bond film, *From Russia with Love* (dir. Terrence Young, 1963), we see shots are of women belly dancing with the camera focused on the woman's belly, bottom, and cleavage. Similarly, in the most recent Bond film, *Spectre* (dir. Sam Mendes, 2015), we see women writhing around with tentacles around them. In all these cases, women are being put on display and not being allowed to do anything other than things that add to their value as objects for viewers to take pleasure looking at. This stands in stark contrast to one of the rare Bond films that has opening credits with no naked women, *Casino Royale* (dir. Martin Campbell, 2006). In that film, we see silhouetted men, but they are not dancing around. Rather they are fighting with one another and being active. Thus, the opening credits firmly establish that women are meant to be passive objects, whereas men are meant to be active forces, which of course ties into how rape culture seeks to reduce women to be passive objects for men to have sex with.

Adding to the idea of reducing women to passive objects during the opening credits is how sometimes the songs also carry toxic messages. For example, *The Spy Who Loved Me* (dir. Lewis Gibert, 1977) has the opening song "Nobody does it better" whose lyrics are comprised of flattering words for the men listening: "Nobody does it better/Makes me feel sad for the rest/Nobody does it half as good as you/Baby, you're the best." Critically, this song works on the same level as *Super Seducer* as in both cases they are making men feel like they have sexual prowess and control over a woman who is practically worshipful to them. Another Bond song

that carries that worshipful idea is the song, “For Your Eyes Only” which includes some of these lyrics: “For your eyes only, only for you./The love I know you need in me, the fantasy you've freed in me./Only for you, only for you.” Once again, song is suggesting that it is delightful for women to be the objects of a man.

The power of music extends into the famous Bond musical motif. Setting aside the opening credits of *Dr. No*, the first time we ever hear it is when Bond introduces himself with his signature catchphrase “Bond, James Bond.” He then proceed to seduce a woman, Sylvia Trench, all while the silky Bond theme plays in the background. This is highly clever as John A. Sloboda argues that “music . . . creates an environment in which the distinction between attributing detected emotion to oneself as opposed to an outside source or agent is particularly fluid.”<sup>226</sup> This is partly because, as Daniel J. Levitin points out, “music activates . . . motor sequences and our sympathetic system”; it also “increases our alertness through modulation of norepinephrine and epinephrine and taps into our motor response system through cortisol production.”<sup>227</sup> Thus, as Bond is seducing the woman, the music is seducing the viewer to see no problem with this behavior, and in fact to root for Bond throughout as he treats woman as a sexual object.

Reducing women to passive sexual objects is also fully evident in how the women are shot and, or costumed. The first “Bond girl” was Honey Ryder from *Dr. No* and when we first meet the character, she is coming out of the water in a bikini. The camera encourages the viewer to leer at the sight of the woman as the camera holds on this sight for eleven seconds only to eventually cut back to Bond, the character we are clearly supposed to identify with, enjoying the

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<sup>226</sup> Patrik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda, “Psychological Perspectives on Music and Emotion” in Patrik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda, *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research and Application* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001), 87.

<sup>227</sup> Daniel J. Levitin, *The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature* (New York: Dutton, 2009); quoted in G. Gabrielle Starr, *Feeling Beauty: The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 86-87.

sight. Another example of this is from the film, *The World is Not Enough* (dir. Michael Apted, 1999). Therein, a Nuclear Physicist is first seen parading around in a tank-top and shorts. The reduction of women to purely sexual characteristics extends into the names many of the women are given. Here is a sampling, Kissy Suzuki, Jenny Flex, Octopussy, Honey Ryder, Holly Goodhead, Xenia Onatopp. and the infamous Pussy Galore. The effect of giving women names like this is to effectively reduce them to being purely there for Bond to have sex with. Although these names were from a time prior to our modern sensitivities, there are important issues that remain at present. First, the older films are still consumed by children and teens today, and thus the messages they carry about women are still relevant. Second, the modern films have attempted to carry on the naming convention in ways that are “acceptable,” but of course have their own serious problems.

For example, *Casino Royale*, decides to play around with this trope. Rather than giving the woman an absurd sexually suggestive name, the film instead decides to have Bond jokingly say to his contact, Vesper Lynd, that her cover name will be “Ms. Stephanie Broadchest.” Her reaction is outrage, but we are not meant to identify with her outrage. Rather, the film is trying to get the viewer to knowingly laugh at how the name pays homage to the previously mentioned sexually suggestive names. There are two problems with this: first it attempts to deflect any serious criticism of the naming convention by acting as if is all in good fun. Second, it suggests calling a woman “broadchest” is something flirtatiously silly when of course it is actually lecherous behavior. Another example of the modern films still trying to get away with sexually demeaning names is to put them in the credits. For instance, *Quantum of Solace* (dir. Marc Forster, 2008) includes a character named Agent Fields. She is never given a first name throughout the film, but when one watches the credits, one finds out her name is Strawberry, a

fruit commonly associated with sex. Thus, the naming convention continues even if it is either “lampshaded,” or somewhat hidden.

Now, one might argue that it does not matter what women are called, what matters is how the women actually act in the film, and there is some validity to this. Despite the stereotypical image of the “Bond girl” being a bikini clad damsel in distress, they usually have much more to them than just that. Despite her reductive name, Holly Goodhead, the heroine from *Moonraker* (dir. Lewis Gilbert, 1979), is a strong character in her own right, as she not only works for the CIA, but also is able to fly space shuttles and thus is integral to saving the day. In *Octopussy*, (dir. John Glen, 1983), the titular Octopussy runs her own smuggling empire with its own private army. Furthermore, she blows open the case that secretly contains the Atomic bomb, thus helping to thwart the villain’s plan. Pussy Galore is arguably even more integral to saving the day than James Bond in the film, *Goldfinger*, (dir. Guy Hamilton, 1964). While Bond is captured and essentially helpless, she switches out Goldfinger’s toxic gas for a harmless substitute, which leads to the United States army being able to save the day at the end.

Despite these elements of agency, the depiction of these characters remains problematic. *Octopussy* for instance has a scene where Octopussy closes her bedroom door behind her only for Bond to barge in after her and force her to kiss him. She exclaims “no” to which he responds by continuing to kiss her, at which point she “succumbs” to him and says “oh James” in a romantic way. Hence, the suggestion here is if a woman says no, then one should continue to apply force until she says yes, something echoed by *Super Seducer*’s insistence that so called “friend zones” exist to be broken down by men until women agree to have sex with them. Another example along the same lines is in *Goldfinger* when Bond pushes Pussy Galore down in a barn and forces himself on top of her until she stops struggling. There is even an example of

this phenomenon from *Spectre*, where Bond corners the character, Lucia Sciarra, up against a mirror. Again, this is framed as romantic, rather than an invasion of personal space and destruction of a woman's personal autonomy. We see three examples of how the Bond films frame things that range from sexual harassment to assault to rape as romantic and thus palatable. When one recalls that highly impressionable children and teenagers are watching this, the damage becomes fully evident.

It is clear that the reduction of women to passive objects for men to objectify and have sex with is something strongly represented in our media. Also evident, is that that media has long lasting damage and is not something one can just switch on and off neurologically. If we are to move past harmful ideas like that forcing oneself on a woman is fun or that a woman is only there for men to have sex with, then we have to look at the media we consume and how it helps to bolster those ideas.

## CONCLUSION

Rape culture is all around us and though chapter one showed how it originates in schools, chapter two explained how it builds in online communities, and in chapter three, I have shown how popular media we consume carries toxic messaging against women. It is critical, therefore, to explain how many of the elements of rape culture may culminate in high profile sexual assault accusations. A clear example of this is in some of the reactions to Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's sexual assault allegations against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. Then NBC news *The Today Show* anchor, Meghan Kelly, attacked Dr. Ford claiming her accusations were symptomatic of how men had lost power: "we've swung the pendulum so far back against men, took away their due process rights. They don't have the right to cross examine. They don't have the right to an attorney. They don't have a right to evidence."<sup>228</sup> The obvious suggestion here is that sexual assault survivors are liars and that men are the true victims, ideas that are similar to those discussed on the Men's Activist Websites. There were also the online death threats directed at Dr. Ford, much as Anita Sarkesian received, which forced her to abandon her home.<sup>229</sup> The questioning of the validity of a woman's words as seen in chapter one continues, as seen by a *USA Today* article which claimed absences in her story meant she was less than credible.<sup>230</sup> The story made no effort to explain that absences in her story can sometimes be the result of trauma.

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<sup>228</sup> Megan Kelly quoted by David Edwards, "Megyn Kelly warns women: 'We have swung the pendulum so far against men, took away their due process rights,'" *RawStory*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.rawstory.com/2018/10/megyn-kelly-warns-women-swung-pendulum-far-men-took-away-due-process-rights/>.

<sup>229</sup> Sinéad Baker, "Christine Blasey Ford still can't live at home because of 'unending' death threats after her Kavanaugh testimony, lawyers say," *Business Insider*, October 8, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/christine-blasey-ford-cant-move-home-kavanaugh-testimony-death-threats-2018-10>.

<sup>230</sup> Catherine Cherkasky, "Christine Blasey Ford is no poster child for women's rights: A female attorney's perspective," *USA Today*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2018/10/04/false-accusations-kavanaugh-ford-innocent-column/1488329002/>.

Elements of rape culture extended into the hearing themselves when Senator Chuck Grassley observed in his opening remarks that “Dr. Ford *and* Judge Kavanaugh have been through a terrible couple of weeks.” Thus, he suggested that there was an equivalence one could make between accuser and accused. Even the attempts to defend Dr. Ford tie into rape culture as seen when Senator Dianne Feinstein emphasized all of Dr. Ford’s accomplishments.<sup>231</sup> While on the face of it, there would seem to be nothing wrong this, there is an undercurrent of the idea that if she had not accomplished all of these things, then she would be less than credible. Thus, once again we return to the idea that “fallen women” are not worthy of our time. Through this case, we can see how elements of rape culture reverberate strongly today, and therefore why it is such an important phenomenon to study.

Despite the direness of the reaction to Dr. Ford’s remarks and the overall misogyny discussed in this paper, there is perhaps hope that society is moving in a more positive direction. Though the internet is a hot bed of Men’s Rights Activists, it also can provide valuable space to organize support for survivors of sexual violence. For example, there is the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) that provides a hotline for counselling. There is also Women Organized Against Rape (WOAR), which provides free individual and group counselling for survivors of sexual violence. Additionally, there is the Twitter account, Men Can Stop Rape, which aims to get men to stop committing sexual violence by offering trainings and public awareness campaigns. Films are increasingly moving in a positive direction with the recent Bond film, *Skyfall*, (dir. Sam Mendes, 2012) omitting the so called “Bond girl” all together. Instead,

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<sup>231</sup> Transcript courtesy of Bloomberg Government, “Kavanaugh hearing: Transcript,” *The Washington Post*, September 27, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/national/wp/2018/09/27/kavanaugh-hearing-transcript/?utm\\_term=.72908c7890bf](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/national/wp/2018/09/27/kavanaugh-hearing-transcript/?utm_term=.72908c7890bf).



the leading woman is Bond's boss, M, who he respects and is never demeaning towards.

Additionally, for all the ire Dr. Ford received, she also had immense support from many others.

Rape culture is clearly a massive problem, but enough people in our society are taking steps to better understand and overcome it. That starts today with the recent allegations by women directed Joe Biden whom they accuse of acting improperly. I have heard from someone that these allegations, even if they are true, are just silly. This led to me getting into a twenty-minute shouting match with this as his comments miss the significance of Joe Biden's actions. Sniffing a woman's hair with no regard for her feelings represents how ingrained male privilege is in this country and how it can manifest in subtler forms than rape. Therefore, we must be constantly vigilant and not be afraid to speak out when we believe there is an abuse of power. If we are to truly end rape culture, we cannot just focus on rape, but rather must focus on counteracting male privilege and its manifestations. Listening to women's stories, speaking out when we see or hear something wrong, and educating men are all steps we should take. If rape culture is to be fought, one must not sit idly by.

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