

WHY WOMEN DO NOT REPORT SEXUAL ASSAULT

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Linda Belden

PART I: INTRODUCTION

WHY WOMEN DO NOT REPORT SEXUAL ASSAULT

In my case, I think if I had been grabbed on the street or something, I would have reported it. But this was a guy I knew, a guy I worked for.

Because he was part of my crowd at school, I assumed he was okay and agreed to give him a ride home... (and was) raped. Because he was a criminology major, he knew what he was doing and was obviously planning my rape in advance--he wore a rubber and I had no evidence for rape, only assault. (The rape was not reported.)

A woman raped by her husband:

I never used the word "rape" until much later... I assumed that was how things were... if I wanted a relationship, that's what I had to put up with.

A woman talks about whether to report rape:

Why go through the additional hell of being doubted, ignored, subtly put down by relatives and associates and risk further retaliation from the males too? See, one would have to be a real masochist!

It's just the rape... I am depressed and feeling very dirty and so emotional. I cry and laugh at moments that seem so unreasonable. I'm a mess. I don't trust myself to be alone, nor can I hardly stand to be touched, I hate it. I hate him most of all. I feel unworthy. I hate being alive now.

Rape can be devastating. The experience of rape has disrupted the lives of countless women and their friends and families. Rape is the fastest growing form of violent crime in this country; a rape occurs in the U.S. once every nine minutes and the rate increases every year. It is also one of the most under-reported forms of crime. The FBI estimates that for every rape that is reported, two to ten times that number goes unreported.

Most people imagine rape happening in dark alleys when sex-crazed lunatics leap out and grab pretty young women who are provocatively dressed. This scenario is beginning to be recognized for the misleading myth that it is. Most rapes happen in women's homes. Most rapists are in every way "normal", except that they act upon rape fantasies. In fact, many rapists are respected members of the community. Women of every age are raped. In Portland in 1978, the youngest female raped was three, the oldest ninety-four. The notion that "provocative dress" causes rape has been discredited, first of all, because it assumes that rape is primarily a sexual crime; when in fact the nature of rape is more violent than sexual. Secondly, this notion is misleading because like so many other common notions about rape, it places the blame upon the woman and not the offender.

Misconceptions about rape are slow to change. One common misconception is that women are raped primarily by strangers. The available evidence indicates that in at least half of all cases of rape, the woman was acquainted with the man who raped her. In Portland in 1978, fifty-six percent of the reported rape cases occurred between people in some way acquainted. Estimates from a sample of hotlines of the proportion of acquaintance rapes range from forty to sixty percent. (Rape hotlines receive calls from women who do not report rape, as well as from women who do.) The focus of this study is unreported rape. Of the women interviewed for the study, three-fourths were raped by people they knew. Over one third were raped by people they knew intimately. In all of these cases, the relationship of the woman to the attacker was in some way a factor in her decision not to report the rape.

Almost a third of the women interviewed were molested or raped as children (in addition to being sexually assaulted as adults). All were molested by trusted adults. Incest is defined for the purposes of this study as "inappropriate sexual contact between a child and an adult who is in a trusted relationship to the child" (i.e. a family member, close family friend, etc.). The FBI estimates that one out of four females will be molested before they reach the age of eighteen. Available information from sexual assault centers and Children's Protective Services indicate that at least eighty-five to ninety percent of the children who are sexually abused are incest victims. In other words, children are being sexually molested, for the most part, by relatives or other trusted adults. People who work with incest victims estimate that perhaps as many as one-third of all women were sexually abused as children. Incest is even less frequently reported than rape.

What is revealed by these statistical estimates and the experiences of the women interviewed in this study is an epidemic of sexual abuse, frequently kept secret because it is happening within the family and other relationships of trust. Studies such as this one only begin to make public the dimensions of this neglected social problem.

The Study's Purpose and Methodology

Purpose:

Relatively little research has been done on unreported sexual assault. Little is known or written about acquaintance rape which is apparently the most common form of unreported rape. It is only recently that these problems have begun to receive the attention they merit. The first purpose of this study was to uncover the reasons women do not report sexual assault. The second purpose was to elicit recommendations from women who have been raped and others' suggestions about how to increase the reporting of sexual assault.

In the process of carrying out the research, it quickly became clear that the purpose of the study would have to expand in two ways. First, the sexual assault of children (especially incest) needed to be included, given the striking fact that a third of the women interviewed had had some experience

with molestation as children. Second, the broader recommendations of the women interviewed about how to end sexual assault seemed essential to include. As each woman discussed her recommendations, she would move from the question of how to increase reporting to the questions of what causes sexual assault and what would need to be changed to end it. In the interim, increased reporting and conviction of rapists will contribute to ending rape. However, the underlying premise of this research is that, ultimately, rape will not end without profound changes in the ways masculinity and femininity are regarded in our society. What seems most useful is to pose the question of what holds women back from reporting rape, in the context of the larger question of what causes rape itself.

How the study was conducted:

Originally, this study was to be based on the records of calls received by the Portland Women's Crisis Line. Although useful information was gathered from these records, it became clear that this source was not adequate for an in-depth study of the problem of non-reporting for a number of reasons:

First, many of the rape calls are crisis calls or the women had particular needs that made it inappropriate to ask many questions for research purposes. Second, in a great number of cases, the woman does not decide whether or not to report while talking to a phone counselor. The question is always discussed and many decide clearly one way or the other, but many do not. Third, many rape calls come from the friends or families of the woman raped. Hence, it was impossible to gather first-hand information about her reasons for not reporting. Even when the records do include stated reasons, they lack the complexity and depth available in an interview setting.

Thus, I decided to base the study primarily on interviews with women who did not report being raped. Women were reached through public service announcements on radio, television, and in newspapers and magazines. Women were interviewed mostly in the Portland area, some in Seattle, and letters were received from various parts of the country. Each woman interviewed also filled out a questionnaire.

The research method of interviewing was selected partly because any statistical source seemed inadequate to deal with the complexity of the issue of unreported sexual assault. The women I spoke with had a chance to reflect in depth about their experience and a wide range of factors in their particular situations that held them back from reporting. It was also my purpose to allow these women to speak through this research project, to use their words whenever possible.

One important aspect of unreported rape that is beyond the scope of this study is homosexual rape. The seriousness of this problem should not be underestimated. Men are raped. Men are also molested sexually as children in significant numbers. (Most children molested are female, but approximately ten percent are male.) Men who call the crisis line describe the same reactions to the rape experience as women who call. Men rarely report rape. Their reasons are similar to women's for not reporting rape. They also tend to feel a sense of shame and isolation that is especially intense because they are alone with what has happened to them. This subject merits special study in its own right.

PART II: STATISTICAL RESULTS

The statistical results that follow suggest a number of interesting hypotheses about unreported sexual assault. Three-fourths of the unreported rapes discussed in the interviews are acquaintance rape, including 63% close or intimate acquaintance rapes and 12% casual acquaintance rapes. The highest percentages of unreported rapes in the records of both the Portland Women's Crisis Line and Seattle Rape Relief Hotline are acquaintance rapes. These statistics support the hypothesis that the majority of women who are raped and do not report are raped by people they know.

The Portland police receive a surprisingly high number of reports from women who are raped by people they know. It would be interesting to investigate the extent to which this high number is due to the presence in Portland of both a victim's assistance program and a rape hotline. A study comparing rape reports in cities with rape hotlines and victim's assistance programs to cities without these services would be useful. Laws in Oregon such as the one barring the woman's sexual history (under most circumstances) as evidence in court proceedings may also affect the rate of reporting in Oregon.

Estimates of the number of unreported rapes vary from twice to ten times the number of reported rapes. Rape hotlines receive calls from women who report, as well as from women who do not. If the estimates of the numbers of unreported rape are correct, one would expect to see more unreported rape calls in the records of rape hotlines than this study indicates. However, it is probably true that many women who do not report rape to the police are also reluctant to call rape hotlines. One woman I interviewed was raped by her boyfriend in a city where there was a rape hotline. She told me she could not bring herself to call them even though she knew it would not be the same as reporting to the police, because she "just wasn't ready to tell anyone". Rape hotlines are relatively new. The Portland Women's Crisis Line, Oregon's oldest rape hotline, has only been in operation for five years. It is my hypothesis that these hotlines are just beginning to become known as places for women to go, when they don't want to go to the police. It is also my hypothesis that some of the same factors that cause women to report stranger-to-stranger rapes to the police more often than acquaintance rapes affect the kinds of calls rape hotlines receive. Many women raped by people they know tell no one.

All the statistics on the sexual abuse of children indicate that children are almost always abused by adults they know. All agencies in Portland, including the Portland Women's Crisis Line and Children's Protective Services, report dramatic increases in the numbers of incest cases over the past few years. Incest is beginning to come out of the closet.

Any conclusions to be drawn from these statistical results should be tentative. Much more study of these problems needs to be undertaken before confident statements can be made specific aspects of these problems. However, it can be stated with some confidence that these statistics indicate a neglected social problem of enormous scope and seriousness.

PART II: STATISTICAL RESULTS

A. The Interviews

Total number of women: Thirty-five (35).

(Twenty-seven interviews, six letters, and two stories told indirectly by women whose daughters had also been sexually assaulted.)

Total number of episodes of sexual assault: fifty-six (56).

("Episode": repeated incidents with the same offender were counted as one episode.)

Ten episodes were reported. These include three episodes in which the police were called without the woman's consent, and four in which the woman had a very negative experience of reporting to the police. (None of the four reported in Portland.)

Forty-six episodes were not reported. These include three episodes in which the woman attempted to report and was prevented from following through with the report for various reasons.

B. The Women Interviewed:

The women interviewed ranged in age from seventeen years old to their late fifties. The ages at the time the sexual assaults occurred ranged from two to three years to the mid-fifties. The educational level attained by the women ranged from the ninth grade to advanced degrees. The range of socio-economic levels was from welfare level to upper-middle class. The women were Caucasian with the exception of one Native American.

Approximately 60% of the women interviewed were raped outside of Oregon. Of those raped in Oregon, a little less than half were raped in Portland.

Number of women with single episodes: Twenty-two (22).

Number of women with multiple episodes: Thirteen (13).

(Six women had three episodes, seven women had two.)

(Again, one "episode" includes multiple incidents with the same offender.)

Number of women who experienced multiple incidents with the same offender as adults: five (5). (all offenders were their husbands)

Number of women who experienced multiple incidents with the same offender as children: eight (8).

PART II: STATISTICS

C. Offender Category Breakdown

- Category 1: Stranger
- Category 2: Very casual acquaintance (met same day, social contact prior to sexual assault)
- Category 3: Acquaintance (boss, friend of family, neighbor, date, etc.)
- Category 4: Intimate acquaintance/relative (boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, husband, close family friend, psychotherapist, father, brother-in-law, etc.)

SEXUAL ABUSE OF ADULT WOMEN (Total of 41 episodes, 32 women, includes rapes and attempted rapes)

Unreported Episodes

Category of offender: (Total: 33)
 Number of episodes: 33
 Percentages (approximated):

1	2	3	4	No Info.
8	4	9	12	0
24%	12%	27%	36%	00
63%*				
75%*				

*In 63% of the episodes, the offender was a known or intimate acquaintance.

*In 75% of the episodes, the offender was acquainted to the victim to some degree.

Reported Episodes

Category of offender:
 Number of episodes: (Total: 8)
 Percentages (approximated):

1	2	3	4	No Info.
5	0	2	0	1
63%	0%	25%	0%	13%

SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN (Total of 15 episodes, 11 women. Includes incest and molestation by strangers.)

Unreported Episodes

Category of offender:
 Number of episodes: (Total: 13)
 Percentages (approximated):

1	2	3	4	No Info.
0	0	3	8	2
0%	0%	23%	62%	15%
85%*				

Reported Episodes

Category of offender:
 Number of episodes: (Total: 2)
 Percentages (approximated):

1	2	3	4	No Info.
0	0	1	1	0
		50%	50%	

ALL SEXUAL ABUSE TAKEN TOGETHER (Total of 56 episodes, 35 women)

Unreported Episodes

Category of offender:

Number of episodes: (Total: 46)

Percentages (approximated):

1	2	3	4	No Info.
8	4	12	20	2
17%	9%	26%	44%	4%
		70%		
			79%	

Reported Episodes

Category of offender:

Number of episodes: (Total: 10)

Percentages (approximated):

1	2	3	4	No Info.
5	0	3	1	1
50%	0%	30%	10%	10%

TABLES

PORTLAND WOMEN'S CRISIS LINE STATISTICS ON SEXUAL ASSAULT
January 1977 through February 1979

Table 1	1977	1978	1979 (through Feb.)	Total
Rape or Attempted Rape:	230	253	52	535
Incest or Child Molestation:	43	59	10	112

Table 2 Relationship of Rapist to woman	1977	1978	1979 (through Feb.)	Total
Stranger:	64	123	13	200
Acquaintance:	61	58	15	134
No Information:	105	72	24	201
Yearly Totals:	<u>230</u>	<u>253</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>535</u>

Table 3 Summary of relationship	
Percentage of total:	<u>Excluding No Information:</u>
Stranger: 37%	Stranger: 59%
Acquaintance: 26%	Acquaintance: 41%
No Info.: 37%	

Table 4 Reported or unreported	1977	1978	1979 (through Feb.)	Total
Reported:	67	77	18	162
Unreported:	103	78	17	198
No Info.:	60	98	17	175
	<u>230</u>	<u>253</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>535</u>

Table 5 Summary of reported/unreported	
Percentage of total:	<u>Excluding No Information:</u>
Reported: 30%	Reported: 45%
Unreported: 38%	Unreported: 55%
No Info: 32%	

Table 6 Relationship of Rapist to Woman and whether rape was reported/unreported, (based on 6 mos. sample, 136 cases) (% approx.)				
	<u>Stranger</u>	<u>Acquaintance</u>	<u>No Info.</u>	<u>% Total</u>
Reported	12% (18)	11% (17)	10% (5)	33% (40)
Unreported	11% (17)	15% (23)	10% (7)	36% (47)
No Info.	0% (1)	0% (1)	31% (47)	31% (49)
	<u>23% (36)</u>	<u>26% (41)</u>	<u>51% (59)</u>	<u>100% (136)</u>

Table 6 (Excluding No Information category) (totals 75 cases)			
	<u>Stranger</u>	<u>Acquaintance</u>	<u>% Total</u>
Reported:	24% (18)	22% (17)	46% (35)
Unreported:	22% (17)	30% (23)	52% (40)
	<u>46% (35)</u>	<u>52% (40)</u>	<u>98% (75)</u>

Table 7 INCEST & CHILD MOLESTATION: Relationship of Child to Offender*				
	<u>Stranger</u>	<u>Incest</u>	<u>No Info.</u>	<u>% Total</u>
Reported	1%	16%	0%	17%
Unreported	0%	37%	0%	37%
No Info. =	0%	16%	27%	43%
	1% (4)	69% (84)	27% (24)	97% (112)

*1977-1979 totals, based on 112 cases)

OTHER AGENCIES' STATISTICS

Portland Police Department (From Rape Victim Assistance Yearly Monitoring Report for 1978.)

Number referred to police: 408
(sexual assault including rape, sodomy, attempted rape, sexual molestation, etc.)

Relationship of victim to offender (defined similarly to the interview statistics on the preceding pages):

1. Stranger to stranger: 44%
2. Acquaintance: 30%
3. Intimate acquaintance: 26%

Seattle Rape Relief Hotline (Based on a three-month sample, from October through December 1978, 121 cases.)

	<u>Stranger</u>	<u>Acquaintance</u>	<u>No Info.</u>	<u>% Total</u>
Reported	19% (24)	21% (26)		40% (50)
Unreported	8% (10)	28% (35)		36% (45)
No Info.	9% (11)	5% (7)	6% (8)	20% (26)
	<u>36% (45)</u>	<u>54% (68)</u>	<u>6% (8)</u>	<u>96% (121)</u>

Most common reasons for not reporting according to Seattle Rape Relief Hotline: 1. fear of retaliation, 2. fear of people finding out, and 3. fear of police procedures.

Reported Cases of Child Molestation in Oregon (These statistics come from the Children's Services Division of Oregon.)

Number of reported cases:

1975: 86
1976: 250
1977: 306
1978: 528

Who abuses? (range of statistics from 1975 to 1978):

Father or stepfather: 52 - 62%
Stranger: 2 - 3%

PART III

COMMON REASONS WOMEN DO NOT REPORT SEXUAL ASSAULT:

(This list is based on the reasons given to the Portland Women's Crisis Line counselors between January 1977 and February 1979, listed in order of how frequently mentioned they were.)

1. The most common reasons mentioned by women who call the Crisis Line are: fear of retaliation, and fear of police, hospital and/or court procedures.
2. The second most common reasons shown in Crisis Line records are: fears of teenagers that their parents will find out, "just wanting to forget about it", not wanting a family member (or members) to know, and not wanting to have dealings with the police because the woman was a runaway.
3. The next most frequently mentioned reasons are: fears of not being believed, feelings of embarrassment, and feelings of self-blame.
4. Other common reasons are: fears that a husband or boyfriend would beat her if he found out, fears that a husband or boyfriend would beat up or kill the rapist if he found out, the feeling that "it would do no good", guilt feelings because the woman was hitchhiking at the time she was raped, unwillingness to deal with the police because of a previous bad experience with police in the past, or not believing that she has meaningful legal recourse (in the case of the woman being raped by a man she knew intimately).

PART III: DISCUSSION OF WOMEN'S REASONS
FOR NOT REPORTING SEXUAL ASSAULT

Fear of police and court procedures

About one-third of the women in the study had some fear of police procedures, the courts, or other official responses to their situation. Three women attempted to report and were not allowed by the police to follow through with the report. Four women who did report contacted me to be interviewed in order to discuss the negative experiences they had had with the police, including one woman who was raped twice after reporting a rape and did not report these rapes because of her previous experience with the police. (None of these women reported or attempted to report in Portland.)

The greatest need for me after being raped was finding consolation, help, support... After half a lifetime of living and learning about male attitudes, I had absolutely no assurance of meeting a sensitive male in the police station, of all places...

I was afraid of having to go through all that with male doctors, detectives...

Some women expressed fears about their sexual history being brought up in court. (None of these women were raped in Oregon where recent legislation has made such evidence admissible only under certain unusual circumstances.) Some women were sure that if they were not physically injured, they could never prove they were raped. (Oregon law now defines rape as intercourse that is "forcibly compelled". "Force" includes the threat of immediate or future death or injury to the woman or someone else (e.g. her child). In other words, one no longer has to be beaten up to charge rape.)

Since he didn't actually beat me up or threaten to, just wrestled and pinned me and ignored the fact that I kept telling him "No", was it rape? Yes, but not an easy question for me then. I was 19.

Some of the women who were raped by people they knew felt sure they would have no hope of proving that the rape happened and thus felt it would be useless to report. Another was raped by a stranger, but felt sure the police would do nothing:

I was living in a small town. It has five police officers... A man I had never seen before...kicked in my door, raped me and beat me up...Nothing would have been done. Things would have gotten very ugly for me if I said anything. I just moved...and I will never go back.

Three women attempted to report. One woman fended off a rapist and screamed. People grabbed him as he attempted to escape and the police were called. Since he had not actually raped her, the police told her to forget about it. They held her and her boyfriend back while the

rapist was released and allowed to drive off--all of this occurred in a crowd of shocked and angry witnesses. Another woman attempted to report her husband who broke into her house (they were separated) when she was asleep and raped her. The police would not make out a report.

Portland has a victim's assistance program called the Rape Victim Advocate Program. Rape Victim Advocates are women trained in crisis counseling who will assist a woman who is raped and wants to report through the hospital exam, the detective's interview, and any legal process that ensues. In a report, one of the Rape Victim Advocates (Laura Altschul) writes that the R.V.A.'s "have found that the hospitals, law enforcement agencies, and the District Attorney's office work together to ease the process of reporting and prosecuting crimes of sexual assault" in Portland. Portland police detectives who interview rape victims are given special training to sensitize them to the woman's feelings. One result of these innovations seems to be a greater willingness to report rape. The number of reported rapes in Portland went from 284 in 1973 to 391 in 1977 and to 408 in 1978. It seems safe to assume that this dramatic increase does not just reflect an increase in the incidence of rape, but that the increase at least partially reflect increased reporting of rape due to these improvements in victim support services and public education.

Women raped in Portland who do report may encounter insensitive treatment somewhere along the line, but they have a far better chance of having an overall supportive experience with the police and criminal justice systems than women who report in cities and towns where there are no rape hotlines or rape victim's assistance programs. Women all over the country still go through traumas when they report that some cases of reporting are as damaging as the rape experience itself.

As I sat on the hospital table trembling, crying, nearly hysterical, a policeman walked up to me and said, "Why didn't you just sit back and enjoy it?" I spat in his face.

Another woman who was raped and reported it:

The man was known to the police who had, among other things, his home address. After personally confronting my attacker several weeks later in a restaurant, I learned that the police had never even brought him in for questioning... (At a later time) the police admitted that they had done nothing about my case...

One woman was raped by three strangers two years ago. She escaped after being held for five hours and called the small town's sheriff from a farmhouse. She was leered at, laughed at, interrogated by a number of detectives who told her she "asked for it" and "must have enjoyed it". Finally, a very old doctor did a rape exam, said there was no semen (she had been forced to have intercourse twice and was bruised and bleeding). The sheriff said to the doctor, "We didn't think she'd been raped. Sorry to bother you."

The following story reveals the consequences of police indifference and inhumane treatment of women who are raped:

This woman was raped by a friend of her brother's and an acquaintance. She attempted to run away and was dragged back through the brush, tearing her clothes and scratching her. When she later escaped and called the police, "they treated me like a criminal from the start," putting her in the back of a police van, having her interrogated five separate times by five detectives "to see if the story fit". Then they sent her away, telling her it was "only a fight with my boyfriend". They never took her to the hospital. She never had a rape exam. This same woman was raped a few years later by a man who abducted her when she stopped by the side of the road to fix her windshield wipers. She knew his address and the car license number, but would not report the rape because of her previous experience. Six months ago, she was gang-raped after being forced out of the restaurant where she worked. Again, she did not report the rape.

In the Battelle Law and Justice Study Center Report of 1975 on unreported rape, 54% of the women expressed a fear of police treatment, 39% expressed fear of a trial process. The Queen's Bench Foundation published a study in 1975 entitled: Rape: Victimization Study in which 37 women who did not report rape were interviewed. Most of them indicated as one reason they did not report: "low expectations regarding police response". In some cities, these fears may be unfounded and based on conceptions of police attitudes and procedures from media treatment of rape and other sources. In these cities, public education must occur to let women know that better treatment of women who report is available. In other cities, profound changes in police and trial procedures must take place before significant increases in reporting will take place. In all cities, women's grievances with police, hospital, and other official personnel must be taken seriously and acted upon.

Fear of retaliation

One common reason for not reporting rape is the fear of retaliation. This reason is mentioned frequently by women who call the Portland Women's Crisis Line, Seattle Rape Relief Hotline, the Rape Victim Advocates, and other agencies. A number of the women interviewed expressed this fear:

Threats of violence...were enough to prevent reporting the rape. The doubt that I could make the rape accusation stick...if (he were) not convicted, (he) could immediately wreak vengeance on me, my family...(or that after a probably brief period of) incarceration, I could expect (him) to be back on the streets and out to get me... I'd be a victim again!

Fears of retaliation are intensified when the woman knows the rapist. When a woman is intimately acquainted with or related to the rapist, the fear of not being believed if she did report, in combination with fears of retaliation or a repeated rape are powerful deterrents to reporting.

Fear of not being believed

One of the recurring themes, especially with women raped by someone very close to them or someone in a respected social position, is the certainty that no one would have believed her if she reported the rape.

He was my neighbor and I'd let him in. Who would believe he raped me?

...Because nobody would believe me, that's certainly one (reason). You've heard this expression, that: "You can't thread a needle if the needle is moving"? God, that makes me so mad, every time I hear it.

Often the rapist will tell the woman that no one would believe her if she reported the rape. A woman who was living with her boyfriend was raped by him. As she fought him, she said to him, "This is rape!" He replied that no one would ever believe her if she told anyway. Another woman was drugged and then raped by a co-worker who also happened to be a policeman. She confronted him after the rape and he replied, "Well, you wouldn't go out with me" and was obviously confident that she did not have a chance in the world of being believed if she reported the rape. This woman became pregnant as a result of the rape. Serious disruption of her life followed. Another woman who successfully avoided a rape attempt by a policeman who was also a co-worker (in this case, with considerable authority over her job future), knew she would never be believed if she reported him. He was a respected man, married with children, and had been on the force in that small community for years.

Two of the women interviewed were raped by their psychotherapists. One was in the midst of an emotional crisis and was talking to the psychotherapist in the evening at a counseling center. It was the first time she had ever gone to any kind of counselor. After pouring out her feelings for two hours, she felt very trusting towards the man. He raped her after getting her to lie down under the pretext of doing some bodywork that would relieve some of her anxiety. Another woman was raped by her psychiatrist whom she had been working with for eight months. (She came to him to work out difficulties resulting from an early experience of molestation.) He insisted she needed intercourse with him for therapeutic reasons. She flatly refused. He threatened her with a gun and raped her. Both of these women were sure the police (and most other people) would never believe them, if they reported. The second woman did tell her gynecologist, who had originally referred her to the psychiatrist. He told her repeatedly that he did not believe her and yet prescribed a very high dosage of estrogen (which carries a significant risk of cancer) to cause abortion! She eventually settled a civil suit out of court, after discovering three other women who had been victimized by the same man.

Almost any woman raped by a husband, boyfriend, date, or other man who has been in any sort of sexual relationship to her fears not being believed.

He was my husband. I didn't know if anyone else had these things happen to them. I just didn't tell anyone.

This woman and others called me during the recent marital rape case in Oregon. It was the first time some of them had ever even considered that their experience could possibly be taken seriously. Most people do not consider acquaintance rape to be rape; they simply do not take it as seriously as stranger-to-stranger rape. Rape between people who have been in a sexual relationship is even more difficult for most people to take seriously. In most states, a legal statement against rape in marriage does not exist. There has been some shift in attitudes so that women raped by strangers are more often assumed to be telling the truth, but relatively little shift in attitudes about acquaintance rape. Thus, these women's fears of not being believed are often realistic. It is increasingly apparent that the most common form of rape is acquaintance rape. It should also be apparent that this form of rape is as traumatic as being raped by a stranger. In many situations, the trauma can be worse because of the fact that profound trust has been betrayed. It is essential that our society begin to regard acquaintance rape with the seriousness that it merits.

Fear of being blamed

Almost all of the women interviewed expressed fears of being blamed by friends, family, police, or others if they reported being raped.

Aware than many people carry attitudes that a raped woman is "spoiled"...I feared scandal...in church associations... and repercussions...in my work. (This public school teacher feared the "morals clause" might be invoked, resulting in her losing her job.)

One woman raped by two strangers one week before she was to get married said:

I felt so dirty. Who could I tell? I was terrified of what people would think.

Other women:

They all asked me if I wanted to report it to the police. I said no...because I would be afraid of the publicity.

It would ruin my reputation.

I had a reputation for being "easy" (hence, she would be blamed).

These reasons for not reporting rape are mentioned again and again. One woman fears being blamed because she was dressed attractively, another because she had been in a bar alone at night, another because she had let her ex-boyfriend into her apartment. The least frequently reported form of stranger-to-stranger rapes are rapes that occur when the women were

hitchhiking (according to the Queen's Bench study cited earlier). Both women interviewed who were raped when hitchhiking were sure they did not have a right to report, since they had accepted rides from strangers. Many women who call the hotline share these feelings. Although they come to realize that they were not asking to be raped when they asked for a ride, they still fear being blamed.

Some women feared general condemnation, many others feared blame from family members or close friends. Three of the women feared that they would be beaten by their abusive husbands if they ever discovered that their wives had been raped. One woman was raped by a man who worked for her husband. They were all at a party and she wanted to go home. Her husband wanted to stay, so this man offered to drive her home. He ended up driving her to a deserted area and raping her. Her biggest concern was to get home, clean up, and get her torn clothes hidden before her "violent and jealous" husband got home. He had thrown her down concrete stairs in the past, with very little provocation, and she was terrified about what he would do if he found out she had been raped. She never told anyone until years later.

Women raped by people close to them are afraid of being blamed for bringing it on themselves or failing in their relationships. A woman raped by her boyfriend:

I knew I hadn't asked to be raped or anything like that. But I was so ashamed of that relationship, I just didn't tell anybody. (She was sure people would think less of her if they knew she had been raped by her boyfriend, even though she moved out almost immediately afterwards.)

In our culture, blaming the victim is common. People victimized by racism, the class structure, and other forms of oppression are assumed to somehow deserve their fate. Poor people are poor because they are wasteful, unambitious, or they do not plan ahead well. Uneducated people are uneducated because they are stupid. The ghettos are run down because the people in them do not take care of their homes. Women are raped because they ask for it, they dress "provocatively", they want to be raped and secretly enjoy it. There is a complexity of attitudes that blame women who are raped for the rapist's crime and excuse the rapist, such as the attitude that men have uncontrollable sexual urges ("he was just sowing his wild oats"). These attitudes perpetuate rape by giving license to rapists and further traumatizing the woman who is raped.

Self-blame

I thought that I'd asked for it.

We'd been talking for about two hours...I left the room to go to the bathroom...when I came back I remember I smiled at him...later I wondered if somehow that was what I did wrong...

I didn't wear a skirt again for months after being raped.

Was it really rape? I wasn't sure, because there must have been something I could have done to prevent it... (This woman tried to fight off the man who raped her--a man she was on a date with.)

I hadn't done anything. And it can't have been my fault. But for years I felt guilty, like I was leading them (strangers who sexually assaulted her) on or something... I thought I must have done something to make him think he could do that to me, like it was my fault...and I'd hardly ever spoken to the man.

Many women not only fear being blamed, but blame themselves. They first feel guilt, shame, and embarrassment, rather than outrage, betrayal, or hurt. Usually when examined, the guilt proves to be irrational. It proves to be the internalization of the oppressive attitudes discussed above. In counseling, women who have been raped usually come to make a distinction between making a mistake in judgement or taking a risk that did not work out, and being guilty of asking to be raped. Yet, the guilt and shame are difficult for women to get over. Some of the women interviewed did not realize, until later, that the man who raped them had probably raped before and would rape again; because they were so focused on their individual failings that must have caused the rape.

Isolation

All of the cultural attitudes that cause women to fear not being believed, being blamed, and to blame themselves reinforce the isolation that keeps rape, incest, and other social problems stuck in place. Isolation was one of the main themes that ran throughout the interview. The women I spoke with were very surprised when I told them about how common rape, incest, and domestic violence are. Many had assumed that they were virtually alone with their experience of sexual abuse. One woman was raped by both her first and second husband. She felt outraged and upset but never told anyone because "those things just weren't talked about". Sexual abuse will not end until it is addressed as a social problem, until women stop carrying their pain privately, with shame and the sense of having been made forever "different" and alone by their experience. Women must be supported in realizing that they have been victimized by a social problem that is not their failure, their fault.

The experience of being alone with the trauma of rape, of having no source of support, makes recovery very difficult. Three of the women I interviewed had never told anyone about being raped or molested until telling me. Two of the women had been keeping their painful secrets for years--one for over twenty years, the other for forty years. One of these women was molested when she was a little girl by her grandfather, was raped by two strangers seven years ago, and then went through a brief marriage to a very abusive man. She told no one about these problems, holding all her feelings inside her. Since she was raped, she has had several severe health crises and emotional breakdowns, including a stroke, cancer, a suicide attempt, and psychiatric hospitalization. All of these are

tension-related illnesses and she feels that not being able to discuss her abusive experiences contributed to them. Her story is a painful illustration of how the social attitudes surrounding sexual abuse cause isolation of women who are victimized and how seriously isolation can aggravate the trauma of sexual abuse.

A woman who received compassionate support from her cousin talks about how to be supportive of women who are abused and how important her cousin's response was to her:

I think listening to them, and believing them (supports women who are raped). You've got to let them know you believe them because if my cousin had said, "Oh, come on", you know, it would have put me way back. You don't want to tell them, "There, there, you're going to be all right", because she doesn't want to hear that right then. You just want to let her cry on your shoulder. And just be there and let her talk and don't interrupt her. Don't call her a liar, don't pick her story to pieces, just listen.

Shock and Denial

Sometimes the psychological state of the woman who is raped makes reporting out of the question. Many women experience a kind of shock that may not wear off until quite a while later, at which time they may feel it is too late to report it. A number of women do not report because they feel that they "just want to forget about it". One woman I interviewed expressed this feeling. She had been raped at a party and did not report it because she wanted to forget as soon as possible that the rape happened. She did not tell anyone about it for some time, but found she could not forget it. She realized she had to integrate the experience in some way. She now wishes she had reported, but at the time of the rape she was not feeling ready to fully face what had happened to her.

A number of women expressed to me that they had been raped but had not called it "rape" in their minds until much later. This kind of denial is common among women who are raped by people with whom they are supposed to have trusting sexual relationships. There are two levels of confusion. First there is the legal confusion. One woman raped by her boyfriend thought she had no legal basis to accuse him of rape. Another was unaware that husbands were not allowed to rape their wives, until the recent marital rape case in Oregon caught her attention. For the women I interviewed, this denial or confusion was more profound on an emotional level. For some, it took time to acknowledge the painful fact that someone they were supposed to be able to trust had betrayed them. For others, it took time to let themselves experience the extent to which they had been violated. One woman talked about how her inadequate sense of self contributed to this confusion for her. She was raped by a man she had been dating in college.

To say: "I was raped", especially to any officials, is to say: "I was violated, something abusive happened to me that I didn't deserve".

She went on to talk about how her low self-image at that time made it impossible for her to make such a statement. Another woman was brought up to feel that the woman's role meant putting up with treatment she now considers abusive. At the time she was raped by her husband, she did not know that she deserved respect and decent treatment from husbands, fathers, or other men.

Rape and alcohol

One complicating factor in rape is alcohol. Women who are intoxicated in bars or at parties are more vulnerable to attack. Any woman who was drinking at the time she was raped may have more difficulty reporting because she fears (realistically) that her testimony would not be believed. Also, some women who are raped by strangers when they are very intoxicated do not remember the assailant clearly enough to identify him and thus do not report. One woman I interviewed was drinking heavily in a bar and woke up in a strange hotel room. She had been beaten and raped, but felt it would be useless to report it since she could not possibly identify the rapist. Other witnesses probably could have identified him. He may never have been able to be convicted for that particular crime, but her report may have been useful information for the police. Women who were drinking when they were raped tend to have a more difficult time with fears of being blamed or disbelieved. They also tend to have more feelings of guilt than most women who are raped.

Rape and race

All but one of the women I interviewed were white. In general, rapes of Black, Hispanic, Native American, and other women of color are far less frequently reported than rapes of white women. This problem is an area that needs special study in its own right. The research must be conducted at least partially by minority women if it is to be successful. An in-depth examination of the reasons women of color do not report sexual assault is beyond the scope of this paper. However, some hypotheses can be proposed.

Rita Cepeda and Yolanda Alaniz are Hispanic women who have worked with the Seattle Rape Relief Hotline. They raise a number of important points in an unpublished paper entitled: "Possible Value Differences Encountered When Counseling a Chicana Victim" (written by Rita Cepeda and edited by Yolanda Alaniz). They first point out that cultural differences among Chicana, Black, Native American and other minority groups are profound. "Minority women's attitudes" can be meaningfully examined only up to a point; any in-depth examination must investigate each cultural perspective on its own terms. However, certain attitudes can be expected to play a possible role in any minority woman's decision not to report rape. First, if a woman of color is raped by a white man, she may realistically fear that she has a small chance of ever seeing him convicted of rape. Rape by white men of minority women historically has not been taken seriously. Second, if she is raped by a man who is not white, she may have some reluctance to report for other reasons stemming from the fact that a disproportionate number of minority men are convicted of rape (and other crimes). Cepeda and Alaniz express this observation:

The legal system is also seen not as an agency to uphold your rights as a citizen, but rather as an oppressive

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institution to be fought, amended, and changed. Therefore, it follows that utilizing the legal system may seem not only foreign, but even a breach of un-written law in the sense that you may be using what has been an oppressive tool against another. This aspect may be further complicated if the other person or rapist is from your own people. (page 1)

In many minority communities, rape and other forms of abuse are often held in even greater shame and secrecy than in most white communities. For these women, the sense of scandal, of disgrace for both herself and her family is very strong. An Indian woman I interviewed felt she could never tell anyone about the sexual abuse that was happening to her because sexual matters were never talked about as far as she knew. She felt a profound sense of shame that has taken its toll throughout her life.

Minority women are also more likely than white women to fear humiliating treatment by medical personnel. Women of color who do not have money have probably experienced indifference or worse from some part of the health care system. This country's history of racist, ethnic, and class prejudice has a number of consequences, one of which is the minority woman's distrust of the law enforcement, court, and health care systems.

Rape and adolescence

Adolescent women are often the targets of rape and usually their age complicates the situation in some way. The Portland Women's Crisis Line receives a great number of calls from adolescent women who have been raped and do not want to report. Often, their primary reason for not reporting is that they do not want their parents to find out. One young woman raped by a stranger told me:

I can't report. I'm scared of what my parents might do. I think they'd blame me, or tell me I can't go out anymore.

The reasons for not wanting parents to know vary, but the basic feeling that they must not find out is common.

Runaways are especially vulnerable to rape: they hitchhike, they find themselves without places to stay, and they are regarded by the rapist as being unlikely to report. The Crisis Line gets many calls from runaways. One woman I interviewed was raped when she was thirteen (and had left home) by two men who had offered her a ride. She was taken to one of the men's apartments and raped. She did not report it because she knew she would be sent home.

I was afraid...that the police would treat me bad since I was a runaway...I knew they'd send me home. I had to leave home, all of us kids left early...my father beat us so much...

Acquaintance rape is also more complicated for adolescents if there is any sexual context for the relationship before the rape occurs. Adolescents

are in the process of learning about sexuality, about sex roles, and about the games that go on between men and women. When something goes wrong and a teenager gets raped by a date or by a boyfriend, she is likely to lack the confidence to avoid the confusion and self-blame that hold so many women back from reporting. Instead, she is likely to feel guilty, to conclude that "men are just like that" and to withdraw, or to feel deep doubts about herself. She may wonder if dating or "going with" someone entitles the man to rape the woman, just as some women who are raped by their husbands wonder whether a man has the right to rape his wife. (This internal dialogue often goes on without her mentally using the word "rape". She may think in terms of whether he has the right to "treat her that way", etc. and call what happened "rape" much later.)

An example of a male-female "game" that has disastrous consequences for adolescents (as well as adults) is the game in which the woman's "No" is taken to mean "Yes". Some adult men use this notion to justify what can only be called rape. Adolescents are also influenced by this notion. I have done speaking engagements with high school boys and have seen the extraordinary difficulty many of them have with accepting the idea that a woman's "No" must be respected, that if she says "No" and he forces her, that is rape, no matter how long they have been kissing, petting, going together, if they had intercourse before, etc. Adolescent women are particularly sensitive to the sex-role training that keeps the female side of the game going. Women are trained to want to escape the responsibility of saying "Yes" to sex (let alone to initiate sex). There still exists a strong attitude that a woman who consciously and deliberately engages in sex is bad. Thus, a woman must feel she was "swept off her feet", overwhelmed by the man's more powerful sexual urge to feel all right about being sexual. It is easy to see how the extreme form of this play of sex roles and attitudes is rape.

Adolescent women tend to be especially prone to the confusion that results from these attitudes and games. They are often particularly hesitant about asserting what they do and do not want. A number of the women I interviewed were raped as adolescents by a boyfriend, an ex-boyfriend, or a date. None of them reported the rapes. They all talk about experiencing bewilderment about the incident that directly relates to sex-role training in our society. A young woman raped by her boyfriend when she was fifteen told me:

One night after a date...we were on the couch kissing and petting...he promised he would not try to enter me...the next thing I knew, he was forcing his penis into me with his hand over my mouth so I couldn't scream and the other hand holding my arms down across my chest...I was in a state of shock and hurt. I couldn't tell anyone at the time...I think I thought it was normal...the best preventative to this situation would be to raise girl children to be less accepting of such treatment...If I had thought more of myself then, I would have been able to see his cruelty for what it was before the trauma.

Incest

Over one-third of the women interviewed for this study were molested as children. All were molested by someone they knew. Incest is a serious form of sexual abuse with long-term consequences for the women who have experienced it. Sexual experimenting between children of approximately the same age is usually not traumatic because there is less likely to be any coercion involved. Sexual abuse of a child by an adult has entirely different consequences. There is always an unequal power relationship that is exploited, even if the sexual contact is mixed with affection (as is often the case). All of the women who had been molested told me that their incest experiences had made a painful impact on their lives. Almost none of the incest incidents were reported. Most of the reasons that women have for not reporting rape discussed in the preceding pages are reasons that children do not report incest. They are often afraid they will not be believed or are afraid of being blamed. They often feel intense guilt. There are also other factors that complicate the situation, especially for a child who is molested by someone in her own family. A woman molested by her father as a young teenager told me:

I never told anyone...I knew my parents had financial problems. I just couldn't see how they'd make it if the family broke up...Another girl in our town was raped by her father...he went to jail...I always wondered what my father thought about that...

Children molested by their fathers or stepfathers often fear that their homes will break up if they tell and that they will be blamed for ruining the family. A child is likely to feel terribly conflicted about telling someone and having her own father arrested. They are often scared to tell their mothers. One woman raped by her stepfather described her feelings:

I was afraid my mother might not believe me. Or if she did, this would have been worse, that she might not do anything.

Many children do tell their mothers. The Crisis Line receives many calls from mothers whose daughters have just told them they were molested wanting to know what to do about the situation. Many other children do not tell their other parent. Most of those interviewed in this study felt they could tell no one about what was happening to them. For a child, the experience of keeping sexual abuse a secret can be devastating. It can leave the child feeling permanently tainted, "different". For many of the women, there was a definite connection between their not being able to tell about being molested as children and their feeling unable to report rape as adults.

Some of the women I interviewed told me they could not remember thinking the situation through clearly, but remember a vague sense that they would get blamed if anyone found out. Two of the women were blamed when the incest situation was discovered. One was molested by a twelve year old neighbor boy when she was six. She told her mother who believed her, but also told her that she was a "horrible girl to do that". She begged her

mother's forgiveness (she had resisted the boy who threatened her) but her mother said, "Only God can ever forgive you". This experience of being blamed by her mother was as traumatic to the girl as the molestation.

Another woman was molested between the ages of five and nine by a family friend, a thirty-four year old man in whose care she was often left. This woman was growing up in a small, church-oriented town. A relative finally realized what was going on and told her family. Most of the community found out. Her family left the church, which was very important to them, because they were ashamed. Her older sister reproached her for "ruining her church wedding". She remembers feeling resentment towards her from all members of her family. The man stayed in the church and was never even reprimanded, as far as she knows. In the years that followed, her family treated her as though she were wicked and always to be suspected. She felt they blamed her entirely, as if it were her responsibility to regulate the sexuality of a grown man. She tried to act like a "good little girl", but somehow there was no redemption for her sin. Her father became abusive towards her and never allowed her to buy clothes, as he allowed the other children. She grew up as a very withdrawn child, both at home and at school. This woman is very clear about the fact that her family's reaction did far more damage than the sexual abuse itself. It was painful for her to tell me her story, but she said, "I want people to know, so no one ever has to go through what I went through".

Most of the women I interviewed who were molested were given very little information about sex as children, which made responding to an adult who was initiating sexual contact especially difficult for them. They were not sure what was happening to them, often they literally did not have words for it. There was no one to tell and no way to tell. A woman molested by her grandfather when she was very young said:

He told me: "This is normal. All little girls do this with their grandfathers to make them love them more".... Who could I tell? I didn't understand...no one ever told me about sex...When I was sixteen, I got my period...I was terrified...A nun at school told me what it was...

Another woman molested by her brother-in-law when she was eight told me:

I grew up in a family where we didn't talk about the sexual relationship between man and wife, where babies come from even...menstruation or any of those things. So...you don't really know what's going on. My older sister and I were very close, but how was I to tell her?...It was her husband. I didn't know what the word "incest" meant. As a child, I had this feeling that no one would understand. And I'm wondering, has that really changed a lot today?

Incest leaves the child with intense conflicts. The ambivalence that often occurs when the child is receiving positive attention as part of the incest situation can be extremely difficult. Often affection and sexual abuse are mixed together and get very confused for the child. Her feelings

of love and hatred for the man molesting her are painful--it is much easier to only hate someone. The guilt feelings for the pleasure the child may feel or for other reasons, can persist into adulthood. Incest is rarely reported and most states do not have good programs to deal with this problem. The toll it takes on people's lives is tremendous. Much serious attention must be given to this social sickness if children are to live in a world where sexual abuse does not occur.

Unreported Rape and the Position of Women: Some General Considerations

One of the outcomes of the way manhood and womanhood is constituted in our society is an epidemic of sexual assault that goes largely unreported. The position of women economically and socially, the attitudes surrounding sexuality and relationships between men and women play a role in the motivations for not reporting rape and for rape itself. Any examination of rape and women's reactions would be superficial, without an acknowledgement of the cultural factors at work in causing this situation. Most men do not rape women. However, rape is not an aberration, it is not a pathological occurrence on the fringes of society disconnected in all important ways from the rest of social life. Rape is one logical outcome of what is considered to be "normal" in relationships between men and women.

Rapists are not sex-crazed lunatics who could easily be spotted in a crowd. The results of this and many other studies make that fact clear. The profile of the rapist is a question beyond the scope of this study. An important point to be made, however, is that any stereotype of "the rapist" is misleading. Men from all backgrounds, classes, races, and educational levels rape women. A number of women in this study were raped by respected members of their communities--teachers, psychiatrists, policemen, business managers. Often men who rape women they know do not think of themselves as rapists. They reserve that name for the lunatic leaping out of the bushes at night to rape a woman he has never seen before. This kind of rapist commonly feels no remorse--the woman made a false move in the game and he only took advantage of the situation to get what he wanted. Often these men are so indifferent to the woman's experience of being raped that they will call her later and ask for a date. I spoke to a woman who had had this experience. She was raped by a classmate who could not understand her rage when he later wanted to come over and visit. The question to be asked is: What are the conditions that produce so many men feeling they have the right to violate women and also produce women feeling shame and guilt when they are violated?

Women have less power than men, economically and socially. Women have less earning power than men and are usually the ones considered to be ultimately responsible for their dependent children. The inferior economic position of women makes them vulnerable to rape and inhibits their reporting rape in a number of ways. Women raped by husbands upon whom they and their children depend for support are not likely to report, for obvious economic and social reasons. A number of marital rapes occur in the context of domestic violence, which also frequently goes unreported for the same reasons. Women raped by their bosses (two interviewed in this study) are not likely to report for fear of losing their jobs. Another form of under-reported sexual abuse just beginning to get attention is sexual harassment on the job.

This problem, in which economic power is combined with any kind of sexual coercion, is also a serious epidemic. Also, of course, women who are raped by a man with some form of social power or a man who is sexually involved with or related to her will experience the fears of not being believed, of being blamed, the self-reproach, and the other feelings discussed previously, more intensely than women raped by strangers.

Any woman confronted with a man she is supposed to trust who is about to rape her will have an especially hard time defending herself or reporting. The high incidence indicated in this study of rape occurring in relationships of supposed trust is an indictment of our society. Thirty-six percent of the women in this study were sexually assaulted by men with whom they had an intimate relationship. The figure is forty-four percent when the sexual assault of these women, when they were children, is included. Five women were raped by their husbands. In most states, it is not a crime for a husband to rape his wife, reflecting the attitude that a woman is the man's property to be used as he chooses. Rape laws derive from property laws. They were originally an attempt to protect the man's property (his wife, daughters, sisters, etc.) from other men. They were not an attempt to protect women. The women raped by their husbands talked about their confusion about the marriage contract. It did not seem right to them at the time they were raped, but most of them felt defeated by the common attitude that once a man has had sexual access, he always has the right to sexual access. This feeling was also common among the women raped by their boyfriends or ex-boyfriends. Reporting thus seemed out of the question. Also resulting from these attitudes about men's right to sexual access to women is the fact that, until recently in some states (the practice continues in others), a woman's sexual history (her "reputation") was scrutinized in rape trials. This practice implies that if a woman has consented to sex in the past, she has said "Yes" to all men forever and can accuse no one of raping her.

One woman I interviewed said to me, "Rapists do the dirty work for all men. They justify other men having to 'protect' terrorized women who feel like they have to depend on men for their safety". The code of chivalry this woman was pointing to divides men into those who protect women and those who victimize women. Women come out one-down either way. It is not just the image of the lunatic in the bushes that causes women to be fearful. There is a climate of rape in our society. Women who have been raped are especially sensitive to it. The romanticism of violence against women in advertising, movies, and other media; the daily verbal assaults (and "small" physical assaults) on the street; the jokes one hears constantly that trivialize rape--all of these and other influences create the climate of rape. These phenomena are produced by and perpetuate the objectification of women. Women are to be seen as objects, not as human beings. One woman told me that ever since she was raped, she is particularly sensitive to being "leered at". She said that she knows that there is a way to look at someone one is attracted to without intruding, without turning that person into an object. She knows the difference between being looked at "as a piece of meat" and being looked at as an attractive woman who is a human being. "Women do not leer at men", she said. "When I look at a man, I am aware of him as a person. I'm sensitive to his reactions..." A convicted rapist interviewed in a film entitled: "Rape, a Preventive Inquiry" talked about how a woman may be a person to him, but at the time he rapes her "she could be a used car...she is an object".

Women internalize their inferior status in their attitudes about themselves in ways that affect their whole lives. They are taught to fulfill the image of the passive, dependent, only minimally competent female. These attitudes obviously affect the way a woman will respond in a potential rape situation and her motivations if she does not report a rape that does occur. Many studies indicate that women who have low self-esteem are more likely to be targeted by the rapist than women who feel confident and good about themselves. The rapist is looking for a woman he can dominate. Women who have low self-esteem, who have internalized the attitudes that oppress them, are also less likely to report rape. As one woman interviewed expressed it:

I had an inadequate sense of self, a really low self-image.
I thought I was worthless...It affected my not reporting
the rape...somehow I wasn't worth saying, "I was violated".

Women often internalize the notion that women cannot think logically, that women overreact, are hysterical and unreliable in their judgement. Often, women confronted with rape situations in which they know the man find it difficult to trust their reading of danger signals. They invalidate their own judgement. Sometimes after the rape, they even invalidate their knowledge that they were raped. Women are taught to always value the word of male experts or authorities over their own sense of things. A woman raped by a psychotherapist took weeks to fully acknowledge to herself that she was raped. Her mystification about male therapists or other men in positions of authority was profound:

The essence of me knew I had been violated, but on top...
my mind was saying, "Maybe it was therapy, etc."

The theme of "not calling it rape" came up again and again in the interviews as a reason the rape went unreported. This theme can be viewed as an outcome of the female "script", which is based on injunctions such as: "Don't think", "Don't trust yourself", "Expect less respect than men are given". A woman living according to the dictates of the female script may feel terribly upset by being raped or abused, but is likely to assume that frequent violation of women is just the way things are; she is likely to assume she has no recourse.

There are other elements of the female script that make reporting rape unlikely. One is the attitude that the woman's primary job in life is to take care of others, putting herself last. One woman attacked by her mailman told me, "I couldn't report him--I wouldn't want him to lose his job". A few of the women mentioned that they felt they could not bring themselves to send a man to prison, the prison system being what it is in this country. Others mentioned concern for the rapist's family. These are real, compassionate concerns. It is very unlikely that rapists will be "rehabilitated" in our country's prisons. They will probably only become more anti-social from being brutalized by the prison system. The striking thing to point out, however, is how easy it was for these women to put aside their anger, their other feelings, for the sake of the man who raped them.

Women are also raised to please others, especially men. If a woman says she does not want to have sex with her date, boyfriend, or especially

her husband, and he forces her, her idea that it was somehow wrong for her to say no to his demands in the first place, may make her less likely to report rape. Women often assume that their needs should definitely come second to any man's. One woman who was raped by her neighbor and struggled with guilt feelings about that incident, talked about an incident earlier in her life: A man she knew slightly in college tried to force himself on her. He bit her neck and she started crying. He stopped. Two days later he tried to commit suicide by jumping out of a window. She blamed herself. When women talk about why they blame themselves, the irrationality of their self-reproach is often clear to them. It is not a rational guilt, but is nevertheless, powerful. Most women feel some guilt whenever they put their own needs first. Many go through life without ever allowing themselves to be their first priority.

Coercive Sexuality

Sexuality is a focal point for many of the attitudes that shape men and women's feelings and behavior. Sexual relationships and attitudes reveal a great deal about the position of women in our culture. The coercive sexuality that pervades relationships between men and women has many consequences, one of which is rape. Another consequence is how women feel who have been raped. Women's value in the eyes of others and themselves still rests upon their sexual purity. Women must defend their sexual purity to be worthy human beings--it is their treasure, their bargaining point. In some cultures, the economics of female sexual purity are overt--a woman's marriageability depends upon her virginity and her economic survival depends upon her marriageability. Our culture has moved some distance from this rigid translation of sexual purity into economics, but the same kinds of attitudes still exist, attitudes which powerfully affect a woman's experience of self-worth and how others view her.

Many of the women I interviewed were reluctant to report rape, in part because of these attitudes. One woman wrote me after our interview:

Although the "pure lily" picture of women is fading, there is still a prevalent attitude that prefers a "pure" woman. A woman's worth (a "good" woman) is still measured by virginity (if unmarried) or fidelity (if married). Knowing this is a deterrent in reporting a rape because publicity would change attitudes towards me...rape has devalued me; I have been robbed of... being worthy. (emphasis added)

Another woman spoke for quite a few others who feared their previous "reputation for being easy" would make it hard for them if they reported being raped:

I had slept around, so I was used merchandise--I couldn't be damaged...I thought men would see it as: "She's been around, what does one more matter?" (emphasis added)

No sexual purity means no value, which means the rape was not significant. It is not the trauma to the woman as a human being that is impor-

tant, it is the loss of a kind of market worth that makes other people take certain rapes more seriously than others (such as the rape of a virgin or an upper-class wife with a "good reputation").

This woman was raped by a man who told her afterwards that he would not tell anyone if she did not (as if doing her a favor). She agreed not to tell:

I was afraid I would be seen as fair game...that I would get more hassles from men if it became known that I had been raped. (emphasis added)

Many women who are raped by men they are acquainted with are told he won't tell if she won't. She doesn't tell the shameful secret (her experience) and then is shocked to discover he has been bragging about it (his successful conquest being something to be proud of).

Thus, women's value is seen primarily as being a sexual one. Coercive sexuality means that sex is an issue between two adversaries. The adversaries can be rapist and victim or they can be two people on a date, with his role being to go as far as possible and her role being to hold him back. At any point on this continuum, the man is the aggressor. It is his role to make the conquest. It is the woman's role to defend her sexual purity. If the man is successful (even if this success means he has raped the woman) he is proud. The woman has failed in her mission--she feels ashamed and guilty, in addition to feeling hurt and degraded. Others regard her in the same light and blame her. The man is not accountable--he was performing as expected. The woman is at fault. The rapist in this kind of rape situation feels no guilt. The woman raped feels an extraordinary sense of guilt.

In a letter from a woman raped, attention is drawn to another way in which women are blamed in matters of sex:

The woman is to blame: the woman is the evil one, the seductress (starting with the temptress Eve). The man is made weak under a woman's spell, he can't help himself...With this reasoning, no man is accountable in matters of sex--or sex crimes. I (the woman) am entirely responsible for any sexual encounters and... should be faulted not only for having done something to "hook" the man, but also...for being so vile as to call, "Rape!"

The attitudes of coercive sexuality justify men's actions to themselves both in stranger-to-stranger situations as well as in acquaintance rape. It creates, as one woman interviewed put it, "a general inability to distinguish between good--consensual and pleasurable--sex and one-way, forced infliction of a man's penis into a woman". If men and women were regarded as equals in matters of sex, both men and women would be regarded as having sexual desires and both would be held responsible in the same way for how they handle these desires. Both men and women could initiate sex. Both could say "Yes" or "No" truthfully when asked. Bargaining,

manipulation, certain destructive games, and a common form of rape would virtually disappear. As long as coercive sexuality is the norm, there will be epidemic proportions of rape and most women raped will not report, blaming themselves and fearing censure in a thousand ways.

PART IV: RECOMMENDATIONS

If the rate of reporting rape is to improve and, more important, if rape and sexual abuse are to end, a serious long-term commitment must be undertaken by our society. Rape, incest, and other forms of sexual abuse do not leave visible scars the way a similar epidemic of assault would, but their psychological impact takes an enormous social toll. If we value the quality of life, we must take the epidemic of rape and sexual abuse that is occurring as seriously as if it were a plague threatening the health of people all over the country. People must realize that rape can happen anywhere, to anyone, at any time. "No female is likely to get through life unscathed. She is likely to either experience some form of sexual abuse herself, or to find that sexual abuse has affected someone she loves.

There are a number of short-term measures that will both improve the rate of reporting and prevent rape. These measures must be implemented in the context of a long-term solution: rape must be made inconceivable in our culture through a transformation in the ways that men and women see themselves and each other.

The recommendations in the final section of this study come from the women I interviewed and from me. They do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the staff or volunteers of the Portland Women's Crisis Line. It is intended that these proposals and ideas stir discussion and action that will benefit all of us. Many of the women I interviewed felt regret about not having reported because they feared for other women or felt a great deal of anger at the men who could rape a woman without consequences. These recommendations are the changes they feel would have supported them in reporting.

Education

Many forms of public education about sexual abuse would improve the rate of reporting and prevent rape from occurring. These include:

1. Educational programs as a standard part of all school curriculum, workplace education programs (in which employees would participate as part of their working day), and other community education programs for those not working or in school. These programs should include information on aspects of rape, incest, sexual harassment on the job, and other forms of sexual abuse such as sexual abuse laws, what to do if raped, hospital, police, and court procedures, V.D. and pregnancy information. Much attention should be given to rape prevention: all the technical means (securing one's home, shrieker alarms, etc.) as well as self-defense courses and the psychology of rape prevention. The latter would include assertiveness training for women so that attitudes that prevent women from responding powerfully to abuse could be changed. As one woman interviewed said, "Women are taught to feel they have no right to even get angry about abuse". Women would need, also, to examine their reluctance to say "No" to a man's demands, their fear of being "impolite" or "creating a scene" when danger signals are present. Other education about attitudes that perpetuate societal blame of the victim would also be essential. The basic response of suspicion to women who are raped must end. As a society, we look to the rapist for the

source of the ultimate responsibility for rape. Education about destructive attitudes is just as important for men as it is for women. Adolescent males need education about sex roles and male/female games as they begin to date. Men also need to be educated about what rape is and the attitudes that perpetuate it. (For example, many men need to be informed that acquaintance rape is rape, and they need to know the difference between rape and seduction.)

2. Special attention to the needs of children must be given if sexual abuse is to decrease. To prevent incest and to increase reporting when molestation of children occurs, a number of measures will be necessary. Sex education at a very early age and as an ongoing part of schooling is essential. Keeping a child ignorant ("innocent") can prevent that child from being able to deal with inappropriate behavior on the part of an adult. Part of the sex education program should deal directly with sexual abuse. Obviously, it is important not to terrorize children, but it is essential that they know what inappropriate adult behavior is, that they can say "No" to an adult, and that they have people to tell, if they are molested. The big secret of incest must be brought out into the open. Supportive, open environments must be created for the prevention of (and recovery from) child molesting.

Institutional Measures

1. The legislatures all over the country must pass laws that support women who are raped. For example, laws making both a woman's sexual history and her relationship to the accused (including whether or not they are married) irrelevant must be passed, if women are going to be more willing to go through the court systems.

2. Special training for a number of groups in the needs of women and children who are sexually abused will be critical. These groups include police, medical personnel, (all hospitals should have specially trained rape victims intake staff), social workers, counselors, psychotherapists, teachers, and school counselors.

3. Sexual assault centers should be set up all over the country, similar to the programs now in existence, which are very successful. Different therapeutic techniques and experimental treatment models should be employed to increase our understanding of what works most effectively in assisting women and children who have been sexually abused and their families, in recovering from their traumas. These centers, as well as all other health and counseling services, should be funded in such a way as to be easily accessible to lower income people.

4. Rape Victim Advocates programs similar to the one in Portland are essential to an increased willingness on women's part to report. (Rape Victim Advocates assist a woman who is raped through all medical, legal, and court contact she might have.)

5. All of the above programs require funding. A serious commitment to end sexual abuse in our society must include funding, if it is to have any meaning. Another area where funding will be important is for independent rape hotlines or women's crisis lines. It is essential that women who have

not decided whether to report and women who know they do not want to report have a place to go. Anonymous free medical treatment for rape victims and third party reporting of the rapists must be made available to women who do not choose to report. Rape hotlines (as well as the other agencies mentioned) must have a significant number of minority women on their staffs and must make minority outreach a priority. White hotline workers must recognize that mistrust of "white" institutions extends to hotlines. Minority women must be supported in developing prevention and victims assistance programs in their own communities. It is also important that gay women be present on rape hotline staffs and that heterosexual women counselors be assisted (through training, etc.) in giving up biases that would inhibit them from working well with gay women who are raped.

6. Through a number of means, the "climate of rape" most women find themselves in must be ended. We must, as a society, stop tolerating the romanticism of violence against women and other destructive images of women in the media. Attitudes must change so that the prevalence of street hassles and all other "small" sexual abuses become inconceivable.

Supporting the Victim

All of the preceding measures would serve to overcome the isolation most women who are raped experience. Women who have been sexually abused will come to know that they are not alone, that rape is a social failing, not their personal one. It is also important that people learn how to be supportive of women who are raped. Men and women must realize that they will probably not go through life without either encountering sexual abuse themselves or having someone close to them go through it. Recovery is a function of support. Reporting rape or incest is also often a function of support. When women no longer feel the need to hide this crime and know there are supportive people close to them, they will report rape more often and will recover from the experience more rapidly and completely. Women who tend to blame women for getting raped, out of wanting to deny their own vulnerability, must re-examine their attitudes. Men who blame women or feel that women are "spoiled" by being raped must change their attitudes. There needs to be more involvement of families in rape adjustment counseling. There also needs to be counseling by trained men and women available to men who have had someone close to them raped, so that they can have a place to vent their feelings, confusion, etc. (There must also be men trained to counsel male victims of rape.) The attitude that the trauma of acquaintance rape is somehow not as legitimate as stranger-to-stranger rape must be changed.

Women who are raped need to be supported and nurtured in a way that does not "rescue" them. That is, in a way that does not lessen them or keep them stuck in the mentality of a victim, the mentality of powerlessness. A woman who has been raped has lost control of her life in a profound and terrifying manner. She needs to be encouraged by people she comes into contact with to take control of her life. One of the women I interviewed who went to the hospital after being raped was upset by being patronized by the medical personnel as though she were a hurt child. A woman who is raped needs to be supported in making her own decisions about whether or not to report, what she wants to do, etc.

Women must be supported in taking responsibility for their lives. Responsibility is not to be confused with fault, blame, or guilt. Flaming individual women who are raped or who have other problems stemming from their social position is oppressive. Responsibility in the sense intended here is close in meaning to the word "empowerment". One woman I interviewed told me that for years after she was raped, she felt guilty and blamed herself. This woman gave up her self-destructive sense of guilt and instead took responsibility for being raped (her distinction), in the sense that she realized ways she had overlooked danger signals before the rape occurred. This examination of her "responsibility" has empowered her; she holds the rapist accountable for his crime, she feels no guilt, and she feels more confident that she can avoid being raped again, now that she is taking responsibility to protect herself. She does not live in fear. She pays attention to what is going on around her and she feels good about taking care of herself.

All of the foregoing recommendations are short-term measures that would be effective at increasing the reporting of sexual assault. These changes would also contribute to the prevention of sexual assault. Any step to prevent sexual assault will be most effective if it proceeds from an analysis of what is at the root of sexual abuse. The prevalence of rape, incest, and all other forms of sexual assault is a powerful indictment of our society. Profound analysis and profound changes in the ways manhood and womanhood are created will be essential if the epidemic is to end.

END