RAPE, RESPONSIBILITY, RESPONSE:
FEMINIST SOLUTIONS TO RAPE CULTURE ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

By
HANNAH JACKSON ROBB

A Thesis Submitted to the Honors College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelor's Degree
With Honors in
Philosophy
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
MAY 2015

Approved by:

[Signature]
Dr. William Simmons
Department of Gender and Women's Studies
The deepest and most genuine thanks are in order to my advisor Bill Simmons for all of his thought provoking discussion, patience, and guidance throughout the many phases of this paper; my mentor Patrick Baliani who graciously spent many hours with me and my writing, ceaselessly encouraging me with his creative, unique, and powerful feedback; my brother Nick Robb for being my closest friend and a most-rigorous instigator of philosophical debate; and my parents Sherrie Jackson-Robb and Paul Robb, for their endless love and support, and for transforming the possibility of my education into a beautiful reality.
Abstract:

Sexual assault on college campuses is an urgent social and cultural issue. The historical mistreatment of rape victims lays the groundwork for our current culture, laden with rape myths that sustain many incorrect and damaging social beliefs and legal theories surrounding sexual assault. Liberal feminists have tried to move towards a solution to this problem through legal recognition, representation, and reform. Radical feminists have criticized reformist elements of the liberal approach, arguing that sexual assault is merely a symptom of a greater social problem, a patriarchal culture that perpetuates and normalizes violence and sexual dominance. This paper considers the views of liberal and radical feminist philosophies as they apply to the issue of sexual assault, while also taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of the solutions they offer. I’ll argue that on a practical level, the liberal feminist push for legislative action is necessary in an effort to claim justice for rape victims. However, on more foundational level, I believe that the radical feminist view reaches for the very heart of this issue, calling attention to a cultural acceptance and normalization of misogyny, sexism, and violence that serve as foundations for sexual assault and the endurance of rape culture.
I. Speak.

“I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.”
- Audre Lorde

In September 2014, I came across a startling opinion piece in The Daily Wildcat, my university student-run newspaper. Unfortunately titled, “Only Responsibility Can Stop Rape”, I immediately feared that I would be horrified with what I found. Sadly, all my fears were confirmed. I was presented with an alarmingly predictable article that blamed female victims of sexual assault, placed the overwhelming majority of the responsibility on the shoulders of female students to protect themselves from getting assaulted, skeptically questioned the legitimacy of rape victims’ testimonies, and as a bonus, was written in a patronizing, paternalistic style that was both insulting and profoundly hurtful. This experience served as a piercing and painful reminder that rape culture not only exists in today, but it directly affects my life as a woman and as a student. How am I to respond to ruthless, misogynist slander; as a feminist, woman, human, lover, ally? I can’t help but turn to theory to try and sort through my feelings; I’ve learned that theorizing is as much emotional as it is political. Liberal and radical feminist philosophies have served as starting points, theoretical tools, in my attempt to make sense of the frightening persistence of sexual assault and rape culture on college campuses. While liberal feminism rests on legal action and policy reform as a way of eliminating sexual violence against women, radical feminism acknowledges the presence of an underlying, sexist, systemic inequality of power in relationships between men and women, something that cannot be transformed merely through legislative action. The way rape victims have been mistreated and continue to be mistreated, on
college campuses and in general, fuels the radical feminist sentiment that legal reform alone cannot solve our sexual assault problem. Radical principles draw attention to the fundamental cultural views surrounding rape that have a large impact on how victims are viewed in society and dealt with legally. In the following sections I will outline the principle views of liberal and radical feminist philosophies, while also considering various objections to these views. I will then explore the solutions that these feminisms offer as attempts to eliminate sexual assault and rape culture on college campuses. I’ll argue that the efforts that liberal feminists have made, and continue to make, towards legal justice for survivors are both necessary and noteworthy. However, in order to begin uprooting patriarchy on college campuses, we must move towards a radical dismantling of rape myths and their foundations, as well as sexist worldviews that have shaped some of the hate speech that is alive on our campuses and in our culture today.

**Liberal Feminism**

In order to fully consider the liberal feminist views and responses to sexual assault on college campuses, it is important to understand some of the primary principles, goals, and themes within liberal feminist philosophies. Very broadly speaking, the goals of liberal feminism are the protection of women’s personal autonomy and the inclusions of women’s presences and perspectives in the political world. Liberal feminism, in many ways an extension of traditional liberalism, typically maintains that humans are inherently equal and that the law should reflect this. Liberalism emphasizes the value of the individual’s capacity for reasoning as perhaps the most vital and valuable part of the individual. Liberalism places value on individual autonomy rather than established authority that might coerce an individual to make certain choices.
These ideas have shaped much of our current political and legal theory; John Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government* is one of the cornerstones of Western political philosophy, emphasizing the inherent and natural equality and freedom of all human beings, as well as the necessity for some form of social contract or governing body that maintains order among citizens. Liberal feminism seeks to apply the liberal principles that have historically been applied to men, to women as well.

“Consistently over the centuries, feminists have demanded that the prevailing liberal ideals should also be applied to women. In the 18th century, they argued that women as well as men had natural rights; in the 19th century, they employed utilitarian arguments in favor of equal rights for women under the law; and in the 20th century, with the development of the liberal theory of the welfare state, liberal feminists demand that the state should actively pursue a variety of social reforms in order to ensure equal opportunities for women.”  
(Jaggar 28)

The political beliefs of liberal feminism stress the importance of women’s rights, personal autonomy, and equality with men in the public sphere. The public sphere includes areas of life where women have been excluded from in the past, such as the workforce, politics, and education. Most liberal feminists would agree that equal status in education, politics, and the workplace is a crucial part of achieving social equality between the men and women. For this reason, liberal feminists often find that the most effective way to work towards equality is through legislative action, although various forms of protest have been used to get the attention of the political elites. Liberal feminists have fought against laws that discriminate against women, either by granting them fewer rights than their male counterparts or allowing blatant discrimination based on gender.
**Variant Perspectives in Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminism is a broad category and there are, of course, differences in opinion and philosophies among liberal feminists. Some liberal feminists place more emphasis on preservation of individual civil liberties, and some are more interested in addressing economic disparities in our society. There is division among welfare liberal feminists, who advocate for state intervention in the public sphere, and more libertarian-minded, classical liberal feminists who believe that there should be no state intervention in that sphere. Rosemarie Tong argues that the majority of liberal feminists today identify with welfare liberalism. “Very few, if any, contemporary liberal feminists favor the elimination of government funded safety nets for society’s most vulnerable members” (Tong 13). While classical liberal feminists deny that the government should take any part in assisting people who are struggling, welfare liberal feminists claim that there should be state funded assistance for those who have fallen on hard times. The major difference in view lies in the role of the state, and how much responsibility the state should have for citizens’ well-being. Even considering the differences in perspective among liberal feminists, there are many points of agreement between liberal feminists. Liberal feminism advocates for the legal equality of women within our existing political system. Some groups of liberal feminists, who identify as classically liberal, are also sometimes categorized as individualist or equity feminists, a view founded mainly on liberal political thought. Liberal feminism can be considered individualistic in the sense that it prioritizes the individual ability to choose what is good for his or her own life, as long as this does not infringe on the rights of others. This view claims that the
individual pursuit of happiness and fulfillment should come before considerations of the community, or the general welfare. Rosemarie Tong uses the example of religious freedom to illustrate how this concept is used in our society. “Such a priority defends religious freedom, for example, neither on the grounds that it will increase the general welfare nor on the grounds that a godly life is inherently worthier than a godless one, but simply on the grounds that people have a right to practice their own brand of spirituality. The same holds for all those rights we identify as fundamental” (Tong, 12). This particular view within feminism draws a divide between the public and private spheres, especially when it comes to state intervention. Classical liberals claim that the state should be able to intervene, to an extent, within the public sphere. The private sphere on the other hand, should be left to the discretion and responsibility of the individual. Liberal feminists, especially those of the welfare-liberalism variety, have raised an important critique about the traditional separations of the public and private spheres of society and the damage it has caused for women throughout history. Issues surrounding family and home life have largely been deemed private issues, not issues that warrant state intervention or protection. This is problematic when considering cases of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and other instances in which vulnerable populations are left without legal resources to help them escape toxic situations in the home.

Aside from the political goals of liberal feminism, liberal feminists also have distinct views on human nature and the relationship between men and women. Liberal feminism maintains that the essential differences and similarities between men and women are irrelevant because they are overlooking the more general human nature
that encompasses both men and women. “The philosophy underlying the
sameness/difference approach applies liberalism to women. Sex is a natural difference,
a division, a distinction, beneath which lies a stratum of human commonality”
(MacKinnon 220). This is a reflection of the traditional ideas within liberalism, that each
person is first and foremost an individual who has the same rights as every other
individual, regardless of his or her unique identity factors such as race, gender, class, or
sexuality. We see this sentiment echoed in documents like the Universal Declaration of
Human Rights: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this
Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion,
political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”
(UDHR, Article 2). The justification for this type of view stems from the liberal
dependence on rationality as an indicator of human worth. An individual’s ability to
reason is the main requirement for being considered politically relevant in the liberal
view, and this view maintains that personal identity factors do not undermine or hinder
one’s ability to reason. From this belief, liberal feminists have argued that there is no
essential difference between men and women that is politically relevant, since women
and men are equally capable of reasoning. Liberal feminists have argued that gender
should be irrelevant when considering the rights of men and women because both men
and women share the same human nature. “So far, then, the liberal feminist position
seems to be that male and female natures are identical; or, to put it more accurately,
that there is no such thing as male and female nature: there is only human nature and
that has no sex” (Jaggar, 37). This view is particularly radical in light of the widely held
belief that men and women didn’t share the same capacity for reasoning. Liberal
feminists also have varying perspectives on the role of power in our society. Some liberal feminists have viewed power as a positive social resource that is unequally distributed throughout society. Susan Okin is one example of a liberal feminist who views power as a critical social good that is withheld from women, especially in the traditional gender-structured family. “When we look seriously at the distribution between husbands and wives of such critical social goods as work (paid and unpaid), power, prestige, self-esteem, opportunities for self-development, and both physical and economic security, we find socially constructed inequalities between them, right down the list” (136). For liberal feminists like Okin, power is not viewed as the problem. Rather, the problem is an unequal distribution of power between groups of people, leaving non-dominant groups in extremely vulnerable positions. Liberal feminists have argued that women are in need of more exposure and opportunity to gain equal power with men in our society. For this reason, many liberal feminists have fought to achieve a more equal distribution of power between men and women in every realm of society, from politics and education to household duties and family structures.

**Criticisms of Liberal Principles**

There are important shortcomings to consider in the liberal feminist view and its connections to liberalism. One highly contested aspect of liberalism is its reliance on abstract individualism as the foundation for political theory. The main criticism against the individualist philosophy is its insistence on an inaccurate depiction of human interaction and relationship in communities, often based upon an unrealistic individualist view of a state of nature. Critics of individualism argue that it makes more sense to think about humans as connected, rather than separate from each other. This
can be easily seen in the family structure, where infants are dependent first on their mothers’ bodies as a growing place, and later on some other source of care and nurturance to survive.

“Every human being is born into, takes shape in, relation. For the embryo and the fetus, life exists only in relation. Physical separation at birth initiates a caring relation once maintained almost entirely by instinct. Since the emergence of recognized human life, the whole process has been overlaid with practices developed in cultural evolution and, as part of cognitive evolution, with the conscious attention of mothers capable of thoughtful planning and reflection.” (Noddings 34)

Humans are also connected on emotional and relational levels throughout life, a connection that is necessary for healthy growth and development. The importance of individual freedom and autonomy in the liberal view trumps the recognition of interconnectedness and communal welfare, which critics consider to be a fault of the view. Some liberal feminists have replied to this argument by claiming that placing importance on individual rights doesn’t have to undermine communal welfare. Joan Kennedy Taylor argues that radical feminists are operating under a mistaken conception of individualism. Individualism asserts: “the individual is the basic unit. An individual joins with others in various ways to achieve goals. An individual does not receive identity by being a member of a group. Nor should an individual’s political and legal rights be decided by being born into a group” (Kennedy-Taylor 11). Here we see that some forms of individualism place individual rights and identity prior to identification with a larger group, but these views do not necessarily disregard the importance of community and group membership. This argument is essentially saying that individual rights can coexist and enrich communities and connectedness. “A group formed by individual choices nourishes the individual—in fact, human nature is such
that many life-serving goals can only be reached by people willing to act in concert—Individuals need chosen groups of all sorts, and the existence of a multiplicity of such groups, almost necessarily works to increase choices” (Kennedy-Taylor 12).

Other critics of liberalism take issue with the liberal theorists apparent belief that their perspectives and values are universally shared and adequately represent human nature. Carole Pateman has criticized the way that many liberal theorists have either ignored societal gender inequalities or assumed that they were biologically based and therefore justified.

“Contract doctrine entails that there is only one, conventional, origin of political right, yet, with the exception in Hobbes' theory where both sexes are pictured as naturally free and equal, the contract theorists also insist that men’s right over women has a natural basis. Men alone have the attributes of free and equal ‘individuals’. Relations of subordination between men must, if they are legitimate, originate in contract. Women are born into subjection.” (Pateman 41)

Pateman also takes issue with aspects of John Rawls’ political theory, namely that his ideas surrounding “the original position” are painfully abstract and unreflective of the realities of life. Pateman claims that the idea behind Rawls' original position and veil of ignorance are inadequate insofar as they don't account for the realities of racism, sexism, and classism. “The parties in the original position merely reason and make their choice...the representative is sexless.—However, in doing so, Rawls could only make his original position a logical abstraction of such rigour that nothing happens there” (Pateman 43). The claim here is that Rawls’ ideas about humans who operate under a “veil of ignorance” are too abstract and unrealistic to really be beneficial.
Radical Feminism

“To believe that freedom or justice for women, or for any individual woman, can be found in the mimicry of male sexuality is to delude oneself and to contribute to the oppression of one’s sisters.”

- Andrea Dworkin

Radical feminism began to emerge in the 1960’s women’s liberation movement, introducing a refreshing view of human nature and society into the field of feminist philosophy, one that was much different than the preceding political theories. One of the main claims that radical feminism asserts is that gender oppression was the first, and most fundamental, instance of oppression throughout history. This claim implies that gender oppression lays the groundwork for every other kind of oppression that can be observed in our society. Alison Jaggar illustrates this:

“—that women were, historically, the first group to be systematically dominated; that women’s subordination is the form of domination that should be tackled first (perhaps because it is causally primary; perhaps because women are in the most acute emergency situation); that the domination of women provides a conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression—” (Jaggar 101).

Radical feminists claim that gender oppression inevitably infiltrates the life of every woman, regardless of whether she recognizes it or not. Oppressive gender roles are so deeply ingrained in the traditions and ideals of our society that they are nearly invisible, except to the person who is actively trying to see them. Radical feminists claim that gender is the most powerful social structure and method of cultural control in our society. Societal ideas about gender and sexual identity end up determining the major social structures in our culture. Radical feminists argue that gender will inevitably affect an individual’s experiences in the legal realm, the workforce, the domestic sphere, education, in sexual matters, family structures, and psychological perspectives and
outlooks. Radical feminist philosophy emphasizes the separation between men and women in almost every aspect of life. “Radical feminism shows how, in contemporary society, distinctions of gender structure the whole of life: men and women dress differently, eat differently, engage in different activities at work, at home and in their leisure time, and have different kinds of social relationships, including sexual relationships.” (Jaggar, 85) Radical feminist thought focuses on these social distinctions between men and women as part of the foundations of the systematic oppression that women face, arguing that women are both controlled and subordinated through a regulation of gender norms, reproductive duties, and the denigration of traditionally female-centered values.

Radical feminists believe in the existence of two separate cultures within society, the dominant male culture and the invisible female culture that is often silenced or forgotten. Radical feminists point to instances of separation and subordination of women throughout society. One need not look any further than historical accounts of common law that considered women to be the literal property of the dominant man in their lives, whether that was a father or a husband. In the beginning of the 19th century, women essentially gave up legal independence if they chose to get married:

“—married women could not enter into contracts without their husbands consent, women lost all title to property or future earnings upon marriage, children were legally controlled by the father, and women were often without recourse against kidnapping or imprisonment by husbands and other male relatives.” (McElroy 5)

Women have a painful history of legal, cultural, and sexual oppression that radical feminists understand to be a result of the devaluation of the female gender. One of the gender-based distinctions that radical feminists critique is the cultural creation of
gender roles that ultimately place women in a subordinate position. This view claims that society generally accepts certain characteristics that essentially belong to males and certain characteristics that belong to females when it comes to duties and responsibilities in the family. “The past and present gendered nature of the family, and the ideology that surrounds it, affects virtually all women, whether or not they live or ever lived in traditional families” (Okin 7). Alison Jaggar explains how these accepted characteristics about sexuality determine the social roles of men and women,

“Men impregnate women, of course, but women are then assigned to perform most of the work required to rear infants and young children. Radical feminists claim that the sexual division of labor established originally in procreation is extended into every area of life.—Even those radical feminists who regard the distinction between the sexes as being ultimately a social construct claim that, in contemporary society, as in all other known societies, an individual’s sex is the single, most influential factor in determining her social position, her life experiences, her physical and psychological constitution, her interests and her values.” (Jaggar 249)

Radical feminists claim that the gender-roles have been, and continue to be, a major form of organizing, controlling, and ultimately oppressing women.

**Cultural Oppression and Patriarchal Structures**

“As difficult as it is to change overtly sexist sensibilities and behavior, it is much harder to raise critical questions about how sexism is embedded in major institutions such as the economy, politics, religion, health care, and the family.”

-Allan Johnson

Radical feminism is also distinct from liberal feminism in its insistence on the cultural roots of women's oppression and the structural dominance of men throughout society. This concept is oftentimes referred to as patriarchy, a common term referenced in radical feminist philosophy. Throughout their literature and historical
accounts, radical feminists have shown that men have undeniably exploited women in a variety of ways. Mary Daly has written extensively on the cross-cultural violence enacted against women, and she has claimed that violence against women is the foundation of other forms of discrimination and violence.

“In order to unmask the very real, existential meaning of Goddess murder in the concrete lives of women, I will focus upon five specific righteous rites which massacre women: Indian suttee, Chinese footbinding, African female genital mutilation, European witchburning, American gynecology.—Those who claim to see racism and/or imperialism in my indictment of these atrocities can do so only by blinding themselves to the fact that the oppression of women knows no ethnic, national, or religious bounds.” (Daly 111)

Although critics of radical feminism don’t usually deny the reality of this violence against women, some critics argue that there hasn’t been as much of an attempt to address the core of this violence. Critics of radical philosophies argue that more emphasis should be placed on the question; why do men oppress women and what are the roots of patriarchy located in?

Understanding the concept of patriarchy is essential for understanding the arguments that radical feminists make concerning gender-based oppression. Allan Johnson describes patriarchy not as a certain type of person or a group of people, but rather as a certain type of society and system of values. A society is patriarchal insofar as it promotes and fosters male privilege and male dominance. Johnson’s definition regarding the components of a patriarchal society is concrete and clear. “A society is patriarchal to the extent that it is male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered. It also involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women” (Johnson, 165).

When Johnson refers to a society that is male dominated, he is referring to the fact that the majority of the authoritative and powerful positions in our society tend to be
occupied by men. These include political, economic, legal, religious, educational, military, and domestic authority figures (165). He argues that a patriarchal society is male identified to the extent that the core values, virtues, and ideas of normalcy within that society are based around masculinity and typical masculine features. Some of the core societal values that are attributed to masculinity include “control, strength, efficiency, competitiveness, toughness, coolness under pressure, logic, forcefulness, decisiveness, rationality, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and control over any emotion that interferes with other core values” (166). Patriarchy is male centered because it places the majority of the attention primarily on men and what they do, say, and think. Johnson argues that we can easily see male centeredness in our society simply by observing that women usually play supporting roles to men in domestic life, in the workplace, in movies and T.V. shows, news stories, and in politics.

“In spite of new laws, for example, violence and sexual harassment against women are still pervasive. Inequality of income and wealth has not changed much from the 1980s, and women are still heavily concentrated in a small number of low-level service and pink-collar operations. In spite of the huge influx of married women, many of them mothers, into the paid labor force, and in spite of a great deal of talk about the joys of fatherhood, there has been no substantial increase in men’s sense of responsibility for domestic labor or their willingness to actually participate.” (Johnson 16)

These are a glimpse into what male dominance and male centeredness looks like in our society today. Male centeredness is the idea that the male experience is what is seen as normal and the most appropriate experience when addressing society as a whole.

“Male experience is what patriarchal culture offers to represent human experience and
the enduring themes of life, even when these are most often about women in the actual living of them…” (168).

Although patriarchy is centered on male dominance in society, men aren’t the only ones who participate in patriarchal beliefs and actions. Women can also participate in patriarchy to the extent that they operate under the patriarchal principles that are impressed upon them, or perpetuate patriarchal values and beliefs in their own lives and philosophies. Stacy Dash, a Fox News reporter, used misogynist arguments when discussing Dartmouth’s recent decision to ban hard alcohol on their campus in an attempt to reduce sexual assault. She was quoted, “I think it’s a good thing for the good girls to be told to stay home, be safe. The other bad girls, bad women, the ones who like to be naughty, might go out and play and get hurt, and then, you know…” This view is patriarchal because it wrongfully places pressure on women to avoid rape, while also claiming that women should confine themselves to their homes to avoid rape. Another female contributor, Andrea Tantaros added, “Either women can handle liquor, make responsible choices, or they can’t, and they’re a bunch of babies that need to be kept away from liquor and from boys”. Again, we have a woman who pins the blame on women and alcohol consumption instead of rapists themselves. Clearly, patriarchy is not a definition for men in our society, and it is not a view that is exclusively held by men. Patriarchy is not a person, or a group of people, but rather a belief system, philosophy, and lens through which we can evaluate our culture, and both men and women can be active participants in the goals and ideologies of patriarchy.
Radical feminists have various perspectives on power and domination as it relates to female oppression. One view equates the power relationship between men and women to that of a slave and master relationship, where women are subjugated and enslaved under pervasive male authorities. (Pateman 207) Radical feminists typically view gender as the deciding factor of power relationships in our society:

“The male sexual model is based on a polarization of humankind into man/woman, master/slave, aggressor/victim, active/passive.—The very identity of men, their civil and economic power, the forms of government that they have developed, the wars they wage, are tied irrevocably together. All forms of dominance and submission, whether it be man over woman, white over black, boss over worker, rich over poor, are tied irrevocably to the sexual identities of men and are derived from the male sexual model. (Angela Dworkin, Our Blood, 13)

This view claims that to be born female is essentially to be placed in an automatic position of subordination in society, whereas being born male is to be in an automatic position of power over women. Radical feminist Marilyn Frye has called attention to the interesting relationship between power, access, and manipulation. She argues that women’s subordinate place in society causes them to be accessible to men, vulnerable to male predators, and this is a major contributor to male dominance in relationships of power between men and women. This view shapes Frye’s definition of what it means to be powerless and powerful: “total power is unconditional access; total powerlessness is being unconditionally accessible. The creation and manipulation of power is constituted of the manipulation and control of access” (Frye 103). Women are, in Frye’s view, easily accessible to men, and therefore are likely to be put in the subordinate role in relationships with men.
**Criticisms of Radical Feminism**

Radical feminist theories have sometimes been criticized for their dependence on essentialist philosophies, arguing that men and women are separated by their very nature. Essentialist philosophies and arguments can be criticized harshly because they have been used throughout history to justify discrimination against certain groups of people because of their seemingly “essential differences”. This becomes problematic because oftentimes the radical feminist perspective places the role of essential goodness and innocence on women, and the essential role of aggression and violence on men. Jean Bethke Elshtain explains the political and logical dangers of essentialist arguments:

> “Essentialist arguments were used to justify slavery, to resist the Nineteenth Amendment (which gave women the vote), and to sustain colonialism. By presenting women as a priori nurturing and life-giving and men as a priori corrupt and obsessed with death, radical-cultural feminists fall into the trap of doing unto others that which they do not want done unto themselves and other oppressed groups.” (Elshtain 226)

In this way, some might argue that radical-essentialist views over-generalize the characteristics and goals of men and women, which undermines their value and distinct differences as individuals.

Another common criticism of the radical feminist view is that their theories concerning men are too harsh and generalized, unfairly identifying all men as patriarchal and violent. Some critics of radical views argue that although there are some men who are perpetrators of violence and aggression, it is unfair to assume that all men, as a result of their gender, have aggressive and violent tendencies. Radical feminists have focused on the oppressive nature of relationships between men and
women, usually arguing that this oppressive relationship stems from the inherently violent nature of men. "Under patriarchy, every woman’s daughter is a victim, past, present, and future. Under patriarchy, every woman’s son is her potential betrayer and also the inevitable rapist or exploiter of another woman" (Dworkin, 20). Views like this, seemingly categorizing all men as either actual or potential perpetrators of violence and assault, have been met with skepticism from liberal feminists. While some radical feminists might hold the extreme view that all men are “inevitable rapists or exploiters”, others would argue that men themselves are not the problem; patriarchy is the problem, regardless of who or what perpetuates it.

Radical feminists have faced criticism because their politics have been structured differently than previous political theories. Liberalism is largely based on practicality, rationality, and analytic analysis; radical feminist thinkers have taken non-traditional and non-linear approaches to their work. They have oftentimes chosen to include creative aspects of their theorizing, incorporating music, poetry, photography, drama, and personal reflections and experiences to more accurately and genuinely convey their political views. Many radical feminists have responded to criticisms of their non-traditional ways of theorizing by claiming that traditional theory is itself male-identified, and an unfair degree of importance has been placed on traditional theorizing, disadvantaging female theorists. Radical feminists claim that too much emphasis has been placed on objectivity and abstract theorizing rather than on lived experience and emotion. Susan Griffin has called for the exposure of male centered theorizing, claiming that women have found different and more effective ways to express their politics:
"We did not move from theory; we moved quite simply, as I wrote before, to the sorest wounds, and in this sense, we were no longer ‘thinking’ in the way that Western man thinks, in the realm where thought is divided from feeling, and objectivity is imagined to exist. We were discovering a different sense of clarity, one achieved through feeling, in which thought followed a direction determined by pain, and trauma, and compassion and outrage." (Griffin 31)

Other theorists in the field of moral philosophy and psychology have aligned themselves with radical feminist views, arguing that women have a different way of experiencing, reasoning, and developing that is oftentimes dismissed by mainstream, male culture. Carol Gilligan’s studies on adolescent girls’ distinct ways of reasoning, different from that of their male peers, exposed the widely accepted and praised, but deeply male biased, system of moral development created by acclaimed psychologist Laurence Kohlberg. Kohlberg’s theory measured children’s moral maturity in terms of their ability to obey authority, act in their own best interest, gain the approval of others, and various other standards that Gilligan argued were based on distinctly male children’s perspectives. Similarly, moral philosophers have found fault within moral theories that are seemingly male biased, ignoring the values that are thought to be associated with women.

**Historical Foundations for Current Rape Culture**

“Man’s discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe. From prehistoric times to the present, I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear.”

-Susan Brownmiller

Susan Brownmiller, in her work *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, documents the painful historical roots of rape and sexual assault. She first points out
that rape is a topic that has been largely undocumented and underrepresented in the fields of history, psychology and the law. Most of the noteworthy psychologists and psychiatrists of our time have neglected to research or publish relevant findings on rape. (11) Brownmiller notes that Freud is a prime example of this. “Sigmund Freud, was also struck dumb by the subject of rape.—The father of psychoanalysis, who invented the concept of the primacy of the penis, was never motivated, as far as we know, to explore the real-life deployment of the penis as a weapon.” (Brownmiller 11)

The fact that prominent thinkers have overlooked, underestimated, or ignored the realities of violence against women speaks to a larger cultural dismissal of rape as a serious crime. Even if it is not outwardly acknowledged, rape and male domination have been deeply ingrained in our culture and society throughout history.

Women are at a disadvantage in a gender-based power struggle with men. Brownmiller argues that the beginning of female subjugation can be traced back to primitive times, where men were viewed as natural predators who learned to “hunt” women who were weaker and easily dominated. Women were then forced to take refuge in certain male figures that ultimately became their protectors and made sure that men from other tribes did not attack them. Brownmiller sees this as the beginning of the view that women are themselves the property of men, and the attack of women is primarily the violation of men’s property. (Brownmiller 16) The theme of women as the property of men rather than autonomous beings is one that has been prevalent throughout history and has contributed to the cultural themes of male domination, authority, and control over women in general.
Legal recognition of rape has changed and developed throughout the United States’ history; in the 17th and 18th centuries, rape was a capital offense. In the earliest southern colonies, there were laws that forbade rape and required that cases of rape be brought before a grand jury. If the grand jury saw the case as legitimate, it was brought in front of the Virginia General Court, the court that dealt with cases involving the life and well being of individuals (Smith 177). Even though it was possible for rape victims to seek justice before the law, victims usually didn’t attempt this. Most cases of rape that were heard before the grand jury were turned away. Women weren’t allowed to serve on juries at that time, the jurors who heard cases of rape were always male, and this was probably intimidating and humiliating for female victims. This affected the outcomes of many rape cases, as many southern men had close social ties and they didn’t want to turn on each other in a court of law. “The powerful landowning men of the southern colonies were often related by marriage and not inclined to turn against each other in questionable behavior related to women or slaves” (Smith 176).

Race and class often shaped Southerners attitudes about rape; slave women’s bodies were the property of their masters, so the sexual violation of slave women wasn’t legally considered to be rape. Oftentimes, women’s rape allegations were only taken seriously when they were against black and Native American men. In New England, Native American men who were convicted of rape were sold into servitude, whereas white men were simply issued a fine as a punishment for rape. (Smith, 179) This reinforced white men’s power over women as well as people of color, perpetuating an irrational social fear directed towards men of color as “sexual deviants”. The assault of a white woman by a black man was taken very seriously and was usually met with
harsher punishment than for white men, although in some cases slave owners tried to make special accommodations for slave men because of their economic value. In these cases, juries would try to find a point of blame to place on the female victim in order to remove the responsibility from the assailant's shoulders. If a woman had anything in her history that could potentially leave her with a bad reputation, it would be used against her to try to discredit the validity of her testimony.

Religious ties to patriarchal monotheistic worldviews also had a great influence on perspectives of rape. Many men believed that God intended for women to be natural servants to men and their desires, so the concept of a woman denying a man's sexual advances was unheard of. This belief that men are naturally meant to dominate women allowed men to take out their frustration and anger on women, shaping many of the sexist perspectives of women's roles in today's society. "Puritan men might be powerless before God and nature, but they could dominate women and demand their submissiveness. Together these attitudes encouraged some men who were frustrated by their life circumstances, including being unmarried, to force themselves on women" (Smith 178).

**Rape Myths**

"History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do."

-James Baldwin

A rape myth is an inaccurate cultural belief about the causes of rape. Rape myths can include a variety of ideas, including but not limited to beliefs such as, "victims deserve,
cause, invite, ask for, or want to be raped; victims who get raped could have avoided it and therefore are at fault; and victims are sexually promiscuous, or they are sexually active with the offender, and thus she/he was a willing partner in the act” (Smith 191). Rape myths have been deeply influential and powerful, shaping many of the cultural beliefs, laws, and policies on college campuses, and elsewhere, that affect rape victims. Historically, the authorities and legal system have skeptically questioned the legitimacy of women’s rape accusations. Women who claimed they had been assaulted were supposed to be able to physically show that they had thoroughly resisted their attacker in order to be taken seriously (Smith 192). Women were actually punished by authorities when they claimed to have been raped and didn’t, or couldn’t, show signs of resisting, in which case it was assumed that they had lied about the assault (Smith, 178). Most women didn’t report their assault because they could clearly see that the difficulty of providing proof of their experience would be too great, not to mention emotionally exhausting. “Given the difficulties of being believed, the threat of losing your reputation, or even the possibility of being convicted of a crime, it is not surprising that, as in the southern colonies, few rapes were actually reported” (Smith, 179).

Although in the 18th century rape was a capital offense punishable by death, the definition of rape was extremely narrow and specific. Marital rape was a concept that didn’t exist because women’s bodies were the legal property of their husbands after they were married, and property owners were free to treat their property in whatever way they wished (Smith, 179). Similarly, homosexual rape wasn’t given consideration, given that sodomy was illegal; issues of consent in homosexual rape were either taken to be illegitimate or not worthy of legal consideration. These historical perspectives
that define rape in minimizing ways are, of course, still very relevant today. Activists and rape survivors on college campuses have spoken out about the rape myths that infiltrate their campuses and their lives. Rape survivors at Amherst College revealed some of the troubling responses they received from friends and faculty after their assaults, questions like “Are you sure it was rape? He seems to think it was a little more complicated.” Women are also implicitly discouraged from reporting their assaults simply by recognizing the grim reality of conviction rates for accused rapists, along with the lack of police investigation surrounding rape cases. The recent discoveries concerning the abundance of unexamined rape kits, shut away in storage, speak to the underlying apathetic attitude in rape cases. Alcohol consumption is oftentimes still considered to be a justification for rape, unfairly used as a tool for pushing blame and responsibility on to the victim. Criminal defense attorney Joseph DiBenedetto, in response to a story of a 14-year-old female rape victim who was assaulted by an older male high school student, was quoted “nobody forced her to drink—what did she expect to happen at 1am in the morning after sneaking out?” Responsibility is still unfairly placed on victims rather than perpetrators, and victims are still held responsible for allegedly putting themselves in danger. Women are blamed for behaving “irresponsibly”, i.e. walking alone, drinking, or dressing provocatively (often by someone else’s standards). This insinuates that it is ultimately a woman’s responsibility to ensure that she doesn’t end up getting assaulted, and if she does get assaulted, there is something she could have and should have done to prevent it. Women are told time and again to never walk alone, travel in groups, watch out for each other, and carefully monitor alcohol consumption. These precautionary measures are
meant to protect women from getting assaulted, but in reality, these instructions are an extension of rape myths that direct blame and responsibility towards victims instead of their attackers. These instructions, regardless of the good intentions they might be grounded in, end up perpetuating false beliefs about the relationship between rape and responsibility. These messages also have horrifying effects on many women's conceptions of rape and responsibility. When the principles of rape culture are impressed upon women, we are at risk of becoming desensitized in such a way that we cannot recognize the validity and severity of own experiences. We become, in a sense, deceived by the patriarchal messages of rape culture.

**Liberal and Radical Perspectives on Rape**

Taking into consideration the general goals and beliefs of liberal and radical feminism, I'll consider what each of them has to offer, philosophically and practically, to the issue of sexual assault on college campuses. The liberal feminist response to assault is largely focused on implementing and enforcing policies that will make it easier and safer for women to report assaults and prevent future assaults from occurring. Of course, this is a worthy goal and one that is necessary for women on college campuses today. For liberal feminists, the main solution to sexual assault is the same as other violent crimes, through legal measures, policy reform, legal enforcement of consequences for perpetrators, and legal protection of victims. Radical feminists on the other hand are skeptical of legal solutions to the problem of sexual assault on college campuses because they understand rape to be a cultural problem, an important support and reinforcement of patriarchy, and something that cannot be permanently
eradicated through legislative measures alone. Radical feminists have questioned the heart of our society's systems and structures, the structures that liberal feminists have fought to become included in. In the same way, radical feminist principles will ask us to think critically about sexual assault on college campuses, bringing us not to the question of how to minimize and manage the assault problem, but rather, why we have an assault problem in the first place?

**Liberal Feminist Responses**

Broadly speaking, the philosophical views and principles of liberalism carry over into discussion about sexual violence for liberal feminists. Liberalism acknowledges that rape is a crime against individual women whose rights have been violated. The emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy within liberal thought highlights and emphasizes the idea that rape is a crime against individual victims, implying that every instance of sexual assault is separate, random, and gender neutral. Because this view emphasizes sexual assault as a violation of individual rights, it follows that the solutions for sexual assault are through individual legal measures. If rape is an individual problem, each case must be dealt with on an individual basis between the victim, perpetrator, and legal system. This thought process allows us to easily assume that rape isn't an issue that calls for collective responsibility, and is not indicative of a failure of our culture at large. Allan Johnson discusses the view of sexual assault as an individual issue. “Most men do nothing about the problem of sexual violence, for example, because they see it as an individual problem: ‘Unless I do it or its done to someone I care about, its someone else's problem, not mine’” (Johnson 197). This reflects the fairly
characteristic rejection of collective responsibility that is common in liberal thought. Individualist thought rejects collectivism on the grounds that communities are made up of individual people, and the only way to achieve communal change is through individual decisions to change. This point is legitimate, although it should be stressed that individual choices are often heavily influenced by cultural and communal factors. With this in mind, we can see that the only way to implement lasting change in regards to any social issue is to begin changing the dominant cultural attitudes towards the issue, which in turn leads to change in underlying social structures.

The solutions presented by liberal feminism only go so far when dealing with sexual assault, even though liberal principles are compelling and necessary to a degree when dealing with any kind of violent crime or violation of individual rights and autonomy. From a liberal perspective, it seems perfectly reasonable to expect that we would be able to reform laws so that they better protect women from sexual assault and hold perpetrators of assault accountable for their actions. The reality is that even with all of the strides that have been made in the legislation surrounding rape victims, even with protective legislation in place, perpetrators are oftentimes not held legally responsible for their actions, and women are still assaulted. Legislative action is clearly not enough to make a lasting impact on the problem of sexual violence against women. Interestingly, some liberal principles even seem to perpetuate acceptance of rape myths, as the individualist foundation of liberalism seems to endorse the idea that the woman, an autonomous agent, is somewhat responsible for her actions that lead to her assault.
**Radical Feminist Responses**

Radical feminism sees a different picture when thinking about acts of sexual violence against women. Rather than viewing each instance of assault on an individual bases, radical feminism views acts of sexual violence as interconnected and indicative of a larger system of male dominance and cultural oppression of women. For radical feminists, rape is an important pillar of the structure that upholds patriarchy, and it is a distinct tool in an effort to control women’s actions and bodies. Radical responses to rape are distinct in the way they hold men, as a gender class, responsible for sexual assault. Andrea Dworkin sees rape as a result of the gender assignments that are given to men and women in society.

“Remember, rape is not committed by psychopaths or deviants from our social norms—rape is committed by exemplars of our social norms...Men are defined as aggressive, dominant, powerful. Women are defined as passive, submissive, powerless. Given these polar gender definitions, it is the very nature of men to aggress sexually against women.” (Dworkin 46)

Radical feminists unapologetically point out that men are, by and large, the main perpetrators of sexual assault, and therefore rape is not merely an instance of individual violence, but specifically male violence. Violence, aggression, and dominance are aspects of the typical picture of manhood that gets portrayed in our culture, and these cultural portrayals of men as violent beings and women as objects of domination are embodied in the prevalence of men's sexual violence against women. While it is certainly true that not all men rape, and not all men participate in violence, there is also a cultural and collective responsibility on the part of men, as a group, that radical feminists recognize as essential to eradicating rape culture. Radical feminists see the power and necessity of collective responsibility in social issues like sexual assault.
James Baldwin beautifully illustrates this concept in his discussion of guilt and responsibility as it relates to our history of racism in America:

“I’m not interested in anybody’s guilt. Guilt is a luxury that we can no longer afford. I know you didn’t do it, and I didn’t do it either, but I am responsible for it because I am a man and a citizen of this country and you are responsible for it, too, for the very same reason... Anyone who is trying to be conscious must begin to dismiss the vocabulary which we’ve used so long to cover it up, to lie about the way things are.” (Baldwin 1964)

Radical feminists see the legitimacy of collective responsibility as it pertains to male violence and systems of patriarchy. Regardless of whether one chooses to participate in patriarchy, in violence, in domination, radical feminists claim that it is the collective responsibility of all men to recognize their own male privilege. It is the collective responsibility of men to recognize the pervasive harms that have been inflicted upon women, by men, throughout history. It is the collective responsibility of men to actively become women’s allies, to refuse to perpetuate sexist values, to treat the issue of violence against women as urgent and unacceptable. In order to begin changing patriarchal beliefs and practices, individual men must begin taking responsibility for the violence that they didn’t commit, but that fellow men, past and present, have committed. This is what it means to be a male ally: to be a man who recognizes the reality of patriarchy as it exists in our culture and on our campuses today, to be a man who recognizes his own societal position of power and privilege that is allotted to him as a result of his gender. To be a male ally means fighting alongside women, not turning a blind eye to our pains, taking positive, intentional action towards the elimination of sexism and male violence.
Principles of radical feminism forcefully dismantle the seemingly hard-hearted and deeply male centered, individualistic liberal philosophy. Radical views highlight important themes of communal responsibility and interconnectedness, as well as the existence of patriarchal cultural factors that are extremely relevant in our cultural and legal treatment of rape. While it is undeniably important to fight for the legal equalities and protections that liberal feminists have fought for and continue to fight for, we also cannot neglect to address the underlying and possibly more troubling question that radical feminists ask: why do men assault women in the first place? Radical principles make it clear that there must be at least an equal amount of effort put towards cultural and foundational changes as there are legislative efforts surrounding sexual assault. There needs to be as much emphasis placed on the sexual objectification of women’s bodies in our culture as there is on reforming alcohol consumption policies on college campuses. There needs to be less time spent advising women on how to be safe and warning women about the consequences of their behavior, and more emphasis on structural and cultural beliefs that implicitly condone and foster rape myths and rape culture. If we neglect to address the difficult questions that radical feminists ask about the failures of our culture, about the roots of our culture’s misogyny, we will continue to see the blatant perpetuation of rape myths. We will continue to see women who don’t feel they can or should report their assault, we will continue to see women who think their rape was a result of their alcohol consumption, and we will most assuredly continue to see the responsibility for sexual assault being unfairly directed towards women.
The Power of Naming

“When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.”

Audre Lorde

In light of the limits of liberal feminism and its dependence on the legal system, it becomes evident that radical feminism provides necessary tools in the fight against the blatant rape myths that infiltrate our college campuses today. One of the profound strengths and solutions that radical philosophy offers to the issue of sexual assault on college campuses is its emphasis on the power of women’s voices and women’s ability to name, define, and share their own experiences of sexual assault. Radical feminism values the persistent sharing of emotion and experience, as well as the validation and legitimacy of feelings and emotional response. This was exemplified in the use of consciousness-raising as a method of activism throughout the women’s liberation movement. Consciousness-raising has been a political and liberatory practice that radical feminists have used in order to give women an opportunity to come together and discuss social issues that affect them in similar ways. Allowing women to take control and ownership over their voices and perspectives, consciousness-raising has been used to validate women’s emotions and experiences in safe and affirming communities. In contrast to liberal principles that view people as separate entities, not necessarily connected with other people, many radical theorists insist on the interconnectedness of communities and people. These care-centered philosophies
generally place more emphasis on relationship and natural caring responses as an alternative to rules, regulations, and duties that are emphasized in liberal moral theories. In cases of sexual assault, the radical philosophy of connectedness and caring relation is indispensable. Some kind of community of care is necessary in order to support survivors of assault, a place where their experience and voice is affirmed and they are treated with kindness and tenderness. The present liberal legal system and the way it handles cases of sexual assault falls far below this standard of care. The radical feminist movement towards consciousness-raising and sharing of experiences allows women to combine their emotional, experiential, and relational lives with larger social and political issues. The goals and energies of consciousness-raising places emphasis on the importance of each individual woman’s voice as a foundation for political and social change, while also honoring the power of communal connection. bell hooks describes the importance of consciousness-raising as a therapeutic tool for women in emotional turmoil. “Early on in the contemporary feminist movement, consciousness-raising groups often became settings where women simply unleashed pent up hostility and rage about being victimized, with little or no focus on strategies of intervention and transformation” (hooks 7). This way of thinking is still relevant when dealing with sexual assault today. There is an immediate necessity for victims to have a space where they can express their anger and pain, knowing that their voices are heard, valued, and respected. It is necessary for women to be able to critically respond to the injustices they see around them, injustices that affect them personally as females.

The issue of being able to name and define oneself has been prevalent in recent years, in postmodern and third wave feminisms. Third wave feminists have criticized
liberal feminisms for failing to recognize people who fall outside the boundaries of the traditional concept of “woman”. The very juridical structures of power that claim to represent women are also the structures that define women, and what constitutes a woman.

“Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms—that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and even ‘protection’ of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice. But the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures.” (Butler 4)

Critics of liberal thought oftentimes point out the problem of the strict liberal conception of “woman”. As long as an authoritative system of power is able to define which subjects fit into the category of “woman”, these subjects will inevitably be held under the power and regulation of the very system that names them. In cases of sexual assault, women have historically been informed, by male centered legal systems, what the definition of rape is. These systems of authority don’t have a right to define rape, because they cannot really understand the lived reality of female-victims’ experiences of rape. Women are more often than not the victims of assault, and men are almost always the perpetrators of assault, and yet it has been male leaders and authority figures that have been the deciders of what constitutes rape, consent, and legitimate testimony. Even certain kinds of testimony are deemed more credible than others; radical philosophies have seen poetry, storytelling, music, and performance as legitimate forms of testimony, whereas liberal philosophies rely on objectivity.

Anything less than objective “fact” is disregarded in our legal system; this is clearly displayed in the immediate dismissal of rape cases that don’t provide evidence
measuring up to the liberal and legal standards of objectivity and therefore, legitimacy. It is crucial that we consider the fact that our legal system, allegedly striving to reach justice in these cases of assault, is both designed and enforced by men. The population of people who are, by and large, the perpetrators of sexual assault happen to be the very same population of people who have the power to decide, legally and culturally, what rape is and how it should be dealt with. In the same way that Judith Butler has questioned the male-centered legal system's definitions of the subject “woman”, we can extend the question to the legal system’s definition of “rape”. It is with these considerations in mind that it becomes even more crucial for women to be able to reclaim their definitions of rape to match their own personal experiences of rape. This serves a dual purpose; not only does it begin to place the power of naming where it belongs, but it also begins to dismantle rape myths that are founded on false experiences and definitions of rape. Women’s ability to speak, name, define, and reclaim is an essential part of undoing what has been done to us.

Conclusion

I find within myself a sense of urgency, a specific concern when considering the issue of rape on college campuses. Institutions of higher education are in many ways a direct pathway to female empowerment. Today education is an available resource for many, though not all, women; yet we also know that in the not too distant past, women were not considered capable or worthy of education with their male peers. I try to remind myself of this frequently as I move through my life as a female student. The extent to which women have access to the same quality and depth of education as their male
peers is at least one aspect of women’s societal equality with men. If female students are placed in positions of fear and intimidation in the very place where they are supposedly acquiring independence and personal empowerment, they are not free, they cannot flourish. As a forward-looking feminist thinker, I know that my education is a tool, it is a treasure, it is a shield. My education has enabled me to begin to question the assumptions I had previously internalized about femininity, gender, my role, myself. Education, along with exposure to the experiences and perspectives of other feminist thinkers, has allowed me to explore ideas of a patriarchal society, of male dominance, the politics that surround female bodies. As I think back to the beginning of this year, reading “Only Responsibility Can Stop Rape” in The Daily Wildcat, I find that my greatest concern rests with the impressions that it left on readers, women who may have been damaged by it, men who may have seen it as justification and fuel for violence. Of course, I can never be sure about who it might have affected, I’ll never know if it served as a false confirmation of someone’s deeply held suspicion and fear that her rape was her responsibility. What I do know is that language is powerful. The decision to speak is powerful. I have learned as a Gender and Women’s Studies student, as a feminist, as a woman, that the very choice to speak instead of being silent is political. Every feminist who chooses to challenge and respond to the pervasive, damaging, patriarchal lies that threaten her education, her growth and her survival claims her power and her voice.
Works Cited


Works Consulted


