"I Felt Like a Slut": The Cultural Context and Women's Response to Being Raped

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This paper examines how cultural beliefs (cultural constructions) about women influence how women survivors of rape make sense of their traumatic experience. A thematic content analysis of interviews with female survivors of rape was undertaken to provide a systematic description of the phenomenology of the experience. This paper reports on one major finding which highlighted the ways in which cultural beliefs about women, sexuality, and rape become salient to women, and are accessed by them as they struggle to bring meaning to the experience of being raped. The nature of these beliefs and their implications for response and recovery are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The study of trauma has revealed that the destabilization and reconstruction of meaning structures is one of the primary psychological processes organizing the response process (e.g., Epstein, 1991; Horowitz, 1979; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; McCann and Pearlman, 1990). Many clinician/researchers have argued that recovery must include working through the meanings that the traumatic event holds for the individual (e.g., Briere, 1989; Horowitz, 1986; Herman, 1992; Lindy, 1988; Roth and Lebowitz, 1988; Roth and Newman, 1991). Although different authors emphasize different pathways from which meaning emerges, typically meaning is seen as accruing primarily from the interaction of life history, personality proclivities, and the particulars of the traumatic event.

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Another critically important source of the meaning attached to a traumatic event derives from the broader sociocultural context in which the individual lives and is traumatized. By sociocultural context, we mean the ideas, beliefs and metaphors which emerge from our cultural productions and institutions (e.g., literature, media, religion, law), which form a recognizable and coherent ideology and which are relevant for a particular event. The ideas and beliefs which emerge from this ideology are easily and generally recognizable, rather than individual and idiosyncratic. For example, one component of our ideology about women portrays women's primary value as residing in their sexual appeal to men. This belief, or construction about the central value of women, is manifested through pervasive, sexualized images of women in advertisements.

Most of the documentation of the cultural context of sexual trauma has been done by feminist scholars (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Dworkin, 1979; Russell, 1975). With notable exceptions (Burt, 1980; Herman, 1981; Williams and Holmes, 1981) psychological research has focused more on the epidemiology of sexual trauma (e.g., Koss *et al.*, 1987; Russell, 1982) and on its symptomatic aftermath (e.g., Kilpatrick *et al.*, 1981; Cohen and Roth, 1987; Roth *et al.*, 1990) than on the relationship between the cultural context and women's psychological response to sexual trauma.

Feminist scholars, on the other hand, have focused on the relationship of the culture to rape. They have painted a portrait of a culture that is dehumanizing and oppressive to women, where rape and the threat of rape function as forms of social control, where women are believed to both want and be responsible for male victimization of women, where women are denied fundamental human and civil rights and where some women are able to purchase what privileges they do have through social contracts that grant them some protection at the cost of other, fundamental liberties (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Dworkin, 1979, 1989; Griffin, 1979; Medea and Thompson, 1974).

Several attempts have been made to empirically evaluate the feminist understanding of rape. For example, one subset of our culturally constructed ideology about women and sexuality has been described as rape supportive attitudes (McDonel and McFall, 1991) or "rape myths" (Burt, 1980). These are a collection of familiar ideas about women and rape, such as "all women want to be raped," which have been repeatedly documented as being present in law, films, books, and common speech (Brownmiller, 1975). Widespread endorsement of these rape-supportive attitudes have been empirically demonstrated (Field, 1978; Burt, 1980). In addition, men who endorse these attitudes are more likely to report that they would rape a woman if assured that they would not be caught (Malamuth, 1981). Men who endorse rape-supportive attitudes are also more likely to report an

actual history of sexual aggression against women (Koss *et al.*, 1985). Further, Lisak (1991) and Sanday (1981) have published data that support the feminist argument that the etiology of rape is to be found in cultural patterns which reflect and support both rigid sex role stratification and the devaluation of what is culturally constructed as feminine.

Awareness of the cultural context has also implicitly influenced the epidemiological research on sexual trauma. By taking into account the sociocultural factors which inhibit accurate labeling and reporting of rape, researchers have improved the accuracy of incidence and prevalence data (e.g., Russell, 1982; Koss *et al.*, 1987).

The effect of the cultural context is also noted in the treatment literature. Feminists argue that our culture holds women responsible for male sexual aggression. This perspective has received some support in the small treatment literature which argues that because self-blame is culturally inculcated in victims, treatment must include a critical deconstruction and unlearning of these attitudes. (e.g., Kilpatrick and Veronen, 1983; Lebowitz, 1993).

Most current models of response to trauma contend that human beings are active in organizing their experience and that internal representations of self and world are central to this process. These internal organizing frameworks are called, by different writers, schemas (Horowitz, 1986; McCann and Pearlman, 1991), basic assumptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), a personal theory of reality (Epstein, 1991). Most theoreticians/researchers working in the field of trauma would agree that people hold multiple and often conflicting schemas about self and world which are active and conscious to different degrees at different times in their lives (Epstein, 1991; Horowitz *et al.*, 1980). A traumatic event typically invalidates dominant, more positive, operating schemas and initiates an intense search for new schemas which can make sense of the information of the trauma. Older "latent" schemas are likely to be activated if they have some explanatory power (Horowitz *et al.*, 1980).

This model can be used to understand the relationship between cultural constructions of women and the process of responding to a rape. Ubiquitous, culturally located ideas about women and rape are likely to have been internalized, at some point, by many women, and these ideas, insofar as they "fit" with the advent of a rape, are likely to be activated in its aftermath. Thus, if a women is victimized, the rape may confirm her pre-existing schemas about the role and value of women. Even where more positive schemas have developed and been dominant, the rape may activate latent schemas which have a better "fit" with the experience of being raped. In addition, other people (friends, family, police, etc.) may react to victims within the framework of these culturally prevalent ideas, thus creating ex-

planations for the survivor to use and/or reinforcing latent schemas that are relevant to the rape. Last, rape itself is a powerful interpersonal communication. The degradation and worthlessness communicated by the rapist is likely to be heard loud and clear in the emotional intensity of a victimization experience and may be internalized by the victim particularly if it matches other, culturally prevalent schemas about men and women, and women and sexuality.

Since meaning is a central aspect of the response to trauma, and since cultural beliefs are some of the threads out of which we weave meaning, it would be reasonable to expect that culturally derived beliefs will be accessed by women as they struggle to make sense of their experience of rape. We would not expect most women to directly attribute these beliefs to their culture, nor to necessarily endorse these beliefs. Nonetheless, our suggestion is that there is a sufficiently coherent set of cultural constructions about women and sexuality that are directly pertinent to sexual violence. These constructions are sufficiently ubiquitous such that many women will, in formulating their experience of being raped, make spontaneous reference to these beliefs which can, through a face value interpretation, be traced to the rape-supportive cultural ideology about women and sexuality.

To test this hypothesis, we systematically content analyzed the spontaneous autobiographical accounts of women who had been raped, in order to determine whether and how these culturally derived meanings were accessed by women in the process of making sense out of their experience. This analysis was done in the context of a larger study examining the phenomenology of rape in which a wide range of clinically meaningful themes were documented (Lebowitz, 1990).

While themes such as "rage," "fear," "loss" etc. appeared in some or many of the interview transcripts, the theme that represented women's use of cultural constructions to make sense out of their experience was coded in virtually every interview. This ubiquity suggests that culturally located meanings are centrally implicated in the response process.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects of this study were 15 women who were adult or adolescent survivors of completed rape and who were part of a larger sample of women recruited by advertisements for participation in a questionnaire study (Cohen and Roth, 1987). Excluded from the present study were

women used in the pilot research (Roth and Lebowitz, 1988), women who identified incest or child abuse as the central trauma, attempted rape victims, women whose trauma did not meet the legal definition of rape, and any woman with a severe, chronic or concurrent trauma (e.g., protracted battering).

All of the women were white and the sample was heterogeneous for socioeconomic class. All were functioning members of the community. Their ages at the time of the interview ranged from 19 to 52, the average being 28.6. Their ages at the time of the rape ranged from 13 to 51, with the average being 23. Most of the women (81%) were between 17 and 26 at the time that they were raped.

The women were raped from between 9 months and 16 years prior to the interview, the average time being 5.7 years. Nine of the women were raped by strangers, and six were raped by men they believed they had reason to trust (e.g., classmates, friends of friends, dates, boyfriend).

PROCEDURES

Women who responded to the advertisements for survivors of rape were invited to the university for an audiotaped interview with the first author. Following informed consent procedures, each subject was told.

> We are interested in your experiences and what they have meant to you. You may talk about your experiences in any order or any way that you wish. We are interested in all aspects of your thoughts and feelings about what has happened to you, from the time of the rape until the present.

Because we wanted to understand how survivors perceived and formulated the salient aspects of their experience, the interviewer avoided asking additional or leading questions and reserved all unessential commentary for the end of the interview. The interviewer restricted her comments to questioning for clarification, to prompting the subject to continue, and, when necessary, to offering emotional support. At the end of each interview, the subject was provided with support and validation. Interviews averaged 2 and 1/2 hr and were transcribed verbatim.

ANALYSIS

A coding manual was derived from a pilot study of interviews (Lebowitz, 1987; Roth and Lebowitz, 1988) and consisted of descriptions and examples of 16 themes. This manual was used to train an independent coder. The 15 transcripts were coded by the first author, who also marked

passages for coding. Eight of the transcripts were randomly selected and given to the second coder. This second coder, working independently, identified the themes he felt best described each marked passage. Double coding was permitted.

This present paper focuses on one of the themes which was coded in this study, namely, "The Influence of the Culture." The general instruction for coding this theme (described in detail in the coding manual), was to code any reference that the women made to sociocultural constructions of female sexuality, the implications of being female in this society, and rules about gender relationships.

RELIABILITY

Reliability of the themes was assessed by comparing the coding results of the independent rater with those of the first author. Coding reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa (Cohen, 1960) on the statements coded by both raters (256 out of a total of 577 statements coded). Percentage agreement was calculated for each of the theme categories. Cohen's Kappa was 0.89 and the percent agreement for the 16 themes ranged from 100% to 78%. The category "The Influence of the Culture" had 83% agreement. Interestingly, this theme was unique in being present in all of the transcripts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the following we will present examples of the types of statements coded under the category "The Influence of the Culture" with an analysis of their meaning. To facilitate a thorough explication of the findings, reference will sometimes be made to other quotations coded under this category which are not presented here because of the space limitations.

The women's descriptions of this culture's construction of femaleness and its impact on their experience of being raped will, simply for purposes of presentation, be grouped into four categories: (1) The rape illuminated aspects of the sociocultural context, which were previously unnoticed. (2) Women incorporated culturally generated constructions of femaleness, sexuality and the meaning of rape into their descriptions of how they experienced the rape, thereby highlighting the nature of these embedded constructions. (3) Women spontaneously described more general aspects of what it means to be socialized as a woman in this society and these aspects of female socialization were linked, by the women, to the experience of

being raped. (4) Some of the women linked these general socialization patterns to the meaning of rape and the probability of being raped, emphasizing how it made them feel about being a woman and how rape functions as a form of social control.

1. Rape as an Illuminator

Rape sometimes acts to illuminate previously unseen aspects of the sociocultural milieu. In these instances rape serves as an exaggerated paradigm of aspects of heterosexual social patterns which are typically harder to notice because they are embedded within normative social structures. The experience of being raped sensitizes some women to those elements of the culture which remind them, or seem paradigmatically related to, to the experience of being raped.
Abby

> I guess the worst thing is the idea that there are a lot of guys out there like that. It could happen to my sisters, you know. But, better me than my sisters who are still virgins. I had a lot of problems with an old boyfriend about that too [like] if they want it, they should get it. And my boyfriend and I worked it out somewhat. If I had a headache or something, it took a long time before he could realize that it might just really be that and that it wasn't a rejection of his masculinity for me to say that. I think a lot of, especially younger guys, use sex as a way of expressing dominance... It's *so* important to guys. I mean some probably say it feels just as good for the girl as the guy, but you never hear girls complaining about the equivalent of blue balls or anything else. If they don't get sex, they find other ways to process that frustration. With guys, it can be such a big issue. There's a lot of pressure on them. And, I think [the rapist] may have been feeling the pressure and took it out in a very bad way.

Among the ideas included in this undergraduate's description of her views of the college social scene are her perceptions that undergraduate males seem to feel entitled to sex and that their urgency in this matter seems influenced by nonsexual aims—namely dominance. Further, she has come to believe that her rapist is not alone in his orientation to women and sex; i.e., she has come to believe that his behavior reflects general social patterns and is not a function of idiosyncratic and unique pathology.

Another survivor, Gretchen, became sensitive to the fusion of sexual and aggressive imagery in language and found herself frightened and angered when a man, speaking to a friend of hers, said jokingly:

> Maybe I'll go over and try her on right now and fuck her brains out.

Gretchen went on to comment:

> And 'I tried real hard to dismiss that, you know, to say' Oh he's drinking. He's joking. And I can't dismiss that. I can't. Fucking someone's brains out is a violent

thing. It's not, here I am with a person. At [its] best it's cutting someone up in pieces...it's a violent thing.

Many of the survivors become aware of and complained about inter-personal communications such as certain types of jokes and compliments that, by their own admission, they would not have noticed before. Some women become extremely sensitive to anything which felt like the reduction of a woman to an object.

Helen

> When [I'm] in the movies or something, [and] you hear someone refer to a woman as a cunt it just sends me up a wall. I mean, that's not what we are. I feel like if my husband tells me that I am attractive or that I'm looking good he's talking about all of me. If he tells me I have nice hips I feel like from here to here and from here to here [DEMONSTRATING] is ugly, but there's one little strip that's nice, and, you know, why is it nice? Its nice because of sex, and that's not all I am, and that's not primarily, what I am, and that's not even among the most important things that I am. [STARTS SOBBING] That may very well be connected [to the rape]...I mean one time my father was making a joke [about how rape victims were desirable], and I was trying to tell him that I didn't think that was a particularly nice thing to do, and I think the phrase that I used was something like, 'You know, you seem to think that it's a compliment, but what it is, is somebody using you like a piece of furniture'. And I think that somebody looking at you as a walking crotch is the same thing.

Thus, for Helen, being raped was like being used like an object in-stead of being treated like a human being. Being "complimented" in certain ways repeated the reduction of person to sexual object that she experienced during the rape.

Women complained about the "unique stigma" attached to rape vic-tims and how being raped is not like being mugged in terms of the meaning of the event. Rape, they reported, is often viewed lightly or as something other than what it is (for example, as an expression of sexuality rather than of violence). They also spoke of hearing people accept the "rape myths" and/or feeling hopeless and angry about ever changing men's ideas about women and rape.

Martha

> I was working on this in-patient service with a psychiatrist who ... was working with a really severely regressed schizophrenic patient who had a hysterical conversion disorder. He was paralyzed on one side of his body although periodically he would hit nurses with his paralyzed arm, ... so obviously the guy had a lot of hostility towards women ... So the patient was lying in bed and the male physician was in there [with] the nurse, and the physician said, 'You know, John, there are a lot of good looking nurses around here. In fact, that nurse right over there, she's real good looking. You know what John, I'd like to see you up and around and chasing some of these nurses. In fact, I would consider it a therapeutic success if you got up, chased that nurse and raped her'. This is a true story. And the nurse said, 'Well, I wouldn't like that'. And you know, she was just totally blown away, did not know what to say to the psychiatrist. When I heard about it, I was so enraged ... it just sort of highlighted all the issues about men in power in relation to

women...it's a really frightening thing and nobody, *nobody* in the hospital was willing to do anything...[The] man who was the director of the in-patient service [who] had met with the head nurse, who was outraged about it, laughed and said, 'Come on, it was just a bad joke, it was sexist joke, maybe I'm sexist too, but it's not that big of a deal'. So then I was ready to kill him because he was so unresponsive. So I went into his office. This is my boss, and I said, 'Listen, I heard about how you responded to the whole issue and how you feel about the whole thing, and I want you to know I've been raped and it's nothing to laugh about. If you think it's a laughing matter then you don't deserve to be working with women and you most certainly don't deserve to be running an in-patient service. I don't want to hear what you say about it, I just want to think about how you would feel if some man came up to your wife and held a knife up to her throat and told her to spread her legs', and then I left the room... I mean, that's how furious I felt ... and it also pointed out to me how, if he said, 'I want you to go beat up that nurse', it would've been a totally different response. But because it was rape you know, 'Ah rape, you know, they like it. Some girls like it'. And I found that really horrifying.

Several points are illustrated here. Sex and aggression are not differentiated by the physicians in this story any more than they were by the woman's friend who spoke of "fucking" a woman's "brains out." Further, this fusion of sex and aggression, actualized as rape, is legitimized as an expression of healthy male libido and its cruelty is minimized by the response of the director of the unit. The survivor draws a relationship between the attitude towards rape embodied by the doctors and the idea that women like to be raped. This view of rape is contextualized by the speaker within the power differential of the hospital system, with its male doctors and female nurses, which permits the more powerful men to define the meaning of the event. An event which is in reality terrifying for women is defined by the physicians as healthy and positive for men and therefore must be desired by women. Interestingly, when struggling to get the director of the unit to understand the meaning of rape for a woman, she could only do it by asking him to imagine his wife being raped. This is echoed by another woman in the study who hopes that one day her rapist's daughter will be raped so that he will know something of the pain he has inflicted. Men are seen as so invulnerable and immune from this type of violation and helplessness that it does not occur to some women to rape them even in fantasy; the closest they can come to inflicting this type of injury is to imagine raping a woman that the man loves and/or owns.

Thus, many women come to see a relationship between their rape and broader, more normative patterns of male-female relationships. Being raped acts as a floodlight which allows the survivor to see what was present all along but which previously was unrecognizably embedded in the social landscape.

2. Constructions of Female Sexuality

One of the dynamics that these survivors became sensitive to is the relationship between rape, the social construction of female sexuality, and

the implications of this construction for women. We can cull what these women say about their experiences, and what they report other people say, to deduce some of the conceptions of female sexuality which shape our social environment and which allow rape supportive ideas such as the "rape myths" to seem legitimate and compelling to many people.

Survivors report feelings and interactions with others which suggest that female sexuality is frequently conceptualized as a commodity or an object. As a commodity, or an object, it may be "soiled" "dirtied" or "ruined", all terms which appear frequently in the transcripts as descriptions of the effect of the rape on female sexuality. One implication of this construction of sexuality is that, like any other object, female sexuality can be owned, and it can have different levels of worth.

The criteria for accruing value to female sexuality, in these transcripts, revolves around levels of usage (meaning the number of men who have had sexual access to the woman). Specifically, high usage equals low worth, and low usage equals high worth. In general there is a dichotomized view of female sexuality represented by the poles of "virgin" and "whore." The greatest decrement in value comes with intrusion into 'virgin territory' (see Sarah, below).

Further, the value of a woman's sexuality defines her value as a person. As Martha noted: after the rape it seemed like "[my sexuality] was dirty, or there's something wrong with my sexuality and me." She goes on to say that after the rape "[my sexuality] was bad and so I was bad." We know from other quotations cited in this section that underlying the definition of a "good girl" is the notion of sexual chastity. A woman cannot act sexually autonomous without losing some of her sexual value, and with the loss of sexual value women lose some of their humanity. This equation underlies another undergraduate's description of needing the "excuse" of drunkenness in order to have sex (see Lisa, quoted later). Implied in this description of needing an excuse is the belief that there is some decrement in value, some loss associated with responsibly claiming and acting on one's sexuality. Yet another undergraduate explained that once she stopped being a virgin, or once she had sex with a man, it became harder to say no because men would not accept that it was reasonable for a non-virgin to refuse them sexually. Her experience is that once a man has had access to her sexuality, or knows that she has had sex, he acquires the rights to her sexuality. Completely absent from her explanation is the idea that her sexuality might be embedded within her person—to be engaged with at her discretion.

Many of the social responses that women complained about were messages that their value was tied to the value of their sexuality, and that they had lost value as a result of being raped. The idea expressed by some

of the women, that a white woman is more defiled if raped by a black man than a white man, highlights the conception of her sexuality as a usable object that accrues or loses value according to how it is used. If used by a member of a culturally devalued group, her sexuality and hence her person lose value even faster.

The value of a woman's sexuality, and hence her person, is based on the criterion of how many men have had access to her sexuality. This is reflected in the widely-held belief that it is a worse offense to rape a virgin than a non-virgin.

Sarah

> I had a gynecologist here who was very cold ... it was like, I was not a virgin and so what if you got raped?

Thus, once used, her sexuality could not be too badly damaged by additional usage. Damage to her person was not entered into the equation. (Whether the gynecologist actually intended to communicate this, or whether this was what she projected onto his "coldness" is not the issue. Rather the point is that the culturally familiar content of her interpretation of his behavior suggests easily accessible, culturally generated meanings.) Several other women also thought their being raped somehow mattered less because they had not been virgins at the time. The value of a woman as a function of her sexuality, is also reflected in the idea, articulated by several women, that being dead is preferable to being raped. For example, a mother who had once told her daughter (Lucy) before she was raped, "I'd rather see you dead than raped" apologized to the emergency room doctor for her "selfishness" when she admitted she would actually rather have her daughter alive and raped than dead and unraped. In other words, Lucy's mother felt that she was selfish for claiming her daughter as a person for herself, regardless of the loss of her value to a man.

The relationship between a woman's sexual value to a man, and her sexuality may also be seen in the interview data in the ways in which some women interpret the meaning of their treatment by men. The following quotation describes one woman's description of an interaction with a close friend to whom she has just confided that she got raped after her father made her hitch-hike as a character building exercise.

Julie

> [my friend] just said, 'Well that's what you get because your father should never let you hitch-hike. Mine never would. That's what happens.' You can imagine how I felt about that ... [I felt] devastated...I wish I had never said it. I felt like I was a slut and I should never have told her and that my father didn't love me and that now everybody knew it.

> Interviewer: What about it made you feel like you were a slut?

Well the fact that, you know, I didn't mean enough to my father that he would protect me from this kind of behavior. It meant that I wasn't worth it to him.

Interviewer: [Is that the] same thing as being a slut?

Right. Like I was being farmed out or something.

In other words, if you are valued sexually, the man who values you, and in a sense owns your sexuality (in this case her father), protects you from the predation of rapists. If you are not valued or not deemed worthy of protecting, it is because you are not valued sexuality, i.e., you are a slut—a sexually degraded and available woman. A woman is either protected through the selective protection of her sexuality, as in a wife or daughter, or "farmed out" like a prostitute. Sexuality is dichotomized into virgin/whore, unavailable/available, valuable/invaluable, worthy of protection/not worthy of protection.

The right to control one's body—along with expectations for behavior—follows the same dichotomous metaphor. Thus, a woman is either sexually chaste, clean and saving herself for one man, or sexually unchaste and belonging to all.

Rachel

My mother was still under the assumption that I was a virgin. ...she said 'Now this has happened to you and you are going to have it the rest of your life.' [She] didn't want me to press charges... She wanted me to forget about it. She didn't want to talk about it. I was soiled ... [and] now that I'm soiled I'm going to start living a loose life. I'm going to start whoring around ...I really think that she thinks I am whoring around. That I really am a no-good person ... that I really am unclean. Which I don't believe any of it but it bothers me that she believes it.

Another woman, Terry, who on some level did believe "it," became a prostitute following her rape and explained this out-of-character behavior in the following way:

Terry

[When] it really hit me what had happened then I felt very, very dirty. I remember taking a bath but it was like you were internally dirty. You couldn't get clean no matter how you tried ... and after that I didn't care what happened to my body ... I worked in these massage parlors, basically a prostitute. Or I would go to bars and I really didn't care about my body at all. Like what did it matter any more, so I made money on it ... At that point, you know, it's like you've been violated *so so so* bad that it didn't matter. You could be swimming around with a hundred guys, what did it matter now. And ah, that's why [I did it].

Later in the interview she goes on to describe her young daughter as embodying the lost part of herself—the "pure" virgin part:

Terry

She to me is like the driven snow, you know, being four years old ... [Once] I had her it didn't really matter what happened to me because here I've produced this

> wonderful person over here, who is all pure and now, here is something left of me now. So it didn't really much matter [what happened to me].

Terry has split off and projected the pure and hence good part of herself, and is left acting out the other construction available to her—the prostitute. Rachel is a highly educated, upper class woman raped at gunpoint, at age 25, on her job; Terry is a working class woman raped at 19 while hitch-hiking to see her first boyfriend. Although they react differently in their intellectual and behavioral response, both spontaneously describe having to contend with the same dichotomous model of female sexuality (clean vs. dirty/virgin vs. whore) with its attendant evaluation of female worth and expected behavior.

It follows that if female sexuality acquires its value according to male use, then although women technically possess the commodity of their sexuality, it is not really intended for their ownership or use. Women are in a sense merely guarding their sexuality for the appropriate man. If a woman is raped while a virgin, she may see herself as less sexually valuable. If something happens to her sexuality once she "belongs" to a man, the damage accrues to him as well as to her. Thus, Lucy, after trying to talk the gun-wielding assailant out of raping her because "my husband will never touch me again" apologized to her husband for getting raped.

In the following quotation, Martha highlights the relationship between her prerape sexual socialization and her experience of, and response to, being raped.

Martha

> One of the big results for me about the experience was how much I cut off my sexuality for a long time. What's hard for me to know is how much I would have anyway having come from the kind of background I did, having to be brought up to be the good girl and that whole thing... A lot of my cutting off from myself would have to be connected with having been raped because that's how I dealt with it then ... I could never own up to my sexuality with [my boyfriend] so either I'd have to be high or I'd have to not take all my clothes off. It'd be like this frantic thing where if I had my pants around my ankles somehow I really wasn't having sex... I think it was a way of disowning being sexual and that kind of assault [and the consequent] feeling that somehow I had been violated, or was dirty and there was something wrong with my sexuality and me. Then I didn't know how to have it, bring it back to being part of me and say this is mine, I'm going to go with it and enjoy it.

Several pre- and postrape factors converge to shape her response to the rape. Martha had previously identified herself as being brought up to be a "good girl" and she wonders how much of her postrape distancing of herself from her sexuality was predetermined by this "good girl" upbringing, which, in her description, includes the necessity of disowning one's sexuality. The rape provided an additional, traumatic reason for her to get distance from her sexuality. Prerape, her sexuality had put her at risk for being

a bad girl and now, in the context of the rape, she blamed it for the trauma itself. In other words, sexual desire and sexual agency has come to mean responsibility for rape. Elsewhere in the interview she describes how after the rape she felt most troubled by her sense of responsibility. In the above quotation she describes needing to distance herself from feeling responsible for any postrape, chosen sexual activities. Thus, she deals with her self-blame by employing patterns learned from her normative, prerape sex-role socialization. As a result, she disowns her sexuality even more profoundly and this becomes one of the most troubling and persistent legacies of the rape.

The cultural pressure on women to be desirable, to be responsible for male sexuality and to renounce their own sexual agency makes women more vulnerable to being raped (see Lisa later). These pressures make it difficult for women to accurately define and feel outraged about forced sex—i.e., to call rape "rape" and to demand redress, and they provide readily accessible ways of conceptualizing the event which in turn has pernicious effects on self-image and behavior.

3. Female Socialization

The type of cultural constructions regarding rape and female sexuality highlighted above "make sense" because they emerge out of more general and accepted ideas about women. In other words, specific constructions such as "women want to be raped" are related to larger patterns of gender socialization. This was highlighted by the tendency of several women in the study to spontaneously link their more general experience of being female in this culture to their experience of the rape. These women suggest that just as they have come to see sexist jokes as existing on a continuum with rape, so too they have begun to feel that there is some relationship between rape and being socialized as a woman.

For example, Abby, in the context of talking about her postrape-altered view of the world and her discovery that she has to take care of and protect herself, contrasts this new set of expectations with her "conservative" upbringing. In this context she states: "I wasn't raised to have to balance my own checkbook or pay the bills or anything like that." Abby goes on to describe her postrape view of the world as forcing a type of independence not encouraged by her upbringing. Further, she believes that had she been raised to be a more "confident" person, the rapist might not have targeted her, once targeted she might have responded differently, and if raped she might have pressed charges. She is drawing a connection between her socialization to be dependent and her vulnerability to being raped. Her

realization that if she was more confident she might have not only reacted differently (i.e., fought), but might have also pressed charges, suggests a connection between being brought up dependent, without a sense of her own rights, and her inability to react with sufficient outrage during and subsequent to her rape.

In a related, albeit more extreme example, Julie describes how she was brought up to never raise her voice, and how "girls are not valuable in my family." She goes on to describe an instance in which her father, while angry, implies that her achievements must have been obtained by bartering her sexuality.
Julie

> [He told] me that because I had gotten Phi Beta Kappa I was truly a slut. The only thing I was good for was selling my ass on the West Coast. I was nothing but a whore ... He [went] through a list of every achievement I had ever made and made sure that I knew that the only reason [I had achieved it] was because I was nothing but a cunt and so forth and so on.

This type of communication is salient, in part, because of the form the verbal abuse takes. In order to meaningfully abuse his daughter this father labels her a "slut" and reduces her to a "cunt," derogations which derive their meaning from the ways in which female sexuality is constructed. These terms also have a broader relationship to conceptions of female personhood or lack thereof. Agency and achievement (Phi Beta Kappa) are here posited as antithetical to proper femaleness. Good women apparently don't achieve such things, hence his daughter must be a bad woman. To be bad, as a woman, is to be a whore.

Given these aspects of female gendering it is not surprising that at least one woman, Anne, framed the rape as confirming her already extant negative feelings about being female. Even before the rape, although a successful professional, she had felt an acute sense of discrimination as a woman. After the rape, she sees a relationship between the oppression she already felt as a woman and the victimization she experienced being raped.
Anne

> If you want to know the truth, I feel angry about being a woman ... If I wasn't a woman that wouldn't have happened, and it's unfair. And, God damn it, I shouldn't have been a woman, that's how I feel. And I still do. I think I felt that way before the rape, and I think that the rape confirmed that. It's the way I was brought up in my family. I hated being a female, and this confirmed it [CRYING THROUGHOUT]...I feel like, if I was a man, the qualities that I have, I would be able to be moderately successful. This never would have happened. I never would have had to learn to deal with it, I never would have had to even think about it. And that makes me furious ... I can't imagine ever feeling different... I think I'll always hate it. And that bothers me a lot, feeling alienated from my own femaleness. I feel like I'm an inferior person because I'm female. In a way I feel victimized by being female. And, the rape suports that... that's probably the thing that interferes most with my happiness right now—not feeling happy about being a woman, not

feeling good about myself as a human, who happens to be female. That's the most
pain I ever experienced, when I feel, torn [and] angry at myself, for something I
had no choice about, being female... Angry at myself for something else I had no
choice about, being a victim. And yeah, that, that's the worst experience. I feel like,
the views that other people might hold about rape, those things anger me. They
infuriate me. But it's not as painful. I feel like there's some assholes who exist in
the world who have certain beliefs, and they always will and, that doesn't bother
me as much as whenever I feel that alienated from myself, bad about being a
woman, and unable to feel good about myself as a person, being female. That's
the most painful thing. And the rape is so tied into that I can't sort it out.

In addition to the rape resonating and reinforcing her already extant
sense that be female is to be less, she also reacts by directing her anger
at this fact, i.e., turning it inward, a pattern often argued to be socially
inculcated in women.

Fortunately, there is another side to the process of linking rape with
broad social patterns of gendering and discrimination. Becoming aware of
the relationship between rape, broad cultural patterns of gendering, and
one's response to being raped, can facilitate recovery by providing an al-
ternative to self-blame and self-hate. The protocols of several women in-
dicated that an awareness of the cultural context of rape decreased their
sense of isolation and enabled them to label their rape appropriately. This
in turn decreased their self blame and facilitated resolution.

For example, in a sequence of quotations, Martha, who was raped
on a date, describes how being in a T-group where seven out of the eight
women had been raped, helped her, for the first time, to define what hap-
pened to her as a rape. She follows her description of this process with a
description of joining a "Take Back the Night" march in which she marched
past pornography shops and felt "empowered." She states that the march
helped her to "rework and reunderstand" what her experience had actually
been. In the interview, this passage leads to a description of the intense
feelings generated by the rape, such as helplessness and rage, which she
had previously walled off.

Understanding her rape as a problem which is shared with other
women served to legitimize it as a "real rape." This legitimization enabled
her to begin garnering support for her working through process. This, along
with her recognition (via the march) of culturally based derogation of
women, enabled her to access and validate her feelings about the rape.
This process, in turn, changed the internal experience of the event from
one characterized by anger at the self and a lack of an appreciation of her
own basic rights, to one characterized by anger at others, based on an ac-
ceptance of her basic rights. Reframing the rape as an event that grows
out of, and is supported by, a broad sociocultural context allowed her to
feel outraged about it, and to direct this outrage at what she now perceives
to be other manifestations of the same problem.

In the following quotation, we see another women, Lisa, following a similar process. Recognizing rape as an act of gender hatred leads to an important reorganization of her experience of the rape.
Lisa

> I never really felt like a victim until recently, until this year really. I always felt I was somehow responsible because I had gotten myself in the condition to be vulnerable... {Now] I feel that I was victimized. I feel that it's true that I had the control over how much I drank, but in the social situation those pressures, I mean I was drinking because I felt so uncomfortable around guys, and I feel that, that kind of social pressure, that you can't do this, that a woman has to have some reason for wanting to sleep with someone besides that she wants to sleep with him, that she was, she was a little drunk. And I feel that in a way I was [a victim] of that kind of socialization, and that kind of attitude, that is, pervasive at these parties.

> Interviewer: What led you to the change?

> I guess what I've been reading lately and the whole thing about pornography and, I was in a women's studies class last semester, and we talked about rape, and I really realized for the first time the kind of the attitudes that men have about women. I mean I *knew* it, but I just connected it to my situation for the first time, that they have this attitude that women are there for their pleasure, and that they like it. And I felt like I had been a victim of that kind of attitude for some time.

Lisa goes on to describe going to see "Not a Love Story: A film about pornography" and seeing one of her rapists in the audience. At first, she felt "encouraged" that he was there and hoped he was "coming around." When he started making faces at her after the film, she realized that this was not the case and that he was still trying to terrorize her. At first, she was simply frightened, and then she got extremely angry for the first time since the rape 3 years previously. She continues:

> I think when I really started hating men, or being very cynical about their qualities was later when I realized that what happened to me could happen to anybody at any time really, because so many men felt that way.

Several interrelated processes are illustrated in this series of quotations. At first, she does not feel like a victim, instead she feels responsible. For her, this is an either/or proposition. She then describes taking a Women's Studies course in which she is exposed to a feminist analysis of pornography which argues that pornography reveals general attitudes about women and fosters rape-conducive attitudes and rape itself. By her description, her exposure to these ideas gradually leads her to feel that she was made vulnerable to attack by two cultural forces: First, through the process of normal sex-role socialization, she was made to feel so conflictual about choosing to have sex that she got drunk at fraternity parties, which made her vulnerable to attack; second, the myriad ways in which the culture supports rape and attitudes that underlie it made her more likely to be vic-

timized. Contextualizing her personal experience within these broader so-
cial patterns allows her to de-individualize her experience of the rape, and
to begin to see it as an expression of broader social problems. This in turn
allows her to stop blaming herself to the same degree, to label the expe-
rience accurately—that is, as one of victimization—and to get angry at the
rapist and at the social attitudes that she now feels are held by many men.
Anecdotes such as these support feminist theories of treatment which high-
light the need for psychotherapy to critically examine the sociocultural con-
text and its negative effect on women (e.g., Dutton-Douglass and Walker,
1988).

One of the things that can make it hard for women to locate respon-
sibility in the cultural context rather than within themselves is the sheer
frequency of sexually intrusive events which they are likely to experience.
The frequency of these events, especially when they are not widely acknow-
ledged, forces a woman to either locate the blame in the culture, thereby
radically reconceptualizing her view of her society, or to look within herself
for some explanation and (hence) blame.
Sarah

> I did a whole lot of thinking about all of the sexual encounters I have had. I had
> obscene phone calls as a high school student, had a Peeping Tom, had a man that
> exposed himself to me ... One day I was thinking about it. I was thinking, 'Maybe
> you're perverted. You've got all these things that have happened to you sexually
> and then you end up raped.'

In other words, either sexually intrusive events are considerably more
common than is generally acknowledged, or there is something unique
about her that disproportionately attracts these types of events. If the for-
mer, then her view of her culture is altered in a negative direction; if the
latter, then her view of herself suffers.

4. Rape as a Form of Social Control

The preceding material suggests that the broad social patterns out of
which the meaning of rape emerges are a part of women's lives before the
rape, albeit often unrecognized. There is also some indication that these
patterns and pressures lead women to make compromises, and to experi-
ence and shape their lives in the context of the ever present threat of not
being treated as a human being. There is some limited evidence in these
transcripts for the argument made by feminists that the threat of
rape—either actual, or as a symbolic representation of broader pat-
terns—acts as a form of social control and influence (Brownmiller, 1975;
Dworkin, 1978; Griffin, 1971).

For example, Julie, who felt that her father "farmed her out" never wears pants because she wants to be "treated like a lady." One way to interpret this behavior is that she is struggling to conform to the image of a "lady" in hopes of appearing to be a "good" type of woman, i.e., chaste and virtuous. If she appears to be good in this way, then hopefully men will recognize her as belonging to the class of women deserving of protection from other men. Within a dichotomous view of female value, only one of the two classes of women (the chaste, ladylike group) is entitled to protection, which is offered in exchange for their maintaining their sexuality in accordance with male valuation of it, and conforming to the model of a "good girl."

Lucy made a comment that is conceptually related to this. She too believed that if one follows certain rules, one earns membership in the class of women who are protected. Discussing her surprise at being raped and the way it violated her assumptions of the world, she states:

> I guess it's just the idea of well, I'm married, I'm going to be protected now. I've got a wedding ring on. That's supposed to keep you from these things happening to you.

Dworkin (1979) argues that women enter into the social arrangement that they do, in part, to seek protection from men. Whether the search for protection influenced Lucy's decision to marry is impossible to ascertain, but it seems clear that she understands the function of marriage as being partly for the protection of her sexuality, and through this, her right not to be violated.

In a related example, Lisa stated that one reason she did not initially report the rape was because she felt that the men who raped her would protect her from any further trouble. The absurd premise underlying this statement—that a victim should seek protection from her victimizers—is hidden from her because she is adapted to the sociocultural milieu. Lisa stated that she "felt just as responsible as [the men]" who raped her and therefore feared that she would get into "trouble" if other people found out about the rape. One could argue that her reaction is testimony to an extreme form of social control—one in which women are first socialized to assume the guilt for their own victimization, and then forced to seek protection from their victimizers in order to avoid the punishment that this guilt leads them to expect.

In the aftermath of rape, women's awareness of cultural attitudes about rape also shape some of the ways in which they respond behaviorally to the rape, and this in turn increases the likelihood that these attitudes will continue unchallenged. For example, not prosecuting a rape because one assumes, albeit often correctly, that she will receive prejudicial, blaming

treatment, and keeping the rape a secret for the same reason, both common responses in this sample, perpetuate the minimization of the trauma and crime of rape, well as the isolation of rape survivors. Further, rape can also force survivors to conform to certain social stereotypes—i.e., they become more fearful and cautious, and may even become increasingly dependent upon men—to protect them from other men. For example, Abby described this kind of postrape adjustment in her lifestyle.

> [After karate] I'll hang around the gym and walk out with somebody. I used to just, you know, if I had somewhere to go I would just leave ... this whole year I've always waited for a guy to walk out. Which I guess is probably common sense, but it's a change. I never used to think about it.

It is, of course, ironic that even in the context of learning karate Abby feels she must turn to men to "really" protect her. It is especially notable since her need for protection in the first place is a function of male aggression. Her rape has, therefore, functioned to reinforce stereotypical, sex-role behavior which leads her to see dependence upon men for protection as "common sense."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This research presented evidence which supports the hypothesis that women survivors of rape will make spontaneous reference to culturally derived beliefs about women and sexuality in the process of making sense out of their traumatic experience. The content analysis also supports the related hypothesis that the sociocultural context of rape provides ready-made, easily accessed meanings which are likely to play some role in how women make sense out of being raped.

This sociocultural context was related, by the women, to broad patterns of gender socialization. According to these women, manifestations of the cultural construction of gender are present before, during and after the rape; they influence the development of female personality; they provide ways of organizing experience that women bring to the rape; and they affect the meanings that the women and other people give to the rape.

There are several limitations to the generalizations that can be made from the study. The sample size was small and there is no information as to how representative this group was of raped women in general. Further, although the sample varied by SES and age, it was homogeneous for race and ethnicity, and largely homogeneous for sexual orientation. Given the argument that has been made throughout this paper about the importance of culturally derived meanings, we can only assume that membership in

different groups would change, to some degree, the ways in which the dominant culture is filtered, experienced and internalized.

It should also be noted that we are not proposing that the dominant American culture holds a uni-dimensional view of women, nor that all members of this culture are equally influenced, or influenced in the same way. The cultural construction of femaleness, even within the dominant culture, is complex and often contradictory (for example, lately women are encouraged to define themselves, be autonomous and achieve; they are simultaneously encouraged to look to a man for validation, and conceptualize themselves and allow themselves to be used as sexual a object). Further, individual women will selectively filter, internalize, reject, endorse and re-create in their own way the culture's communications. Despite this diversity, what emerged from these data were several consistent features of the cultural landscape, relevant in different degrees and in different ways to the different women, but in some way identified by all, as having a relationship to their experience of being raped.

There was evidence from the interviews that sex is conceptualized as a commodity, that its value is defined not in terms of the woman but rather in terms of male usage. There was plentiful evidence of a related construction of female sexual value as a dichotomized entity, with consequent ramifications for the overall value of the woman. Thus, the survivors describe two classes of women: "good" and "bad." These classes are established on the basis of sexual behavior (either chosen or imposed—it seems not to matter), which in turn have implications for the woman's human rights—specifically, whether or not she is entitled to have her bodily boundaries respected. This reasoning works in reverse as well: If her boundaries are not respected, it must be because she belongs to the class of women not deserving of respect—the unchaste. There is also the sense that women need protection—from men—and that the only people who can provide it are other men. Men in turn protect women according to whether women fulfill their end of the social contract, namely, by maintaining their sexual value according to the criteria set by the protecting male.

Some of the survivors also referred to other salient aspects of female socialization. These included not being brought up to be independent, feeling denied certain opportunities for achievement and self-actualization, and feeling devalued as a result of being female.

These survivors' statements about cultural constructions of femaleness and sexuality provide confirmation of what many feminist scholars (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Dworkin, 1979, Millet, 1970) have documented from varied sources, such as literature, the law, and political history. The observations detailed above have also been reported in interviews with men

about rape (Beneke, 1982), and in other interview studies of rape survivors (Russell, 1974). The fact that these constructions of femaleness emerge from varied sources, and that they can be reliably documented through relatively simple, content analytic techniques, lends support to the argument that our culture constructs gender in ways that are likely to influence survivor's response to, and understanding of, being raped.

As noted in the results, many women became acutely aware of features of the social landscape which bore an actual or symbolic relationship to the rape. In other words, they became sensitive to what Medea and Thompson (1974), for example, have referred to as the "little rapes" which plague women on a daily basis. These were invariably events which they had encountered before the rape, but which took on a different, more negative meaning as a result of the women's recognition of their similarity to the rape itself. Thus, a woman who can no longer tolerate sexist jokes is perceiving a similarity in the attitudes toward women inherent in the nature of the joke (e.g., objectification, degradation) and the attitudes embodied in the rape.

Living in an environment which is full of the symbols of objectification and degradation of women, and laden with the continuing threat of repeated rape, may make it very difficult for a survivor to move towards resolution. For example, the presence in the environment of rape-relevant stimuli may make it difficult for her to avoid having her traumatic anxiety continually re-triggered, thereby broadening the domain of traumatic affect at a time when one would hope to be narrowing it. Keane et al. (1985), in talking about the fear response in Vietnam combat veterans, note that the more frequently a traumatized veteran is exposed to anxiety-producing stimuli the harder it is for the veteran to avoid being continually retraumatized. This in turn is likely to expand the number of stimuli which arouse traumatic anxiety. Similarly, a woman who walks to work each day past pornography stores, or who has to hear sexually objectifying comments at work, is likewise unable to get away from anxiety-arousing stimuli.

The meaning of living in a culture which tolerates and promotes a negative, rape-conducive construction of gender may make it difficult for a survivor to achieve a view of reality which encompasses both positive and negative perspectives. Epstein (1991) has suggested that fundamental organizing beliefs exist in a dichotomous either/or state. When trauma invalidates a positive view, the person may easily flip into the opposite view. Thus, if one sees the world as essentially benevolent (which Epstein argues is a universal belief), and one is traumatized, one's view of the world is likely to abruptly shift from presuming the world to be fundamentally benevolent to perceiving the world as fundamentally malevolent. Resolution depends upon achieving a balanced, complex view of reality which encom-

passes both perceptions in a viable balance. If we transpose this framework onto the trauma of rape, it would seem that the extant culture may make a balanced view difficult to achieve postrape. Rape makes a woman sensitive to rape-relevant stimuli which permeate the culture. This is not only a process of traumatic conditioning; it is also a process of education—the rape has forced her to "see," in a clearer light, what has been there all along. Under the best of circumstances, this kind of awareness might be quite stressful. In the aftermath of a rape, it may be intensely so. The personal trauma, which in and of itself was sufficient to destabilize her ability to perceive the world as a benevolent place, is now potentially further challenged by this second level of traumatization. These processes, therefore, increase the likelihood that the woman will have greater difficulty maintaining a view of reality that is sufficiently complex (or sufficiently suffused with "adaptive illusions" (Taylor, 1983)), such that she can maintain a positive relationship to the world.

The cultural context can, through its effect on meaning systems, affect women's response to rape in several ways. Some constructions may be a part of complex belief systems that are in place before the rape, and which leave the woman little room but to understand the rape in self-detrimental ways. At other times, cultural constructions may be adopted as a useful, although ultimately damaging way to reestablish feelings of agency, both within oneself and within the social domain. Some of these constructions may be offered to women by other people as a way of making themselves feel safe. Lastly, a woman may have once considered these constructions, and long since rejected them, only to find that, in the advent of a rape, these latent rape-relevant schemas reappear, because they now fit the traumatic reality, and bring with them a host of unconscious and unwanted self-blaming and negative attributions.

For example, a woman might hold traditional views which include many of the ideas described above (such as there are good/virtuous women and bad/promiscuous women), but feel that she can live her life in such a way as to be a "good" woman. Hence, she remains a virgin till marriage and expects, as one woman in the study noted, that her wedding ring will keep her safe. If it doesn't keep her safe, she may have no alternative within her world view but to make damaging attributions about herself—namely, that if it happened to her it must mean that she is now a "bad" woman.

Thus, in the case of the woman who has internalized these types of constructions, the preservation of her views about women, sexuality and the social bargain maintains her perception of her cultural environment as orderly and reasonable. The alternative would be to reevaluate her world view, thereby incurring the disorientation and stress of losing an organized belief system, and possibly incurring the secondary trauma of perceiving

the world as a dangerous, random place. One woman in the study talked about trying to make sense of all the seemingly random, sexually intrusive events she had experienced before she got raped. She wondered, with a mixture of bewilderment and humor, whether she must not be perverse to have had all these things happen to her and then get raped. The alternative to deciding she is perverted is, of course, to decide that her culture is perverted—a shift which may decrease her self-derogation but may increase her fear and/or her rage.

A more extreme form of preserving a world view at the cost of a self view, and of avoiding continual retraumatization by the types of symbolic rapes which permeate our social landscape, is to do what Epstein (1991) has labeled "embracing the trauma." This is a form of adaptation which makes use of a profound type of internalization. If at some level one experiences the context of the rape to be everywhere—if one feels unable to psychologically remove oneself from the traumatic situation—one way to avoid continual retraumatization is to reconstruct one's schemas so that they are no longer discrepant with the environment. Thus, one adopts a schema which enables one to experience the environment as consonant with one's views of oneself. In this way, new insults are no longer experienced as shattering. The woman in the study who became a prostitute after being raped had, at some level, "embraced" the construction of the event—I'm raped, I'm a whore—and then proceeded to behave consistently with this new construction.

Self blame, one can argue, provides a defense against the threat of external chaos (i.e., the perception of a world with no clear rules), as well as internal chaos (i.e., the acknowledgement of helplessness). Given the motivation to avoid feeling helpless and powerless, one role that the culture plays is to provide ready-made ways of understanding the experience of rape which facilitate the reemergence of a sense of efficacy, but which are predicated on constructs likely to be damaging to a woman's self-image.

There were several examples of this. For example, the idea that sexuality is a commodity, valued by men, which women are charged with protecting, may be related to one woman's apology to her husband for getting raped at gunpoint, and another woman's assumption that the rape must have been some punishment for prior sexual behavior. Similarly, the notion that women are responsible for controlling men's sexuality, and if there is a failure in that domain it must be their fault, can lead to attributions like that of the undergraduate who felt "as responsible as [the rapists]."

The culture may also exert an effect on meaning systems even on women who have long since relinquished (at least consciously) some of these schemas. For example, several women described prior conflicts related to sexuality which revolved around sexual rights, sexual agency and

how to be both sexual and a "good girl." Assuming for a moment that these conflicts had been resolved, for example in the direction of asserting sexual rights, one could also assume that the resolution would have left psychic residues in the form of the now inactive or latent schemas (wherein sexual rights would be more constrained than in the "resolved," i.e., dominant schema). In this instance the dominant schemas may be seen as a somewhat fragile bulwark against the press of more negative schemas which have been internalized but which are not being used actively. A rape, which abrogates one's sexual rights, might deactivate the dominant schemas because they would no longer have explanatory power. Instead, the latent schemas would be "called forth" because of their compelling explanatory capacity in the aftermath of the trauma. Horowitz *et al.* (1980) have described similar processes whereby bereavement activates prior, negative self-images and role-relationship schemas which are latent and which have powerful explanatory power in the advent of a traumatic loss. We are proposing a parallel process with the caveat that the latent schemas may be internalized, i.e., learned, cultural constructions and need not be a function of individual, neurotic processes.

Cultural forces may also affect women's response to rape by helping to shape their orientation to certain forms of victimization. One woman talked about not being raised to be independent and stated she felt this made her more vulnerable to being raped. Another spoke of feeling like certain opportunities for achievement and self-actualization had been discouraged for her because she was female. Other women voiced confusion about whether forced sex was rape. Another described how she was raised "never to raise [her] voice." And several noted that they did not expect appropriate social redressing in the courts or in the responses of other people. One interpretation of these comments is that they represent patterns of gendering, and that they facilitate the development of a class of people who are adapted to certain forms of victimization. Feeling less independent, less confident, less able to raise your voice, and less sure of your protection under the law can all contribute to being more susceptible to victimization, to being less likely to recognize it when it happens, more likely to accept it as justified in some way, and less likely to respond to it with outrage.

The importance of the cultural context can also be seen in those examples in the results where culture is intertwined with the issue of legitimization. For example, problems legitimizing the rape, particularly in terms of labeling it a crime, can best be understood in terms of the types of meanings which we have been talking about. The difficulty some women had, particularly those raped by acquaintances, in defining their experiences as a rape, speaks to cultural factors shaping the woman's understanding of the event. In these instances the nature of the labeling difficulty implies

that the nature of the violation is being defined more in terms of male rights (there is no confusion when it is a strange man of a lower class for example, only when it is a known man of the same class), rather than the experience of the woman (i.e., being physically subdued and forced to have sex which is a constant). Difficulties labeling a rape as "rape" affect women's ability to seek appropriate support and to give themselves the psychological room to recover.

Perhaps one of the most striking illustrations of the effect of the cultural context on women's responses to being raped emerges when an awareness of the cultural context is described as undoing some of the processes we have been highlighting. Several women (see Lisa for example) talked about a process whereby perceiving a relationship between normative social patterns and rape (such as the recognition that rape is a common phenomenon, hence it cannot simply reflect something unique about them) enabled them to stop blaming themselves, to acknowledge their victimization and to become angry. This understanding was associated, by the women, with steps towards some resolution of the trauma.

These findings have implications for recovery and treatment. There is support for the idea that, as part of an optimal recovery process, many survivors will need to find some way to deconstruct blaming and degrading constructions of women and sexuality. Clearly this can be done outside of the treatment context (as it was by the women in this study).

A woman who chooses to pursue her recovery through treatment should also be helped to critically examine the sociocultural context and the ways that she has internalized its messages. The data from this study support a model of therapy which integrates the analysis of both intrapsychic *and* social forces. As with any other clinical intervention, this process holds risks and benefits. In general, the danger of the therapist not facilitating an examination of the types of constructions illuminated here is that the therapist will collude with pernicious social forces and their destructive influence on the survivor. By not facilitating an examination of these issues the therapist risks robbing from the client a valuable source of validation and legitimate outrage which can help to de-shame and de-pathologize her experience. The danger of encouraging an examination of the sociocultural environment is that the therapist risks adding another layer of anger, alienation, fear and grief to an experience that is already over-burdened with these feelings (see Lebowitz, 1991, 1993, for a more in-depth discussion of these issues). As with any other type of clinical intervention, maximum attention must be paid to respecting the client's pace, their level of support and individual needs and differences (See Herman, 1992).

In sum, for better and for worse we are a part of our environment. One cannot separate a woman's experience of, or recovery from, sexual trauma from the sociocultural environment in which it is experienced.

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