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If you're living with a man, what are you doing running around the streets getting raped?

Edward Harrington, defense attorney in New Bedford gang rape case.

Romance was her suicidal substitute for action; fantasy her suicidal substitute for a real world, a wide world. And intercourse was her suicidal substitute for freedom.

Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (1987), discussing Emma Bovary

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A Rally against Rape (1981)

When the wind blows, I hear the pitchforks rumbling in the background over this P.A. system.

I want to speak with you about rape as a problem of sexism, a problem of the inequality between women and men. We are not in the midst of an epidemic of rape; we are in the midst of a short flurry of rape reporting and rape publicity. Why are these rapes being reported and, in particular, why are they being publicized? If for every reported rape there are between two and ten unreported rapes (a conservative estimate), it is extremely important to ask not only why the ones that are reported are, but why the ones that are not reported are not.

I think women report rapes when we feel we will be believed. The rapes that have been reported, as they have been reported, are the kinds of rapes women think will be believed when we report them. They have two qualities: they are by a stranger, and they are by a Black man. These two elements give you the white male archetype of rape. When the newspaper says that these rapes are unusual, they are right in a way. They are right because rapes by strangers are the least common rapes women experience. And to the extent that these are interracial, they are also the least common rapes women experience. Most rapes are by a man of the woman's race¹ and by a man she knows: her husband, her boss, an acquaintance, or a date.²

In considering the element of racism in this particular publicity and the nerve that this rape reporting seems to hit, I think it is important to tell you what I have been told. That is, that two of the victims of this current rapist are women of color. I think that the nonreporting of this aspect, although it may have been requested initially by the women victims and may be an attempt to preserve confidentiality, also plays into the racist image that what rape is about is Black men defiling "our white womanhood." The invisibility of women of color

This talk was given at White Plaza, Stanford University, Stanford, California, Nov. 16, 1981, where several hundred students gathered to grieve and protest a series of rapes reported on campus.

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Feminism
UNMODIFIED

CATHARINE A. MACKINNON

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England 1987

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is such that if you do not say that a woman is of color, it is assumed that her race is nonexistent—therefore, oddly, white. It's also important for us to be aware that women of color (this is specifically a statistic about Black women) are raped four times as often as white women.³

Of the reasons raped women give for not reporting rape, the most common⁴ is fear of retribution. The retaliation they usually have in mind is that the rapist will come back after them, which he often says he will do during the rape. Or they fear that their boyfriends or husbands will beat them or reject them. Very young women, and also older women, are often afraid that they will be kicked out of the house. Women who have been victims of incest are particularly likely to feel this. Women also feel fear and despair of police, hospitals, and the legal system. Women believe that not only will we not be believed by the police, not only will the doctors treat us in degrading ways, but when we go to court, the incident will not be seen from our point of view. It is unfortunate that these fears have, on the whole, proved accurate. The fear of being treated poorly is not an invention of women's imaginations. It is the result of the way we have been treated. I'm hoping that responsible officials at Stanford are taking notice of the interest and the anger that women are expressing now to realize that they are seeing only the tip of the iceberg and that they are part of the reason why.

Women who do not report rape also say that we want to forget about it; that we feel embarrassed and humiliated by it and that just talking to someone else adds to that sense of exposure, the sense of utter loss of privacy. The very loss we felt when we were raped is compounded by complaining about the rape. That says something about the receptiveness of the context we're in when we try to talk about it. Our protest and resistance are turned into a continuation of the violation. Women also blame ourselves. We fear being blamed by other people, and they do blame us.

In what I've said so far, I've had in mind an entire range of rape experiences. Politically, I call it rape whenever a woman has sex and feels violated. You might think that's too broad. I'm not talking about sending all of you men to jail for that. I'm talking about attempting to change the nature of the relations between women and men by having women ask ourselves, "Did I feel violated?" To me, part of the culture of sexual inequality that makes women not report rape is that the definition of rape is not based on our sense of our violation.

A Rally against Rape

I think it's fairly common, and is increasingly known to be common, for men to seek sexual access to women in ways that we find coercive and unwanted. On those occasions the amount and kind of force are only matters of degree. The problem is that rapes do not tend to be reported or prosecuted or sanctioned based on the force that was used; not based on how coercive it was and not based on how violated the woman feels; instead they are based on how intimate she is with the person who did it. This is why most women think we won't be believed in reporting the most common rapes, that is, rapes by people we know. As a result, I agree with what people have been saying, that rape is everyone's problem. But that doesn't mean that it's men's problem and women's problem in the same way.

To men I want to say: have you ever had sex with a woman when she didn't want it? Were you and are you really careful to find out? Is it enough that you say to yourself now, "I don't know"? Are you really afraid that nothing will happen between you and a woman if you don't make it happen? Are you afraid of our rage today? That we will turn it against you? Is there perhaps a reason for your fear? I think you need to remember that we love you. And that as a result it's often very unclear to us why you are so urgent. It's unclear to us why you are so pressured in seeking sexual access to us. We want you not to denigrate us if we refuse. We want you to support us, to listen to us, and to back off a little. Maybe to back off a lot. And we also want you to realize that supporting us is not the same as taking over either our injuries or our pleasure.

To women I want to say: what do you really want? Do you feel that you have the conditions under which you can ask yourself that question? If you feel that you are going to be raped when you say no, how do you know that you really want sex when you say yes? Do you feel responsible for men's sexual feelings about you? What about their responsibility for yours, including your lack of them? I also want to say that women need self-protection; we do not need more paranoia. The Stanford police tell us, "A little fear is a good thing right now." I think we do not need more fear. We need to make fear unnecessary.

On an individual basis the only thing that I know that begins to address this is something we have access to here: real training in self-defense. Martial arts is not just physical preparation for a one-time shot or a quick fix or a bag of tricks. It is a spiritual, integrated way of relating to one's body as one's own, in which one acts and lives and embodies oneself in the world. Not something that exists only

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for carrying your head about or to be looked at by other people. Self-defense, if it's done right, can begin to give us back a sense that we have a self worth defending.

I have spoken with you about what holds women back from reporting rape in the context of what I think rape is. The only way for us to have this episode not just blow over, as such episodes have for centuries, is to use this occasion seriously to question and to change our lives and to support all sisters who resist.