

“A Zoo of Lusts...A Harem of Fondled Hatreds”

“A Zoo of Lusts...A Harem of Fondled Hatreds”:
An Historical Interrogation of Sexual
Violence against Women in Film

By

Deveryle James

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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One thing should be made clear . . . the body is, indeed, and has been for some time, a screen onto which various ideologies are projected, a battlefield for competing discourses.

—Deborah Wilson

We are dealing with a culture of violence . . . we always knew when we took on the issue of violence against women that somehow our opposition would come after us.

—Patricia Ireland

I think it's important that women's experiences be given a narrative.

—Gloria Steinem

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ABSTRACT

This book, which takes the first part of its title from the musings of C.S. Lewis, discusses the subject of rape in classic and contemporary Hollywood cinema—yesterday and today, i.e., from 1915 to 2003—in which I interrogate the rape and victimization of women as viewed through the lens of feminist theory and film. Despite much feminist intervention and revamping of rape laws, women are still seen as instigators of their own victimization as well as victims of a distraught and failing femininity. I concur with many film theorists that most rape scenes provide insight into the power relations of race, gender and class oppressions; however, by taking a slight departure, I move beyond these relations and enter into a wider discussion of the construction of female virtue, pedophilia, female sexual orientation, woman as spectacle, woman in the middle, and commodification of female sexuality. Additionally, I discuss the relationship between religion and rape. Working from a selective rather than exhaustive and from a thematic rather than a strictly historic framework, these themes are discussed in conjunction with their significance as it relates to particularly graphic rape scenes. I explore what these films collectively say about rape, as I try to understand what about the victim or theme makes the rape scene so graphic. I submit that in each of the films that I analyze, the individual trauma of the victim has its beginning in more complex dysfunctions of the larger social world; therefore, I examine sexual victimization in the context of the societal power structure in which the victim resides. I also look at masculinities under pressure and how these pressures are often used to explain and to excuse men's doing harm to women. Finally, I juxtapose the connection between past histories and images of rape in film with the contemporary reality of the discourse of rape and provide some commentary on how to lessen their impact onto the female experience.

INTRODUCTION

THEORETICAL AND GENERIC CONTEXTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

To say that the subject of sexual violence is a disquieting topic and then close the book on it would be simple enough, but to try and to understand its insidiously dark underlying messages is more of a challenge. Sexual violence is too important a topic not to bring to the surface to examine its every possible nuance and hidden metaphor of misogyny. At every level, a critical examination of sexual and domestic violence reveals a culture's fears, fantasies, anxieties and obsessions with sexuality in general and female sexuality in particular. This uncomfortable simultaneity of fantasy and oppression points to a crucial ambivalence about sexism. The women represented in the films I discuss in this book and their resultant treatment in a true sense parallels the ways in which many women and girls are often perceived and treated by many in our society.

Over the years, there have been complex and varying excuses for why some men rape. Each case of rape, however, shares as its underpinning a common reality: rape is not an aggressive manifestation of sex, but rather it is a sexual manifestation of aggression. This is not to say that when a man rapes a woman, he does not derive some sexual pleasure, but if sexual pleasure was his primary goal, he could certainly find that in a consenting lover, wife or other equally empowered consenting partner. Therefore, I maintain that rape is a sexual manifestation of aggression because the word *rape* in and of itself bears the connotation of domination, violation and a forceful taking. Through this violent sex act, the rapist wrenches away a woman's dignity, agency, and choice and replaces these God-given attributes with humiliation, fear and shame. When a man rapes, he sends an obvious message that he is the powerful one and that the person he is raping, her body and her desires and needs are irrelevant. Even Tupac Shakur pondered the same sentiment regarding the mistreatment of women in one of his social consciousness raps:

Since we all came from a woman, got our name from a woman . . . I wonder why we take from our women, why we rape our women, do we

hate our women? . . . I think it's time to heal our women, be real to our women. . . . if we don't, we'll have a race of babies that will hate the ladies, and make the babies . . . so will the real men get up, I know you're fed up ladies, but keep your head up!¹

The entreaty for women to keep their heads up is a tall order especially in light of the fact that we are living in a country where rape and domestic violence are the only crimes whose rates have increased. Is this increase due to more victims coming forward to report being raped, or are there actually more rapes occurring in the U.S.? Perhaps it is six of one and half a dozen of the other. Further, the rate of sexual assault in the United States is the highest of any industrialized nation in the world (Blumenthal 1995, qtd. in Kilbourne *ReReading America*). According to a 1998 study by the federal government one in three women has been the victim of rape or attempted rape, most often before her seventeenth birthday. What makes it worse is that, in fact, three of four women in the study who responded that they have been raped or assaulted as adults said the perpetrator was a current or former husband, a cohabiting partner or a date (Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998.) While I am well aware that there are sexual crimes committed by men on men and women on women, men and children as well, the fact that 99.6% of rape offenders are male and 94.5% of rape victims are female² indicates, at least to me, that the majority of the rapes we hear about are still being committed in the traditional male-on-female way *and* that rape is no closer to being eradicated than when the first rape was perpetrated. Added to these facts is the sobering, disturbing knowledge that both the rapists and their victims are getting younger and younger.

This explosion of youthful rapists and rape victims comes as a result of living in a world where we are being saturated with sexually violent images and activity. These images have become so much a part of our world, so much so that they are becoming normalized. Dr. Randy Pausch, a computer science professor and video pioneer, who gave his "Last Lecture" at Carnegie Mellon University, said that when he asked his students to invent a videogame that did not involve sex or violence, his male students had a difficult time doing so. "You would be surprised," he said, "how many 19 year old boys run out of ideas when you take those possibilities away."³ Children are growing up much faster these days, but what a powerful commentary on our society when young men who have barely reached adulthood cannot envision a game (or possibly a world)

¹ Tupac Shakur, *Keep Your Head Up*, 1993.

² Cahill, Ann J. *Rethinking Rape*.

³ Qtd. by Jeff Zaslow in *Wall Street Journal Online*.

where there is no intermingling of sex with violence to make it more interesting or meaningful.

Rigid dichotomizing of gender roles is one of the major triggers which have led to the perpetuation of rape. Men have traditionally been assigned the role of protector; women the role of needing protection. It is ironic, therefore, that “despite the fact that it is men who are the rapists, a woman’s ultimate security lies in being accompanied by men at all times” (Brownmiller 449). We have a hard time conceptualizing the fact that fathers, husbands and boyfriends, teachers and preachers can be rapists because with few exceptions, when we envision a rapist, we have been conditioned to imagine some large, overpowering, hypersexual male on the loose (in actuality the culprit usually suffers from impotence and low self-esteem). In turn, we envision the victim as a small, passively helpless white compliant woman. Interestingly, this woman is perceived to be helpless and weak, yet an excessive amount of force and violence is often exerted to subdue and rape her. The concept of the big, sadistic deranged man subduing the small, masochistic woman remains fixed in the imagination of man that woman in her vulnerable and passive state seems to “scream” for some sort of voyeuristic and aggressive attention. The culture at large represents women as naturally masochistic and since they never or rarely complain of their burden, then *essentially*, they must be in need of punishment, (even when they clearly indicate otherwise), whereas men in their voyeuristic and aggressive roles are represented as *essentially* sadistic and therefore, dutifully doing their part, do not hesitate to administer said abuse.

One theory regarding this continual sadomasochist interaction between men and women comes about as a result of masochism being superimposed on women. Originating with Richard von Kraft-Ebing in 1886 from the writings of French author Marquis de Sade, von Kraft-Ebing thought masochism to be a sexual instinct directed to ideas of subjugation and abuse. The core meaning was that it is a woman’s normal state to be dependent on pain, suffering and humiliation for sexual gratification. Freud categorized this type of masochism as erotogenic, and he believed that exposure to suffering is inherent in femininity. Men were taught that “women must therefore need pain and they [men] should not feel guilty about supplying it” (Haskell 134). Hollywood has played up this binary and used it to its advantage and we as spectators have bought into it as well. The films which I will analyze characterize the captive, objectifying aspects of this fabrication through the cinematic apparatus.

Before we begin looking at the ability film has to enlighten us to the mistreatment of women, I want to note that even when it is the bearer of

bad news, visual art in all of its forms is a gift. While both film and literature can be pedagogical, provide for their audience “details of feeling” and engage us with the essentials about human life; it is film, however, with its polyvalence and fluidity, which makes it a singularly powerful vehicle of seduction. Upon entering the dark cavernous surroundings of a movie theater, we are more than willing to suspend belief and immerse ourselves in the voices, faces and bodies moving across the screen. It seems that nothing is ever quite as legitimized as when it is displayed on film; even if that something is violence against women. Film, although it has been around since the early 1900s, is in no way the first medium to present women as the objects of male desire.⁴ The fascination mankind has had for the human body has been longstanding and is certain to continue as long as men and women populate the earth.

One may chose to look at the relationship between the cultural artifacts of the oral, the written and the audio visual as a changing of the guard, so to speak, in that each medium has given way, or scooted over to make room for the next expansive and technologically advanced form of visual representations. This new technology fosters the ongoing love affair of gazing upon naked bodies, particularly women’s naked bodies, and violence.⁵ (Later in this introduction, I will discuss the correlation between 16th-19th century sexual violence, pornography and slavery). The Bible provides us with some of the first published accounts of violence against women. It is during the 19th and early 20th centuries that early examples of painting and other visual art depicting the figure of the nymph in the woods with the broken back came into popularity. These archetypal forms of spectacle were characterized by women lying prostrate, naked

⁴ The Bible in its portrayals of rape and incest introduces us to our first written accounts of patriarchy and violence against women. Here we pause to reflect on what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 1: 9-10: “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything for which one can say, ‘Look! This is something new.’ It was here before our time. (NIV)

⁵ Not only “is the Bible *not* reluctant to discuss issues concerning sexuality, it in fact underscores the sometimes pernicious nature of human sexuality and how the body has always been a site for allurements, depravity, excitement and curiosity. Beginning with Adam and Eve and the shame they felt when they discovered their nakedness (and Adam’s blaming the woman for his disobedience), the correlation has been drawn between the body and man’s depravity. Further, in Habakkuk 2:15 it reads, “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies.”

and passive. Extremely popular with male artists and consumers, the figure of the nymph with the broken back presented a provocative message to her audience, that of a sexual animal awaiting conquest. The imagery of a forest has always conjured up primal emotions and that imagery coupled with that of a naked woman lying waiting in those woods (or the image of a naked woman lying naked in the woods) “cannot remain at the denotative level of factual information, but immediately is raised to the level of connotation—her sexuality, her desirability, her nakedness; she is immediately objectified in such a discourse, placed in terms of how she can be *used* for male gratification” (Kaplan 18). For some, the sighting of the female body lying prostrate automatically transforms into an object susceptible and inviting to unwarranted attack. In explaining the intentions of artists such as Arthur Hacker (1858-1919), and other turn-of-the century artists, with regard to their female subjects, Bram Dijkstra writes “in the very vulnerability of her positions she seems, in her continued ecstatic passivity, to go beyond an appeal merely to the voyeuristic tendencies of the turn-of-the-century male audience. . . she . . . caters to a latent fantasy of aggression [hence] it was only natural to take her by force, since by her very behavior she seemed forever to be pleading to be taken by force” (100). Instead of interpreting the male gaze at the female form as a complimentary gesture, we see that his gaze can just as easily set off a seething cauldron of animal lust provoking women’s own violation.

Notwithstanding, it continues to be woman’s fault because it is part of her feminine nature to “invite violence.” In Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) Lord Henry Wotton remarks, “I’m afraid that women appreciate cruelty, downright cruelty, more than anything else. They have wonderful primitive instincts. We have emancipated them, but they remain slaves looking for their masters, all the same. They love being dominated” (116). It was also during this late 19th century period that men were encouraged by their doctors to take sex from their wives for two selfish reasons: birthrates were declining, *and* in an unexpected negative correlation it was discovered that as women evolved ,their sex drive decreased. Therefore, it was incumbent on the male to keep the human race intact, by any means necessary. Now he had “doctor’s orders” for raping his wife (of course the word rape was not the word used in this connection). Further, it seemed that women could not win for losing because now (and forever more) they had to endure “physical assault . . . [by] showing the very reticence they had been forced to cultivate by their men” (120). Even though Dijkstra’s comments referred to the static imagery of paintings of women, the same ideology can be applied to and

has become a central part of the mechanisms underlying sexual pleasure in the cinema. One major difference is that the moving imagery of the cinema has the ability to put us closer to the dream state than paintings and/or live theatre. Still, the fact remains that by reducing all women and all victims to these archetypal caricatures of active male and passive female, (as initially theorized by Mulvey), and committed these overused and inaccurate stereotypes onto film and presenting them as an art form, we find ourselves being seduced into eroticizing rape as invited violence.

CHAPTER ONE

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON FEMINISM'S RESPONSE TO RAPE

There are several schools of thought with regard to the female experience. It has been suggested that recent interest in sexual violence against women has come about due to a rise in social movements. The recognition among academics of the problem of this violence in the United States was directly related to the emergence of the women's movement, public concerns about violence in any form and the decline of consensus models of society.¹ The history of rape, then, becomes a record of changing perceptions of violence towards women as it relates to feminism and its "place" in society today and yesterday. Interestingly, the meaning of rape has not always been viewed in the way it is now in our present culture. In the 17th century, for instance, if a woman claimed that she had been raped, but became pregnant as a result of the sexual violation, then her rape case was dismissed because it was deemed that a woman could not get pregnant unless she had enjoyed the sex act as well as the man.² And in Old Testament biblical accounts, if a woman was raped, the rapist had to "pay the girl's father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the girl, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives." This rule only applied if he was caught raping her.³ The woman was forced into marriage to cover her shame for being raped. In this way as well as in the 17th century cases, women's rapes were rendered invisible because of patriarchal rules with regard to interpersonal relations. We also remember early to late 20th century accounts where a woman's sexual

¹ Straus, M.A. "Leveling, Civility, and Violence in the Family." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 36, 113-30. 1974.

² This was called the two-seed theory, and it stated that a woman's seed was as vital as a man's semen when it came to conception and therefore, like a man's semen, a woman's egg was released upon orgasm and therefore her pregnancy was proof that she had enjoyed the sex act. Evelyne Berriot-Salvadore "The Discourse of Medicine and Science." *A History of Women in the West, Vol. III.* 376.

³ Deut. 22: 28-29.

history put her on trial and was used against her in the rape trial.

Although in this book, I address the “invisibility” of rape as depicted in film, neither rape nor feminism have always been viewed this way. Like most important and timeless cultural issues, the path leading to women’s concerns and rights has been neither straight nor direct, but rather zigzag in its construct and evolution. Nonetheless, feminism has successfully troubled the waters of societal inequalities within the framework of patriarchy system in which they lived.

In its heyday during the 1970’s, radical feminism firmly and consistently addressed the subject of rape and precisely to contest its invisibility as a crime and to inscribe it as a social problem of violence against women which affected the country at large. These feminists not only wanted to end the secrecy and shame that shrouded this criminal act, but they also wanted the perpetrators held accountable and prosecuted to the highest extent of the law. One would think that these deceptively simple human rights and feminism’s call to responsibility on the part of every decent member of the society would be easily acquired on the one hand and unequivocally enforced on the other. Unfortunately, this was not the case due in part to the predominantly patriarchal structure of the crime as well as that of the judicial system and its bias against women who claimed to be sexual assault victims. Also, it is noteworthy to observe that while many important and life altering things change in our society, the law often is the last institution to catch up and reflect that change. Due to these factors, it was difficult to get women’s voices heard over the din of male superiority and selfaggrandizement. Fortunately, during the 1970s women’s movement a few new rape laws were implemented, in which victims’ rights were newly recognized and established, such as making it illegal for a husband to rape his wife, instilling rape shield laws which protect a victim’s identity and prevent using her sexual history against her in court, and ensuring that the victim receives immediate and adequate medical assistance. A result of the women’s movement with regard to rape is that rape and its resulting consequences were forever put on the public agenda of feminists and on the radar scope of society as a whole.

The radical feminists of the 70s wanted to empower women in their struggles and provide them with the necessary tools to not only lessen their incidents of violation, but to also gain and exercise the agency, recourse and resources available to report and bring their rapists to conviction. On the other hand, all of this attention to women and sexual violence also resulted in another development in connection with the other side of this controversial rape coin. That development involved the perception of women as perpetual victims, always in need of rescue and protection.

How could women be represented as both helpless victims subjected to the whims of men who could simply overpower and violate them due to their unique anatomies *and* at the same time be the autonomous and empowered individuals who were in control of their own lives? This ensuing perplexity caused feminists to try and determine the possible menacing contributors to the plight of women. Most decent, right-thinking people the world over would agree that sexual violation is wrong and that a woman should always have a voice in whom she allows to have access to her body. The rub, it can be said, arises with regard to perceptions of what is considered consensual. Naturally, there are as many schools of thought on the subject of sex and rape and how they come together to inform our society as there are theorists and critics:

I. Susan Brownmiller, who can be said to have emerged from the school of second wave feminists and who has been accredited with coining the phrase, "rape-supported culture," is author of one of the most popular and most quoted from books on rape, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. Written in 1975, her book continues to have significant relevance on the subject of rape, and she approaches the subject with a no nonsense attitude. In her book, she states unequivocally that rape is the tool which all men use to keep women in constant fear and submission. She not only does a historical genealogy of rape to explain how it came to be such a pervasive factor in the lives of women, but she also explains how rape is more about politics and power than sex. Her work helped solidify rape as a crime. Her research was extremely helpful as it comes at the forefront of feminism and although I do not agree with everything she has written, I have noticed that many contemporary feminists choose to critique her theory as a way to build their own. This turns out to be a good thing, however, because in critiquing Brownmiller's pioneering work other women, scholars, feminists, critics, men, students and creative artists extend the conversation on this life altering subject and help to bring it (and keep it) out into the open instead of closeting it in shame and silence.

Brownmiller's 1975 argument was that rape is biological only in the sense that male size and strength and the nature of human sex organs gave males the "structural capacity" to rape and females the "structural vulnerability" to be raped (13-15). In other words, as long as women's and men's bodies are given gendered significance and importance, there will continue to be differences made between the two sexes, differences which heavily favor one group while disregarding the rights of the other. In her assessment of rape dynamics, Brownmiller fails to address the issue of pleasure derived from this aggressive power inequality. The differences do highlight the social construction of gender and set up a binary of

perpetrator and victim. These differences, however, also serve to build Brownmiller's argument that rape is based on hierarchy thereby making rape political in both its execution and its debate.

II. While Susan Brownmiller states that rape is about political hierarchy and not sex, Catherine MacKinnon, coming on the heels of Brownmiller, states just the opposite. MacKinnon's theory rests on her belief that rape is just an extension of compulsory heterosexual sex, and rape is therefore inevitable because of the very nature of heterosexuality where men rule. She does not believe that rape has to be violent in order to rape, and that most women have been dominated and raped through coercion and may not have been aware of such coercion because it can be a subtle coercion, but coercion nonetheless. She says that because of the way heterosexuality is structured then "if sexuality is central to women's definition and forced sex is central to sexuality, rape is indigenous, not exceptional to women's social condition" (qtd. in Cahill 38). To her, rape is just a continuum of the heterosexual relationships women have to enter into as a result of years of conditioning.

III. As we follow along the continuum of feminist positioning concerning this subject and instead of linking rape exclusively to female sexuality, politics was dropped out of the discussion. Susan Faludi, in *Backlash*, argues that the rise of the women's movement was followed by a backlash against women. In the Hollywood films of the 1980s, this backlash was translated as violence against female characters. Rape can be and has been used as a means to get back at women for their speaking out and acting out against issues which have oppressed them and held them in subservient and demeaning roles. Feminism was perceived by some individuals as a being a threat to the status quo. No where was the attempt to squelch the threat so clearly seen as in the movies where it had the effect of playing a large role in manipulating the backlash phenomena and the woman dilemma:

The sexual assault of women has been a recurring theme in U.S. commercial cinema; one in every eight films produced in Hollywood contains a scene depicting violence against women. Moving away from the complex positions occupied by female characters in the 1970s, women in rape narratives were once again depicted in a binarized manner: as either virgin or whore. The independent, career-minded woman tended to be characterized as evil and eventually met her just and often violent end, while the passive homebody was the "good" woman who was rewarded the affections of the hero. This trend, Faludi argues, reinstated the view that women were responsible for the violence they encountered. (Moorti 121)

The most important part of Faludi's argument is that there was a change in the way movies were viewed; they were seen as a backlash against working women, as a regression to prove these women as bad. Faludi is certainly not alone in her assessment of how Hollywood came to leave its biased imprint on the limited way women were viewed on the screen and as cultural subjects.

IV. Central to the argument of how women were viewed on the screen is Molly Haskell's legendary *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* in which she discussed the deterioration of women's representation in film from the 1920s to the 1970s. She writes that "movies are one of the clearest and most accessible of looking glasses into the past, being both cultural artifacts and mirrors" (xiv). Movies, therefore, possess the longstanding qualities to journal, chronicle and archive the treatment of women over the years. What Haskell does is explore the virgin-whore dichotomy that defined women as either honorable and exalted or castigated and disgraced, either of which allowed men to remain in the omnipotent position of overseers of women's virtue: "Women's value was confirmed by affection and attention" (243) and these dichotomies revealed more about a man's insecurities than they might have wanted to admit. Haskell's work begins by positing that woman was always positioned as most revered when displaying emotions of love for her man or her children (1920s through late 1950s) and less revered when making career advancements or pursuing success (1960s to 1970s). Somewhere along the way, (with the arrival of the 1940s), these binaries were collapsed and the women and men of film were identified more by "sexual identity" than sexual roles. Of course, this demotion from reverence to rape can be attributed to and was a reflection of the rise of feminism and of the backlash against it. Haskell's work does not really address the fact that women were being raped even during the "reverence" period, even though these rapes (as represented on screen, at least) usually only occurred to punish women when they got out of "their place." This work picks up where Haskell's leaves off, not only in terms of timeframe but also in that I continue her theme of rape's representation in film.

V. Ann Cahill, in her book, *Rethinking Rape*, examines in great detail the works of Susan Brownmiller and Catherine Mackinnon and their views on rape. Cahill ultimately concludes that both of their theories, although interesting and extensive, are incomplete and insufficient; that is, she finds "both theories sorely lacking" in answering the question of rape, and are in need of reconsideration (3). One bone of contention which concerns Cahill begins with the definition of rape; a well-worn notion among rape theorists, namely, Brownmiller, is that rape is only about power—not

about sex. Restricting rape to principally a violent act equates it with other acts of physical violence and that the sexual component of rape is immaterial. Cahill disagrees with MacKinnon because by her stressing the inferiority of women as subjects, the effectiveness of women is reduced to the point where they supposedly have no options when it comes to their sexual concerns. She writes that most women can discern when they are experiencing rape and when they are having consensual sex. Rape, Cahill, argues is akin to sexual harassment, and as a result is about power *and* sex; that is, men using power to get sex. Psychologist Kingsley R. Browne concurs by saying that "[t]o say that it is only about power makes no more sense than saying that bank robbery is only about guns, not about money."⁴ (I think that this explanation is particularly revealing in understanding the dynamics of rape as it applies to women who rape other women and children, since brute strength is not necessarily associated with female sex crimes). With regard to whether rape is about power or sex, Cahill submits that while the rapist's actions are seemingly concentrated on the sole purpose of violating and penetrating the sexual organs of his victim, his victim's entire body, mind and soul are wholly engaged and traumatized in the violation, and the repercussions of the violation reverberate much longer than the act itself in the minds of both perpetrator and victim.

VI. While Sarah Projansky's research, like that of Haskell's, covers a span of films over a continuum of time, (from 1903 to 1991). She like Brownmiller debates race, class and gender dynamics, and their impact on rape and how the world views its victims. In her book, *Watching Rape*, Projansky has done extensive work on the representations of women's sexual violations through film and television. In her research, she studies films with the historical representations of rape from the early to late 20th century, and argues against the notion that we are living in postfeminist times where feminism is outdated and has outlived its purpose. She argues that rape makes a strong statement on the subject of feminism, post feminism and the backlash. Like Faludi, Projansky observes that when a woman's actions espouse a feminist point of view such as independence, then if she is raped, feminism is used against itself, and the woman is punished for asserting her independence. Conversely, in most films women are presented as vulnerable and encouraged to become more independent in order to avoid rape. Regardless of which scenario is depicted, independence or vulnerability, the woman is raped as a result of it and the best alternative for a woman is to enter into a heterosexual

⁴ <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/index.php?term=pto-4359.html&fromMod=emailed>

family setting to save herself from unwanted or any more sexual attack. For instance, the films of the early and mid-20th century such as *Within Our Gates*, *Swept Away*, *Pretty Woman*, etc., sought to show the “relationship between rape and women’s independence, *often* providing narratives that end with heteronormative family resolutions” (120). Projansky writes of women being trapped in their gendered fate, and when the constant of gender combines with race, the oppression is intensified in the few films which set about highlighting the sexual stereotypes concerning women of color.⁵ Most of these films seem to give “permission” to the assailants to rape women of color because they are believed to be sexually promiscuous and available anyway, and as a result, their sexual violations are considerable less egregious. When class is part of the rape equation, it is usually associated with white, middle-class heterosexual victims, whose rapes either “produce” postfeminism (*The General’s Daughter*), or encourage new antirape laws (*The Accused*) or which boosts camaraderie among females (*Thelma and Louise*). Many of the films I have chosen to include in my research have been analyzed by Projansky as well, and therefore we are often in conversation with one another on some of the same topics.

An Overview of Rape on the Big Screen

While the film industry has the ability to depict, mirror and reenact the horror of rape as performance, in many instances it also has the power to minimize the veracity and trauma of rape and the effect it has on its victims. The review of literature on this subject moves from a general background of the problem and then focuses on factors associated with the continued violence against women. Scarry writes that “*psychological* suffering, though often difficult for any one person to express, *does* have referential content, *is* susceptible to verbal objectification, and is so habitually depicted in art, that as Thomas Mann’s Settembrini reminds us, there is virtually no piece of literature that is *not* about suffering, no piece of literature that does not stand by ready to assist us” and that “art consistently confers visibility on other forms of distress” (11). In our culture of violence, of which sexual violence is such an ubiquitous component, we have gone from a society of rape unawareness to one of rape overawareness to a point of saturation where watching rape on the public screen (whether through film, television or pornography) has had the sadly unfortunate effect of desensitizing the average person to the real

⁵ See Rosewood, *Dust, She’s Gotta Have It, Tie Me Up, Tie -----Me Down*, Incognito.

life situations of actual rape victims: "Scholars have argued that rape is pervasive in narratives generally, and cinema is certainly no exception. Quite probably not a year has gone by since the beginning of cinema when any number of films have not represented, implied, or alluded to rape, attempted rape or other forms of sexual violence" (Projansky 26), and as Stephen Prince writes, "Violence in the movies is not of recent origin deeply embedded in the history and functioning of cinema. It is as old as the medium and has arguably been of central importance for the popular appeal of film" (2).

I will discuss films which expose the way sexual violence perpetuates imbalances and/or vice versa (canonical films such as *The Accused*, *A Time to Kill*, *Pretty Woman*, and lesser known films such as *Things Behind the Sun* and *The Magdalene Sisters*). In these works, it becomes obvious that the author or director wants us to take the perspective of the victim or victims. Other films which adopt this perspective (which I will allude to, but I will not discuss in detail), are a few rape-revenge movies which were popular in the late 70s and 80s, such as *Ms. 45*, *I Spit on Your Grave*, *Lipstick*, etc. While they purport to take the victim's point of view, these films seem instead to have been made with the male spectator's pleasure in mind, and even though these films depict women avenging their rapes, the women are positioned on the screen to be just as visually and sexually titillating in the revenge scenes as they are in the rape scenes, a tautology of abuse. In other words, these films use rape as entertainment, as another excuse to show a woman naked. Kaplan also reminds us that these types of films were almost always "relegated to the "B" film and to the horror genre" (74). In this book, I will talk about older films where the rape scenes are implied or "mild" in comparison to contemporary films where the rape scenes are explicit and often times intended to titillate and arouse sexual desire. It is as though what is on the big screen represents the "truth" and is therefore often more convincing than the truth of real life, which fails to move us anymore.

This dissociation and desensitization backdrop is due to media's strong influence on the public psyche. These media influences, among other things, represent mainstream ideologies while at the same time proving that rape in all its forms still operates under the auspices of patriarchy's persistent determination to maintain and reassert the status quo and as a backlash against feminism. Therefore, whether mild or explicit, the overarching backdrop in the movies I have chosen to discuss all relate to misogyny and gender inequality based on deep-seated patterns of male entitlement to women's bodies.

My exploration of rape's presence and its functions in film begins by

attempting to shed new light on the intersection of race, gender and class exploitation as social forms of power relations, especially as these power relations pertain to mass media constructions. Exposing these representations of rape under the umbrella of racism and female sexuality allows for further understanding of the intricate positioning of women and rape in contemporary cultural texts and the ways in which this positioning has changed (if any) over the centuries.

The seven themes I highlight come from the exploration of the invisibility, violation, pain, shame and humiliation experienced by the raped victim. Film is an excellent medium through which to hold this discussion, because film, like the body, as Judith Butler, et. al suggest, is fluid and indeterminate, and it is often contemplated as a site for negotiation and resistance. Looking at representations in film and of the similarities and differences experienced within women's sexual violence across diverse social groups, we can shed light on the *invisibility* of rape. Because female sexuality in cinema is represented as something that man can repress or use to his advantage, this book seeks to answer the question: How do the representations of rape in film bring into the open the process whereby they represents oppression?

Much has been written and continues to be written about rape and its representation in film, and feminists and critics continue to disagree as to how much representation is enough or too much. Could this disagreement stem from rape's inscrutable nature, which defies or resists representation? Whatever is the answer to that question, the fact remains that we are no closer than when we first began to discover a way to end its nefarious presence in our world. Part of the reason is because although much "ink has flowed about this topic," rape is still a very *invisible* crime. It is because of its pernicious nature that its invisibility needs to be exposed so that we can somehow take away its paralyzing effect on its victims. One way to begin to expose this invisibility is to look at the enormous shift in the way rape is presented in the late 20th and early 21st century media in contrast to the early 1900s when filmmaking was in its nascent phase. In films like *Birth of a Nation* (1915), the maiden chooses to leap from a cliff before the would-be-rapist catches her and does his deed. Her death represents the double honor of keeping the purity of whiteness and womanhood sanctified, and *Within Our Gates* (1925) where the white father, who upon noticing a certain scar/mark on his intended victim's chest, realizes just in the nick of time that the mulatta he is about to rape is his own daughter. However, by 1960, *The Virgin Spring*, the obligatory wandering virgin traveling in the woods is raped in one of the first films to find "a gold mine of publicity by priding itself on presenting the most

detailed rape in the history of the movies" (Coulteray 82). The victim's death supposedly "is the evidence of grace" (82). Still, this film's "graphic" scene is mild compared to the depictions of rape on the film market these days.

The rise and fall of the Production Code may shed some light on this shift. The Hays Production Code, which was formally put in place in 1927 at the advent of talking pictures, spelled out what was and was not considered morally acceptable in the production of motion pictures for a public audience.⁶ With specific reference to sexuality, one of the stipulations ruled that the representations of rape and seduction "should never be more than suggested and only when essential for the plot, and even then never shown by explicit method. They are never the proper subject for comedy."⁷ Any rape scenes depicted in movies produced while under the Production Code were to be implicit and to serve a didactic purpose, e.g., punishing a woman for acting indecently or to punish the man for modeling bad behavior. The Production Code was not strictly enforced however, and film directors and producers found many loopholes for getting around the guidelines. In the early 1960s, the Production Code was phased out in exchange for a ratings system, which has been adapted and modified into our present day. As a result of the end of the Production Code, there was no limit as to what could be represented in a film just so it was rated accordingly. Many filmmakers and filmgoers saw this as a good thing. Whether this is true or not remains to be seen, but in the course of reporting rape through visual and literary means, filmmakers and writers are changing the way we as spectators and readers see rape. The questions remains, however, does viewing rape in these graphic and *mediated* ways somehow reproduce, in part, the violence? One young freshman female recently told me that she felt these scenes need to be graphic in order to stress the brutality and horror of rape. She raises a valid point, but are these graphic representations made at the expense of the victims' and

⁶ Nudity and suggestive dances were prohibited. The ridiculing of religion was forbidden, and ministers of religion were not to be represented as comic characters or villains. References to alleged "sex perversion" (such as homosexuality) and venereal disease were forbidden, as were depictions of childbirth. The sanctity of *marriage* and the home had to be upheld. "Pictures shall not imply that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing." Adultery and illicit sex, although recognized as sometimes necessary to the plot, could not be explicit or justified and were not supposed to be presented as an attractive option. Portrayals of miscegenation were forbidden. "Scenes of Passion" were not to be introduced when not essential to the plot. "Excessive and lustful kissing" was to be avoided, along with any other treatment that might "stimulate the lower and baser element."

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Production_Code

feminist strides? In other words, does constantly showing graphic representations of rape for the expressed purpose of stressing its brutality and horror defeat the purpose of showing rape in a valiant attempt at eradicating this evil from our society? Must we go back to Freud and his explanation of the "primal scene" in which the young child, in seeing his mother having sex with his father, is confused because while the father's actions toward the mother look painful, the mother has a look of pleasure on her face? In other words, the sex act becomes indistinguishable from violence. How graphic is too graphic? The latest trend is for Hollywood to negotiate social change in a profitable way by invoking troubling issues but then re-signifying them in more enjoyable and entertaining ways. In practicing this type of re-signification, witnessing rape in films and other forms of media simultaneously highlights *and* promotes its existence. This statement inevitably brings up the age old question of whether media reflects society or whether society reflects media.

In addition to the films *I Spit on Your Grave* and *Irreversible*, other films such as *Straw Dogs*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Frenzy*, *Seven Beauties*, *Wicked City*, *The Accused*, *Strange Days*, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *Things Behind the Sun*, *Monster*, *North Country*, etc., unabashedly show graphic depictions of rape. This simultaneity is done by representing or masking the horror and sadistic nature of rape through the "legitimate" socially unacceptable and universally deplorable forms of racist, classist, political or sexist ideologies.

Of course, the violence of rape in many films ranges from the sadistic to the erotic. Films like the aforementioned *Irreversible*, *Things Behind the Sun*, *Monster*, *I Spit on Your Grave*, and *Ms. 45* demonstrate through their graphic depictions of rape how sadism works. The sadists' actions are a conflation of pain with power. The sadist's utmost desire is to keep the victim in a continuous state of anxiety—which would ultimately dissolve her psychic structures. This is contrary to what many believe represents the relationship between sadist and masochist, i.e., many believe that the sadist and masochist have directly oppositional desire for each other, and in some cases this is, indeed true of their relationship. In the above listed rape films however, the sadist does not seek out a willing partner who will meekly submit to his demands, but instead he desires one who will resist and in that resisting be overcome by the sadist's need to consume his victim. In fact, rape by its very nature is sadistic because the fundamental principle of sadism depends on the non-consensual victim as the most primitive requirement. Many rape films speak to and understand this "sadistic nature" and capitalize on it, realizing that this appetite for cruelty, mixed with desire has universal appeal to many spectators.

Erotic films include *Dust*, *Straw Dogs*, *Swept Away* and *The Magdalene Sisters* where the camera focuses on close-up of the women's faces and/or bodies, or when it tries to show that the woman being raped is enjoying being violated like Amy in *Straw Dogs*. Ultimately, as Mulvey's article argues, the cinematic apparatus (specifically of classical Hollywood cinema) inevitably puts the spectator in a masculine subject position, with the figure of the woman on screen as the object of desire. In classical Hollywood cinema, viewers are encouraged to identify with the protagonist of the film, who tends to be a man. Meanwhile, female characters are, according to Mulvey, coded with "to-be-looked-at-ness." Mulvey argues that the only way to annihilate this "patriarchal" system is to radically deconstruct the filmic strategies of classical Hollywood with alternative methods. She calls for a new generation of feminist avant-garde filmmaking that will rupture the magic and pleasure of classical Hollywood filmmaking: "It is said that analyzing pleasure or beauty annihilates it." Mulvey's call for a new way of filmmaking which does not subject women to the patriarchal system is a challenge which is being met by a few contemporary female directors, such as Agnes Varda, Sophia Coppola, Kasi Lemmons and Mira Nair.

Another consideration with regard to spectatorship is that of the blessings *and* curses of modern technology; namely, the invention of the video and the DVD. These devices, which can certainly be lauded for the convenience and economic advantage they afford today's film connoisseurs, can also bring into the privacy of the home all sorts of sexual interests. The rapes and sexually violent scenes in particular can be "enjoyed" over and over and can be greatly enhanced by utilizing the zoom and slow motion features of the remote control. Kaplan writes that "voyeurism is dangerous because it exploits its victims and secretly offers a sort of subversive pleasure in horror one would not want to encourage" (10). With these enhancement features incorporated into the DVD or video medium, the voyeuristic spectator has at his disposal the opportunity to view to his heart's content the brutality between the rapist and rape victim. Therefore, "woman, thus dominated, humiliated, and ravished for the particular pleasure of the viewer, serves in another sense as the cause of misogyny" (Coulteray 84). Those who make films are also aware of the voyeuristic behavior of moviegoers and so they can and do effectively mimic much of human nature and capture it, without little difficulty, onto rape films. Examples of this voyeuristic violence can be seen in films such as *Two Women*, *Frenzy*, *The Accused*, *Boys Don't Cry*, and *Strange Days* where the male characters may or may not participate in the rape act per se, but they do enjoy watching the violence being perpetrated on the