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**Constructing Rape, Imagining Self:  
Discourses of Rape and Gendered Subjectivity in South Africa**

**Simidele Dosekun DSKSIM001**

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the award of the degree of Master of Social Science in**

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Abstract

This thesis explores the meanings and impact of rape in South Africa for fifteen women located at the University of Cape Town (UCT) who claim to have never experienced rape. Drawing upon feminist post-structuralist theories of subjectivity and taking a discursive analytic approach, the thesis explores how these women construct the phenomenon of rape in their society and thereby imagine themselves. It is based upon empirical data collected through qualitative interviews. Analysis of this data shows that the women discursively construct rape as highly prevalent in South Africa but ordinarily distant from their personal lives, concerning them 'the Other.' However, it is argued that the women also construct themselves as gendered and embodied subjects inherently vulnerable to male violence such as rape. This means that the fear and imagination of rape are not absent from their daily lives, but rather shape their sense of safety, agency, sexuality and citizenship in South Africa. Because these fifteen women deny personal experiences of rape, the thesis shows that they draw on public discourses and their subjective imaginations to theorise rape and rape crisis in post-apartheid South Africa.

# 1 Introduction

This thesis offers a discursive analysis of rape and gendered subjectivity in post-apartheid South Africa from the perspective of women in the country who claim to have *not* experienced rape. Assuming a context in which South Africa is widely said to be in a rape crisis, this thesis seeks to explore how such women construct the alleged rape of other women around them and how, in the process, they imagine themselves. It does so on the basis of feminist post-structuralist theories of subjectivity. These theories maintain that discourses of vulnerability to male violence, including rape, are central to the construction of women's gendered subjectivities. The contention then is that women who do not personally experience violence such as rape may be yet impacted by the fear and imagination of it. Following from this, the thesis takes the epistemological perspective that women who say they have never experienced rape may yet have much to say about rape.

The fifteen women I met and spoke with in this work would suggest that this is indeed the case. Through their various narratives of experience, analyses of discourse and deployments of imagination, they construct rape as a prevalent phenomenon in South Africa and position themselves as gendered subjects who are inherently vulnerable to it. Therefore, the *threat* of rape is something many claim to take into account as they negotiate safety in their daily lives, especially in public space with unknown men. Likewise the *fear* of rape and, or with, other forms of violence is an emotion many of the women report feeling and managing on a frequent basis. Even if these fifteen women do not ultimately imagine that rape is a likely possibility for them, they construct its prevalent occurrence in their society as a factor which adversely impacts upon the quality of their gendered and embodied lives here and now. In the following discussion, I briefly elaborate upon the contemporary context of rape in South Africa to which these women refer, and from which this thesis proceeds.

## **Context: Discourses of Rape Crisis in the New South Africa**

Rape is a grave problem in the new South Africa, according to political, media and popular discourse on the matter (du Toit 2005; Nuttall 2004; Posel 2005). Through these channels, the post-apartheid nation has been discursively exposed and constructed as that which I will call 'rape-dense,' meaning a space in which rape is extraordinarily present or prevalent.<sup>1</sup> This is not specialist knowledge, limited to activists and academics, the police or other state institutions. Nor is it only local; my personal apprehensions as a foreigner moving here in 2006, and the warnings from friends and family located outside the country, suggest an external association between South Africa and the threat of rape.

The statistics on the prevalence of rape in the country are a key source of this information. Although there is no consensus amongst researchers on where the figures precisely stand, all concur that they are alarmingly high (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002; Statistics South Africa 2000). Statistical studies of rape in South Africa are driven by variously overlapping and opposing research agendas, including feminist, criminological and public health (e.g. Ackerman and de Klerk 2002). Their findings differ depending on variables such as sample size, methodology and definitions used, which also affect their statistical reliability and applicability to the entire South African population (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002; Statistics South Africa 2000). Jewkes and Abrahams (2002) further list a number of sociological and cultural factors that make it virtually impossible to calculate the definitive rape statistic in South Africa (or indeed elsewhere). They argue that incidents of rape reported to the police, the most readily available source of national data, represent the "tip of the iceberg" (2002:1231). Reasons for this include the social stigma often attached to women who allege rape, the fear these women may have of the police and other intervening institutions, and the domestic and socio-economic pressures which may discourage them from reporting rape, especially if the perpetrator is a family member or breadwinner (2002:1232).

Despite such challenges to definitively quantifying rape in South Africa, various figures circulate frequently and perhaps too easily in public discourses of rape. These figures are uniformly horrific though they differ in magnitude and origin, if the latter is at all cited or explained. Thus one may come across statements such as: "1 in 2 women have

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<sup>1</sup> This expression, 'rape dense,' was suggested to me by my thesis supervisor, Prof. J. Bennett.

a chance of being raped in their lifetime;” “a woman is raped every 26 seconds in South Africa” (People Opposing Woman Abuse Website); and “there are 35 rapes for every one reported to the police” (Human Rights Watch 1995, cited in Jewkes and Abrahams 2002:1231). Clearly such “rape statistics,” as they are branded, are not neutral. They motivate and legitimise feminist mobilisation, media attention and public concern. Conversely, they have become the objects of politicised refutation, most notably from key members of the new government for reasons which will be proposed further below (Erlank 2005; Moffett 2006). President Thabo Mbeki, for instance, alleged in a 1999 speech that the rape statistics were imprecise, sensationalist and decontextualised. Having condemned the occurrence of *any* rape in South Africa, he argued therefore: “it is unnecessary and counter-productive for anybody to propagate untruth about the incidence of this crime in our country . . . The tragedy is that many of us have taken these purely speculative figures as fact” (Mbeki 1999, cited in Erlank 2005:204).

As suggested, the “fact” which the rape statistics expose and construct through their deployment and dissemination in public discourse is that of a rape crisis in South Africa. It must be stressed the extent to which discourses of rape crisis are new, occurring within and referring to the post-apartheid context. Posel argues that there was an “explosion” of public talk of rape in the mid-1990s, prior to which, under the apartheid regime, “the issue of sexual violence in South Africa had languished on the margins of public debate and political engagement” (2005:24). Thus she theorises the heightened public awareness of rape in the country today in terms of a discursive shift, consequent upon an eruption of rape into the realm of the publicly ‘speakable,’ not necessarily an eruption of rape itself. Du Toit concurs, explaining that if “the statistics seem to show a sharp rise in the rape rate after 1994 this should more likely be interpreted as the ‘normalization’ of statistics in a climate of greater political stability and as an indication of women’s determination to make the new democracy work for them” (2005:269).

If so, this can be read as a certain victory for South African feminists, in so far as it is a feminist goal to break the social silence around rape and other forms of gender-based abuse which women suffer (Ferraro 1996; Jackson 1993). Feminist activism has been in fact critical in putting rape on the public agenda in South Africa, especially in the context of the major institutional and political changes of the post-apartheid transition.

According to Posel (2005), South African feminists, like their counterparts in Europe and North America, first began to mobilise against rape in the late 1970s. Rape Crisis in Cape Town was formed in 1976, for example. Such activism strengthened and diversified in the 1980s and 1990s, before which feminism itself had been broadly perceived by black women (and men) as a white, middle-class concern, in view, especially, of the imperatives of the anti-apartheid struggle (Beall, Hassim, and Todes 1989). Hassim (2003b) notes that with the 1980s emergence of localised sites of resistance to apartheid, grassroots women's organisations grew. For black women activists, these became safe spaces in which they began to link their liberation from "personal" oppressions such as gender-based violence to the liberation of the nation (Hassim 2003b:51). This shift in their political thinking, though not uncontested by male activists, reflected in the increasing and well-received coverage from the 1980s of rape and gender-based violence in *Speak*, the black women's activist magazine (Hassim 2003b; Meer 1998). And in 1990, the first national march against sexual violence was held in the black urban township of Soweto.

When it finally came, the transition from apartheid to democratic rule in South Africa was a key period for ongoing feminist efforts to direct political and state attention to women's issues, including gender-based violence. A broad grouping of women activists known as the Women's National Coalition (WNC) worked strategically during the transition negotiations to define women as "a distinct group of citizens" for whom full equality and freedom from gendered oppression would require formal institutional backing in the new political order (Hassim 2003a:505; also Seidman 1999). They were able to do so within the terms of liberal-democratic discourses of citizenship and rights which had displaced nationalism as the hegemonic political language (Hassim 2005). They drew also upon emerging international feminist discourses of the gendered character of citizenship to argue that national liberation and democratisation would not inevitably result in women's liberation (Seidman 1999:288). Their success in shaping the form of the new state is manifest in the 1996 constitution, "held up as a model of serious commitment to the ideal of gender equality" the world over (Hassim 2003a:505).

What these changes meant, in terms of the issue of rape, was an opening of the institutional and ideational spaces that had silenced this abuse under both apartheid and

struggle conditions. Rape could now be spoken within the political, and therefore the public, sphere. For instance, under the new discursive regime of citizen's rights and equality, feminists and anti-rape organisations have been able to frame rape in South Africa as a gross abuse of the extensive rights the new constitution formally guarantees to women (du Toit 2005). Speaking rape in South Africa in terms of women's rights has also been encouraged by shifts in dominant, global human rights discourses, which, in the 1990s, came to conceptualise all violence against women as a human rights abuse (Andrews 1998/99; du Toit 2005).

Another post-apartheid institutional change which has contributed to greater public talk and awareness of rape in South Africa is the deregulation of the media and removal of apartheid censorship. On the one hand, feminist anti-rape organisations have used the local media as an important channel through which to broadcast their activism to the larger public (e.g. Rape Crisis Annual Report 2003:9). In turn, the media have sought out such organisations to comment on the problem of rape in the land. However, a local watchdog has charged that critical feminist activism against gender-based violence in South Africa tends not to garner serious media coverage (Southern African Media and Gender Institute 2003). Posel (2005) in fact places greater weight on media sensationalism than on political activism or institutional change for bringing the problem of rape to popular consciousness in South Africa. Ultimately, she argues, it was high-profile cases and media reports of dramatic and violent rapes which captured national attention (also Erlank 2005:204). These included cases of the rape and sexual abuse of children which were allegedly motivated by the "virgin myth," the belief that having unprotected sex with a virgin cures one of HIV.<sup>2</sup> Cases of "baby rape"—the rape of very young children by adult men—provoked even more media attention and, as to be expected, greater public moral outrage (Posel 2005; Ritcher 2003). According to Posel (2005), the first case of baby rape was reported in the South African press in late October 2001. It is worth quoting her in full to consider the media frenzy that allegedly followed. She states that:

by 1 November, the press had suddenly uncovered two more cases of the rape of the very young... Equally rapidly, the press was also awash with a litany of shocking

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<sup>2</sup> There is disagreement over how prevalent this belief actually is, and to what degree it can be cited as an explanatory factor for the rape of babies and young children in South Africa (e.g. Jewkes *et al.* 2002b).

statistics of child rape cases, going all the way back to 1994. By the 5 November [sic], *The Star* announced that “child rape had rocketed to a national crisis”, with no less than 58 child rape cases a day... Indeed for the next year and more, most newspapers carried stories about rapes—in dramatic contrast to the generally desultory, if intermittently more animated, coverage of the issue which had marked the post-1994 period until then (Posel 2005:247).

The public responded to this flood of information about an unfolding crisis, voicing concern and disgust; politicians declared their commitment to fight the scourge of rape. In the meantime, the press continued to uncover and report other cases of rape against babies, children and also adult women (Posel 2005:247). The “grim findings” are, in Moffett’s words, still “regularly reported in the mainstream media” in South Africa today (2006:129). Yet as extensively noted by feminists and scholars in other contexts (e.g. Jackson 1993; Stanko 1995), the media arguably tends to misrepresent rape in terms of its typical depictions of the rapist and victim, and its emplotment of the act of rape (Garda, Bird and Bird 1998; Nuttall 2004; Posel 2005). In brief, the tendency is to sensationalise rape as a violent aberration, in which an unknown assailant attacks an unsuspecting victim in public (Garda *et al.* 1998). Thus the most common form of rape reported in the press here is that of “stranger danger,” though feminists have long argued that it is intimately known men within the domestic space who commit the most crimes of rape and violence against women (Gordon and Riger 1981; Stanko 1993, 1995).

Moreover, several scholars point out that media representations of rape in South Africa, and thus the popular imagination which these shape, tend to racialise the rapist implicitly or explicitly. He is disproportionately figured as a black man (Erlank 2005; Moffett 2006; Posel 2005). This is an image with a long colonial history, tied to racist discourses of black men’s hyper-sexuality, bestiality and lusting after white flesh (Scully 1995). Media and popular discourses of rape also racialise the rapist in so far as they intersect with discourses and anxieties of rampant crime in the new nation. For reasons fascinating but too lengthy and complex to be discussed here,<sup>3</sup> reports and fear of crime in post-apartheid South Africa tend to feature disproportionately in the local press (Media Tenor 2006), and tend to assume a black criminal, ostensibly because of the relative

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance Bremner (2004) who theorises crime psychoanalytically as the new imaginary through which the transition to democracy is experienced by white South Africans. Nuttall (2004) also discusses some of the psychological meanings of rape and fear of rape for white South Africans.

poverty of the black South African population. The result is that the dominant image of the rapist in public discourse is of a black man who is also a criminal.

But if, as suggested, this is an old image in South Africa, a key difference today lies in his presumed location and mobility. While the rapist-criminal may be still imagined to come from the Black townships, the dismantling of the repressive apartheid state machinery means that he is no longer physically confined there (Bremner 2004). He may now move more freely, including into white, privileged and heavily protected spaces. In the popular imagination therefore, the threat of rape/crime is more diffuse than in the past, arguably even omnipresent for some (Bremner 2004). Finally, another new and crucial factor which constructs and articulates with public discourses of rape in the new South Africa is the matter of HIV/AIDS. This is inevitable given the pandemic rates of infection in the country<sup>4</sup> and the direct connection of the disease to sex and sexuality. The “virgin myth” causally links HIV/AIDS to rape, and the act of rape itself is theorised to increase the risk of HIV infection for both biological and sociological reasons (Ackerman and de Klerk 2002; Wood, Maforah and Jewkes 1998). Therefore anxieties of rape in the nation are amplified by those of HIV/AIDS.

Quite possibly it is the manner in which rape in South Africa has been popularly constructed, briefly described above, which explains President Mbeki and the new government’s hesitance to talk of a rape crisis (Erlank 2005; Moffett 2006; Posel 2005). Erlank considers that we may “see in Mbeki’s downplaying of the statistics his awareness of what a predominantly liberal media’s reportage of rape statistics says about the nature of black South African masculinity (2005:205). Posel (2005) further proposes that the “hysterical” public discourses and anxieties of a rape crisis represent anxieties over the hopes and prospects of the new nation itself (also Bremner 2004 on discourses of crime). In this case, the government’s largely reactive stance can be read as a defense of the new political-moral order, and as an attempt to contextualise post-apartheid challenges such as the high prevalence of rape by reference to the brutalities of apartheid itself (Erlank 2005; Posel 2005). It is a reaction to a discursive regime that makes it speakable for a local

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<sup>4</sup> The estimated adult prevalence of HIV in South Africa in 2005 is 18.8%

tabloid to shout that there *is* in fact something fundamentally wrong with South Africa, with the salacious headline: “NATION OF RAPISTS” (The Sun, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2006).<sup>5</sup>

A feminist perspective would problematise the sensationalist framing and substance of such media reports, as well as the kinds of discursive resistance and contestation they provoke over the meaning and magnitude of rape in the country. The problem is that the variously competing discursive frames which predominate in public discourse of rape in South Africa tend to remove gender from the equation. That is to say, dominant public narratives and discourses of rape do not focus on patriarchal gender relations and ideologies to construct, understand and recommend solutions to the problem at hand. Rather, as Moffett decries, in the post-apartheid public sphere “any discussion of rape is invariably subsumed in narratives about race or class, not gender” (2006:135). As I have briefly proposed above, these narratives are also sensationalised for political, psychoanalytic and also commercial reasons. Thus while feminist activism may have played a historical role in exposing rape in South Africa, and may continue to critically construct it as a problem in the new nation today, the discursive terrain is not monolithic. Certainly a new and in itself hegemonic discourse of ‘rape crisis’ in post-apartheid South Africa has emerged, but the fact is that it is spoken by multiple and even contrary voices.

### **Motivations: The ‘Other’ Women**

The above discussion provides an overview of public discourses of rape in South Africa to argue that they expose and construct the new nation as a rape-dense space. This overview hints at the fascinating work that remains to be done, beyond the scope of this thesis and the existing literature, to more fully map the origins, intersections and effects of these discourses of rape. There is also need to deconstruct the various discourses which I have collectively labeled feminist above. Nonetheless, taking the broadly mapped context above as its starting point, the present work seeks to concern itself with women in South Africa who do *not* claim the experience of rape—the ‘other’ women implied in

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<sup>5</sup> This headline appeared in the tabloid paper, *The Sun*, a day after *The Cape Times* published new research findings by the Medical Research Council on the prevalence of rape in South Africa. I saw the headline in bold affixed to a lamppost on the side of the road as I drove in to the University of Cape Town (UCT) to conduct an interview with one of the women in this thesis.

those discourses which construct and contest rape as a reality for an already unacceptable number in South Africa. This research focus assumes that there is such a category of women in South Africa. It assumes too that such women are, at the very least, not unaware of discourses of rape crisis and rape-density in the society around them. The focus of this work is also based on the theory, elaborated in the following chapter, that these women's awareness of rape may have a gendered, subjective and embodied impact upon them. It may, in other words, shape their understandings of self, body and sexuality, *as women*. If so, the work of this thesis is two-fold: to explore how women who do not claim the personal experience of rape construct and locate its occurrence in South Africa; and to explore how these constructions subjectively impact upon them as women.

These questions are informed by feminist thinking and politics. Put most succinctly, this thesis takes the feminist perspective that the rape of women is a structural feature of patriarchal society which variously affects and implicates *all* women.<sup>6</sup> This perspective animates the feminist academic literature on rape and gender-based violence in South Africa (e.g. Bennett 2005; du Toit 2005). However, my purposive searches suggest that it has not been empirically studied in the manner I propose in this thesis, namely by focusing deliberately on a sample of women who do not identify as survivors of rape. This thesis also differs from most existing work on rape in post-apartheid South Africa in terms of its object of study and analytic approach, described earlier as discursive. This means that the focus here is not the brute fact or occurrence of rape but rather narratives, ideas and imaginings which circulate and construct it. Likewise the analysis focuses on discourse, seeking to trace its power, knowledge and subjective effects.

By contrast, the bulk of the academic research on rape in South Africa is quantitative, seeking to measure and document its prevalence in the country as a whole, in different provinces or localities, or amongst different samples of the population such as adolescents (e.g. Jewkes, Levin, Nolwazi and Bradshaw 2002a). Some of this literature examines rape from a medical and public health perspective, considering the intersections of sexual violence and HIV/AIDS, and discussing current and appropriate public health interventions (e.g. Wood, Maforah and Jewkes 1998). Qualitative studies tend to focus on

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<sup>6</sup> Rape, of course, also affects children and men too.

the “social context” of rape and other forms of gender-based violence in South Africa so as to explain it, such that it samples individual survivors and perpetrators of this violence (e.g. Boonzaier 2005; Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, Rose-Junius 2005; Wood and Jewkes 1997, etc). To my knowledge, only Nuttall (2004), Posel (2005) and Moffett (2006) take similarly discursive approaches to the question of rape in South Africa that I propose in this thesis, although their focus is on discourse at the public, not subjective, level.

The women I sample for the purposes of this thesis are located at the elite tertiary institution that is the University of Cape Town (UCT). Again, this differs from most empirical studies of rape in South Africa which rather tend to sample amongst black and historically under-privileged communities. Women students attending UCT at this historical moment are already privileged or, at the least, almost guaranteed upward socio-economic mobility in this deeply inequitable society. They have come of age in an era of ‘freedom’ and women’s empowerment. Thus relative to their less-privileged counterparts, they are likely to have greater access to mass media, and political and feminist discourses on women’s issues and rights. For such reasons, these women can be conjectured to live in the tension between discourses and realities of rape crisis and women’s rights and citizenship in the new South Africa. Therefore, they constitute an interestingly situated group from whom important, though of course partial, insights can be gleaned about the meanings of rape and rape crisis for young South African women at this present time.

For the reasons given above, and as an exploratory and necessarily limited study, I propose that this thesis may offer a modest contribution to the academic literature on rape in South Africa. I propose too that it can be of some practical value to feminist anti-rape activism. South African feminists have argued that “rape ought to be framed as a citizenship issue, because of its political and public nature” (du Toit 2005:253). They contrast the scale of gender-based violence in the country with the progressive and gender-sensitive provisions of the new constitution. Therefore, a study such as this one, examining the meanings and impact of the rape crisis for ordinary South African women, may serve feminist claims as to how this crisis denies such women their human and constitutional rights. Practical value may also come of this thesis because it seeks to map how such women construct and understand rape in South Africa, which may cast light on hegemonic representations of rape in the country. Possibly this information may suggest

new sites and modes for activist intervention, if it is a feminist goal that the rape crisis in South Africa be accurately represented and understood, and thereby effectively addressed.

### **Mapping the Thesis**

This chapter has outlined the background to this thesis and introduced the questions it aims to explore. In Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical and epistemological concepts which underpin and animate this work, and which inform its research focus. Chapter 3 details the methods that were used to sample the fifteen women in this thesis, and to collect empirical data from them. It also discusses the methodological and ethical commitments and challenges of this work. Following from this, I present and analyse my empirical findings in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4, *Constructing Rape*, reconstructs the discourses through which the women in my sample talked about rape in South Africa. Chapter 5, *Imagining Self*, then addresses how their constructions of rape shaped and impacted upon their sense of self and body. Chapter 6 offers a conclusion to this work and a summary of its findings, and suggests questions for future research.

## 2 Theory and Epistemology

The preceding chapter outlined the context in which this thesis is situated. The work of this chapter is to further ground the thesis, looking now at its theoretical and epistemological starting points. In the first section of the chapter, I tease out the links between discourse, violence, subjectivity and embodiment which the thesis seeks to explore empirically. The purpose is to theorise why it is possible to consider the subjective and embodied impact of rape upon women who attest to never having experienced it. The second section of the chapter shifts to the epistemological questions which arise from this theoretical and empirical focus. Here the discussion concerns if and how a subject can be said to ‘know’ about rape without claiming the experience of it, and the status of any such knowledge.

### **The Vulnerable Subject: Discourse, Violence and Gender**

Subjectivity can be defined, briefly, as one’s sense of self or self-awareness. It is “the condition of being a subject” and recognising oneself as such (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine 1984:3). A post-structuralist approach, as will be taken in this thesis, maintains that the subject is constituted in and through discourse. According to this theory, existing discourses offer a variety of subject positions and practices, that is ways of being, which an individual may variously take up, negotiate or reject (Byrne 2003:31). These subject positions make:

available to us a particular, limited set of concepts, images, metaphors, ways of speaking, self-narratives and so on that we take on as our own. . . Our sense of who we are and what it is therefore possible and not possible for us to do, what it is right and appropriate for us to do, and what it is wrong and inappropriate for us to do thus all derive from our occupation of subject positions within discourse (Burr, 1995 cited in Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz 2006:423).

This theoretical perspective denies that there is a true or core self prior to engagement with discourse and practice—with the social world, in short. It rejects too the notion of a unified or stable self, instead conceiving of the subject as multiple, shifting and even contradictory across time and context (Henriques *et al.* 1984; Mama 1995). It follows that

subjection, *becoming* a subject, is theorised as an ongoing process that is neither fully conscious nor unconscious, neither wholly individual nor social (Sclater 2003). Rather, the taking up of subject positions entails a cognitive and creative engagement with available discourses by the subject, at the same time that this is shaped by one's social positioning and environment, and the power relations which structure these (Hollway 1984; Mehta and Bondi 1999; Saukko 2000, 2002). Hollway (1984) and Hollway and Jefferson (2000) further propose an distinctly psychoanalytic account of subjection. They argue that the subject is also motivated to take up certain positions by deep unconscious or psychic drives, and in relation to other subjects, meaning that one makes and defends an "investment" in certain discursive positions with the expectation of concomitant, though potentially contradictory, psychic, material and social benefits (Hollway 1984:238; Hollway and Jefferson 2000).

Feminist scholars maintain that discourses and practices of violence position men and women differently, and are in fact central to the construction of their gendered subjectivities. Dominant social discourses construct men as the physically strong sex, and hence as having the capacity to instigate and also resist physical violence. "Vulnerability is not part of shared cultural conceptions of masculinity," despite the reality that men do suffer violence (Hollander 2001:85). By contrast, hegemonic discourses position women as vulnerable and fearful because physically weak and incapable of effective violence (Day 2001; Hollander 2001; Moore 1994). Thus dominant discourses construct women as ordinarily vulnerable to violence relative to men. Indeed they construct women as vulnerable *to* (some) men and therefore needing the protection of (other) men (Day 2001). This "gendered grammar of violence" (Marcus 1992:392) intersects with constructions of race, class and sexuality to position certain kinds of women as more vulnerable to certain kinds of men. For instance, in South Africa as in other multi-racial contexts such as the United States of America, white women are discursively constructed as the objects of black male sexual predation (Bumiller 1987/8; Hollander 2002; Moffett 2006).

In terms of sexual violence such as rape, discourses of vulnerability take on a further gendered and sexualised specificity. Male sexuality is discursively constructed as active and acquiring while female sexuality is constructed as passive, enacted by the

giving or withholding of consent. Because the definition of rape pivots on the issue of non-consent, it is gendered in dominant discourses as something men do to women, and not vice versa for instance. This is because men are constructed as physically capable of forcing sex despite a woman's non-consent. "Vulnerable female victim and unstoppable male perpetrator are standard rape identities," Hirsch states (1994:1024). This gendering of rape occurs also, if most implicitly, at the level of physiology, where the vagina is coded as an empty, interior space vulnerable to forced penetration by a penis (Helliwell 2000; Marcus 1992). Thus sexed differences are assumed to "render the [penis] 'biologically, or 'naturally' capable of penetrating and brutalizing the [vagina] and render the latter 'naturally' able to be brutalized" (Helliwell 2000:795).<sup>1</sup>

The discursive construction of rape as an act perpetrated by men upon women, by a penis to a vagina, predominates in South Africa (du Toit 2005). This is despite evidence that male rapists can or do not always use their penises, that men are raped, and that women may also rape (du Toit 2005; Graham 2006; Moffett 2003b). Krog, for instance, notes in her study of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that men who had been raped during the anti-apartheid struggle studiously avoided the use of the term to describe their experiences. They spoke instead of sodomy, reinforcing the notion that "rape" is something that happens to women only, though it has happened to them (1996, cited in Du Toit 2005: 255). This strict gendering of rape in discourse was in fact institutionalised in South African law until May 2007. Prior to this time, the legal definition of rape was limited to forced vaginal penetration by a penis, meaning that a man could not be raped by law. With the recent ratification of the Sexual Offences Bill by parliament, rape now been legally revised to include forced anal penetration of men.<sup>2</sup>

If, then, hegemonic discourses define women as vulnerable to male violence, and as uniquely vulnerable to rape, it follows from the theory of subjectivity outlined earlier that women may come to identify with these discursive subject positions. That is to say, they may come to think of themselves as indeed vulnerable subjects and as rapable, *because they are women*. Discourses contrasting women's vulnerability and rapability to

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<sup>1</sup> Helliwell makes this point in reference to feminist scholars, whom she critiques for explicitly or implicitly invoking this idea so as to theorise the universality of rape (2000:795). I borrow her words here not to refer to feminist thinking specifically, but hegemonic constructions of gender more generally.

<sup>2</sup> The Sexual Offences Bill which redefined rape more broadly to include male rape amongst other things was passed by the South African parliament on May 24<sup>th</sup> 2007.

male strength are all the more dominant and accepted because they refer to physical and thus apparently “natural” properties of the gendered body (Hollander 2001). They seem to describe inherent bodily realities. Feminist post-structuralist and phenomenological thinkers argue, however, that such discourses actually *produce* the embodied qualities and dispositions they describe (Hollander 2001; McCaughey 1998; Young 1990). McCaughey explains the link between gendered discourses and materialities thus: “Gender ideology affects the way we interpret and experience physical bodies. Gender is a lived ideology... [whose] ideas get transformed into specific bodily practices” (1998:280). The result is that women may not only come to imagine themselves as vulnerable and possessing little physical agency, but may also experience, enact and (re)produce their bodies as such. Moreover, they may invest in this gendered and embodied subjectivity insofar as qualities such as physical delicacy and weakness are deemed “feminine” and thus attractive to men by dominant heteronormative standards.

Yet identifying and experiencing the gendered and embodied self as vulnerable, Marcus decries, “encourages women to become subjects by imagining [them]selves as *objects*” of male violence (1992:393, emphasis added). She views this as a compromised subjectivity. Furthermore, it means that women may become “*subjects of fear*,” in that they live out a subjectivity characterised by fearfulness, “the anticipation of pain, the inefficacy of action, and the conviction that the self will be destroyed” in a violent encounter with a man (Marcus 1992:394). This sense of self and body may cause women to exist in a state of continuous, if not always conscious, fear of male violence. Hollander theorises this as a state of “*perceived vulnerability*” (2001:86, emphasis added). She distinguishes it from actual or empirical vulnerability, to make the point that women may feel vulnerable to male violence by definition, even if they do not actually experience it (2001:86).

That women generally claim to fear violence greatly, more than men, and more than they report experiencing it, are conclusions that have been extensively theorised by feminists and empirically documented in studies of feminist and other persuasions (e.g. Gordon and Riger 1981; Mehta and Bondi 1999; Pain 1997; Warr 1985). It has been argued and researched in Western contexts that women especially fear rape, hence its characterisation by feminists and others as a grave or even paradigmatic “female fear”

(Gordon and Riger 1981). Some feminists have even argued that fearing rape, believing it to be inherently possible, and thus imagining oneself as always rapable, are key aspects of what it means to be a woman under patriarchy. Stanko cites the findings of feminist research to conclude that “the reality of sexual violence—whether from known or unknown men—is a core component of being female and is experienced through a wide range of everyday, mundane situations” (1995:50). Du Toit (2005) similarly declares that women greatly fear rape in contemporary South Africa. She asserts that the scale of rape in the country “translates for ordinary South African women into pervasive fear, systematic (contagious) humiliation, and incapacitation” (2005:261). For the ordinary woman here today:

agency is seriously curbed. She forms the habit (and teaches it to her daughters) of fearing men and to always look out for and avoid situations that may put her in danger. She lives out on a daily basis her fear of being raped... She lives an imposed identity of the sexually vulnerable simply on the basis of being female (2005:261).

These fierce claims reflect important feminist critiques that if women feel vulnerable to male violence, this is not merely a personal matter, in their heads. Feminists argue that women’s subjective and embodied fears of violence are likely to have material and social costs and effects, including limiting their daily activities, social interactions, mobility and use of space, much as du Toit (2005) contends above (Koselka 1997, 1999; Pain 1997). They insist too that women’s fears and feelings of vulnerability cannot be dismissed as irrational, though they may appear to exceed or contradict the known risks women face. First, feminists maintain that most violence against women is unreported and undocumented, so that it is impossible to fully quantify the extent of the risks they encounter in daily life (Pain 2001). Second, many argue that various forms of male violence against women are ubiquitous, if often overlooked or trivialised by mainstream definitions. This means that women may have “routine” experiences with men which *they* subjectively interpret as violent or threatening, which may evoke or heighten their sense of gendered vulnerability (Gardener 1990; Kelly and Radford 1996). Third, representations of male violence against women are very common, in the media for instance, while representations of effective female resistance or counter-violence are

virtually nonexistent. These may again reinforce women's feelings of fear and vulnerability to men (Hollander 2000; McCaughey and King 1995).

Thus feminists theorise that women may construct their sense of self and body relative to their fear and imagination of male violence, especially to the extent that such violence is discursively represented as always inherently possible. This claim constitutes the theoretical starting point of this thesis. It has been rehearsed in the foregoing discussion in terms of a post-structuralist ontological framework which links gendered discourses of violence and vulnerability to gendered and embodied subjectivities. The theoretical claim is deliberately conditional—hence to empirically *explored* in this thesis via discourse analysis—because as stated at the outset, a post-structuralist account of subjectivity posits a fluid and creative, not determined, subject. This allows and accounts for the possibility that a woman may sometimes take up, sometimes resist, hegemonic gendered positions of vulnerability and fear; sometimes imagine and experience her body as physically weak, sometimes strong. If, how and why women do so, and with what variations and contradictions, are precisely the questions this thesis seeks to explore with a sample of women in contemporary South Africa who say they have never experienced rape. Having thus established the theoretical basis of this research focus, the discussion below explores the epistemological questions that directly follow.

### **The Knowing Subject: Discourse, Imagination and Experience**

To theorise that women may be subjectively impacted by male violence such as rape without having experienced it implies that they may know something of this violence by means *other* than experience. This is at once an ontological and epistemological claim: about how the subject is constituted, and how this subject (therefore) knows. The ontological aspect of this claim was theorised above in terms of the productive power of discourse. Yet this theory also proposes an epistemology in which discourse itself is the source of knowledge for the subject. It proposes, in terms of the particular focus of this thesis, that women who do not claim the autobiographical experience of rape may yet come to know of it through available discourses on the matter—hence the possibility that they may discursively position themselves relative to it. In this section of the chapter I

elaborate upon this theory of knowledge. I unpack what it may mean for the women in this thesis in terms of the epistemological resources they may deploy to construct rape in South Africa and thereby imagine something of themselves.

If put plainly, it seems an obvious point that experience is not the only source of knowledge for the subject. One can form a subjective view, develop opinions and even harbour prejudices and fears about a social phenomenon and personal attack such as rape without living through it firsthand. Others may talk, teach or warn about the experience, indeed perhaps to help one continue to avoid it. Imagination is also an important means through which the subject may presume to know or speak about an experience she has not had. Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis characterise the imagination as a creative faculty which “transforms, challenges and supersedes” the subject’s experiential knowledge and lived realities (2002:315). They refer here to the ability of the imagination to amplify and develop experience into knowledge. Yet arguably their theory of the workings of the imagination applies too in the absence of experience. As suggested above, even if one has not had a particular experience such as rape, there are other available sources of information about it on which the imagination may go to work. These include the socially available discourses and images of the experience in question, related experiences one does have, as well as the experiences of others one knows, sees or hears of.

Thus ideas, analyses and imaginings of a social phenomenon need not be directly experiential in origin. They may instead be abstract, hypothetical or even fantastical; they may be politically or unconsciously motivated; they may derive from other related experiences, as from the experiences of others. Whatever their sources, these ways of knowing are always social and embodied. Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis (2002) stress that this is true even for the imagination, which could be otherwise dismissed as wholly subjective, frivolous or even faulty, and so not worthy of the social scientist’s attention. Drawing from feminist standpoint epistemologies, they theorise the imagination as “situated,” explaining that “our imaginary horizons are affected by the positioning of our gaze” (2002:327). The imagining subject is socially situated in other words, which is not to reduce her imaginings to her situation or identity, but rather contextualise them. The imagination works in relation to the social discourses and practices accessible and

meaningful to the knowing subject, even if rejecting or superseding them (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002:316).

The epistemology being outlined here is consistent with feminist and postmodern theories which variously stress that knowledge is not objective, disembodied or decontextualised. What this epistemology more specifically suggests for the questions of this thesis is that the women being studied may construct and imagine the experience of rape in terms of public discourses of rape available to them in South Africa. These women may further construct rape by drawing on personal experiences which they deem relevant to it. Recalling the feminist theorising in the first section of the chapter above, it is likely that such women may invoke experiences of other gender-based abuse, as well as violence such as crime, and also their everyday interactions with men and heterosexual practices. Finally, if it is taken that all knowledge is situated, it is likely that these women's constructions of rape will be shaped by their various race, class and political positions.

The point, then, is that it is *possible* to ask women who say they have not experienced rape to still speak about it, in the sense that they are likely to have sufficient epistemological resources with which to respond. I wish to say a few words on the truth status accorded to such women's voices by the theory of knowledge I have outlined here, in view of the complex, fraught and, I think, necessary, feminist epistemological politics to authenticate the testimony of rape *survivors*. My contention that my research subjects may presume to 'know' about rape although they do not claim to be survivors of it does not seek to equate or much less validate their knowledges of rape over women (and men) who have survived it. Nor do I presume that my research subjects—or indeed any knowing subjects—may know and express what rape 'is' in some 'authentic,' pre-discursive sense (Mardorossian 2002; Scott 1991).

Because coming from a post-structuralist, discursive analytic perspective, the object of study in this work is not what rape 'is' in South Africa but what it is *known to be*—how it is discursively constructed—by a particular group of women. I have elaborated the theoretical, political and practical motivations for my focus on these women in the first half of the chapter above, and earlier in Chapter 1. Given these motivations, broadly that these women may be subjectively impacted by the fear and

imagination of rape, moreover *as women*, the feminist epistemological proposition here is that they may have important and instructive, not 'true,' gendered perspectives on the matter. The next chapter discusses the practicalities of how I, as researcher, sought to hear, and presumed to analyse, these perspectives.

University of Cape Town

### 3 Methodology

This chapter discusses what it entailed, methodologically, subjectively and also ethically, for me to speak about rape with fifteen women at the University of Cape Town (UCT) who claimed to have never personally experienced it. The chapter opens with a consideration of how I found the women on the UCT campus and interviewed them. I then take some space to critically reflect on the impact on this work of my own positionality and paradigms as researcher and as a socially situated subject. I first discuss the intersubjective dynamics that were at play during the interviews with the women in this study, and then reflect on the subjective processes that shaped my analysis and representation of their words. In this self-reflexive discussion, I also address some of the ethical considerations of this study. Persuaded by Mauthner and Doucet (2003), I endeavour to link the discussion in this chapter back to the ontological and epistemological positions expounded in Chapter 2, to show how theory informed my research practice.

#### **Finding the Women**

The theoretical and political motivations for sampling women at the University of Cape Town (UCT) were raised in Chapter 1. To briefly re-state the point, I suggested that such women, educated and upwardly mobile, could be theorised as located at the intersection of contradictory discourses on the meanings of being gendered as women in the new democratic South Africa. On the one hand, they are likely to have access to discourses of women's rights and empowerment as citizens; at the same time, they may also hear and heed discourses warning of women's heightened vulnerability to rape and other forms of gender-based violence in the country today. In addition to such theoretical considerations, there were practical reasons for my decision to sample women at UCT. These included my relative ease of physical, social and linguistic access to this population, being myself new to Cape Town when I embarked upon this research and located as a student at UCT.

As I had an interest in exploring women's impressions and experiences of their physical capacities for violence, I planned to include a sub-sample of women in this study who engaged in self-defense or martial arts. To this end, my first strategy for recruiting respondents was to visit three martial arts clubs on campus and publicise my study and aims to the women there. I recruited only one woman through this means, though I later found that a number of other respondents had varied experiences of self-defense and martial arts training. A second respondent learnt about my study through an announcement in a large undergraduate class arranged by my supervisor. Beyond these necessarily limited methods, my supervisor and I decided that I should put up posters across campus, asking women interested in being interviewed to contact me via email.

I was initially doubtful about this last method, figuring that potentially interested women would not respond to anonymous posters on a topic as sensitive as rape. I also feared that their potential interest on seeing the posters might not translate into the effort required to email me. For these reasons, I agonised over the wording of the posters, wanting to make them as eye-catching and interesting as possible, without being sensationalist or offensive (See Appendix 1). I was positively surprised at the number of responses the posters generated. I was also surprised to be contacted by a UCT staff member because, I realised, my automatic assumption had been that by sampling on campus, I was targeting students. I hesitated over including this woman in the study because I also assumed that students would be much younger than her, and because I wanted to focus on the post-apartheid context. Nonetheless I decided to meet and interview her, and ultimately chose to include her in this thesis based on the interesting perspectives she shared. My assumptions about the age of UCT students were in any case challenged by my meeting and interviewing a mature student, incidentally of the precise age as the staff member.

The largest challenge I faced while recruiting participants into my study was that I did not receive any responses or signs of interest from black African women until the tail end of my fieldwork. All the while, I continued to receive expressions of interest from white women. There were a number of hypotheses suggested to me by friends and colleagues to make sense of this. The first of these, which I reject, was that African women are more likely to have experienced rape than their white or coloured

counterparts, making them ineligible for my study.<sup>1</sup> Other more plausible factors were demographic. First, there are simply fewer African than white women at UCT. Furthermore, as my supervisor and some African women I attempted to recruit pointed out, I had unwittingly concentrated my research posters in spaces on campus familiar to me, namely the humanities buildings, whereas African women tend to be concentrated in commerce and the sciences. White women, by contrast, happen to be relatively concentrated in social science fields such as psychology in which students may be more familiar with being interviewed for research purposes. A final hypothesis proposed to explain the apparent reluctance of African women to come forward, which I found subjectively compelling as an African woman myself, albeit a Nigerian, was that they may not have as strong a ‘culture of the confessional’—speaking to strangers about intimate matters—as their white colleagues.

To address some of these factors, I put up new posters on campus specifically addressed to African women, moreover in different spaces such as a student residence they populate. I also sent out an email to my personal friends and contacts at UCT, asking them to directly publicise my research to their female African friends, and to introduce me as someone they knew, not a total stranger. Surprisingly, this last approach also proved to have limited effect; I was able to recruit only one African woman in this way. Finally, anxious to complete my interviews before students became too pressured by exams or before the semester ended, I decided to put up posters offering African women 50 Rands for an hour and a half of their time to participate in my study (See Appendix 2). I was amazed at the speed and size of the response: even before I had finished putting up these new posters one afternoon, I received expressions of interest from three African women. I eventually scheduled interviews with four such women within a matter of days, bringing my total interviews up to fifteen, but was bombarded by responses from other prospective participants for the next two weeks.

A second challenge I faced when recruiting women into this study was that of sampling across socio-economic class. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, qualitative studies on victims and survivors of rape and gender-based violence in South Africa tend

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<sup>1</sup>Although I take the perspective that race is a social construct, and a particularly fraught one in the South African context, I use the racial terms African, white and coloured here in the commonsensical manner that they appear in everyday South African discourse, my respondents’ included.

to focus on women in the relatively underprivileged African and coloured communities. While such women certainly constitute the bulk of the South African female population, I read the marked lack of research focus on white and privileged communities to imply that gender-based violence does not affect the latter groups as much.<sup>2</sup> My study may appear to support such notions because it samples women who claim to have *not* been raped within the elite context of UCT, rather than a less advantaged setting. This was by no means my intention, and I reject class-based arguments which deny the presence of rape and gender-based violence in privileged communities. Indeed it was my intention to avoid this interpretation of my work which alerted me to the need to find and speak to women from different class backgrounds *at* UCT. The challenge, however, was practical: how to actually find and identify women by their class status, given especially that the primary mode of recruitment through posters was anonymous.

I realise now that a relatively simple solution would have been to ask the women who replied to the posters by email to tell me their class background, amongst other salient characteristics, before I arranged to interview them. This did not occur to me in the early days of my fieldwork. I was in any case so keen to proceed with interviews and anxious not to dissuade the women who expressed interest via email that I would have been reluctant to push for much information from them before we met in person. I think also a more fundamental reason for my reluctance to discuss class with the women is that I generally feel awkward doing so, especially with people I do not know. This held true even when I did eventually meet the women, with the result that I did not directly ask them to state their class or socio-economic backgrounds. Some of them did so of their own initiative, and I approximated the class status of the others using typical indicators such as their parents' occupations, where they lived and so forth. Overall I would classify four of the fifteen women I interviewed as being of working to lower-middle class backgrounds. A fifth woman identified herself as moving between working and middle-class status because of the education she is pursuing at UCT. The remaining ten women

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<sup>2</sup> From my purposive searches, I have only found one academic work on gender-based violence against women that focuses on the white South African population, Diana Russell's *Behind closed doors in white South Africa* (1997). However, as my supervisor pointed out to me, there are many works of fiction which address this issue within the white community.

were of solidly middle or upper-middle class background, including, significantly, all seven white women with whom I spoke.

Appendix 3 provides a summary of the fifteen women I interviewed, identified by the pseudonyms I gave them, their age, socio-economic and racial backgrounds. In terms of other salient characteristics that may have had a bearing on the findings of this study, the women were all visibly able-bodied and all identified as heterosexual, with the exception of one who identified as bisexual. Physical disability could intensify women's fears or feelings of vulnerability to violence if their mobility is impaired for instance (Pain 1997), while women (like men) could be targets of violence because of their homosexual orientation (Mason 2001; Muholi 2004). Writing in the South African context, Muholi (2004) documents that African lesbians in townships have been explicitly targeted for rape, to allegedly punish or 'cure' them. Therefore hearing women at UCT for whom homophobic violence is a possibility or physical mobility a challenge, which would have required purposive sampling, would most likely have enriched the data I collected.

### **Hearing their Voices**

Before I met or interviewed any of the women in this study, I conducted pilot interviews with two friends of mine. The purpose of these interviews was to enable me to better articulate and refine the questions that I wished to explore with my research subjects. These pilot interviews were taped but not transcribed, and the data collected from them is not included in this study. Subsequently, I met and interviewed fifteen very different and interesting women studying or working in one case at UCT. All but one of these interviews were held on campus and each lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, with an average duration of 72 minutes. I explained the purpose of my study to each woman before interviewing her, and stressed that participation was voluntary such that she could opt out at any time or choose to pass on any particular questions I raised. I also explained that the interviews were confidential, meaning that I use pseudonyms to refer to the women in this work and endeavour to conceal any personal details which could serve to identify them. I taped all the interviews with the women's consent, and later transcribed

them myself. All the women signed a consent form stating that they accepted the terms of the interview, including to be anonymously quoted in this work (See Appendix 4). Each woman took a copy of this form for her records, and I retained a second for mine.

I was greatly influenced, perhaps even distracted, by Hollway and Jefferson's work (2000) on the fear of crime as I worked to formulate an appropriate interview structure. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) adopt a psychoanalytic approach to researching and analysing people's stated fears of crime and violence. They argue that such fears are often rooted in unconscious and unarticulated aspects of people's biographies. To get at these, they propose the use of a semi-structured narrative research method which lets respondents make free associations between their various stories and experiences. Within a Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) as they call it, the role of the researcher is simply to encourage people to tell their stories. She is to ask open-ended, 'narrativised' questions, and not impose a structure on their responses. I found this approach most compelling, especially because of the detailed and even tidy empirical case studies Hollway and Jefferson (2000) present to substantiate it. Therefore I initially wanted to adopt the FANI method in my research. Yet as I continued to pore over their work and others who use it (e.g. Gadd 2000, 2003), I felt increasingly intimidated, specifically by the mode of analysis it entails. I finally concluded that I lacked sufficient training in psychoanalytic theory to presume to use the FANI method. Instead I decided to use more conventional semi-structured qualitative interviewing techniques, but borrow from Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) prescriptions as possible.

The first of these was that I avoided imposing too structured a format on the interviews, rather conceiving of them as conversations. With the input of my supervisor, and drawing from feminist literature on women's fears of crime and violence (e.g. Hollander 2001, 2005; Koselka 1997; Pain 1997), I prepared a guiding set of questions on the broad themes that I wished to cover in the interviews (See Appendix 5). These included: the women's experiences of violence, including crime; their interactions and relationships with men, known and unknown; their mobility and uses of space or lack thereof. I never directly referred to this list of questions during the interviews. Instead I allowed the conversations to flow as naturally as possible once they got underway and endeavoured to ask women questions that followed logically or thematically from the

issues they raised. Certainly, this was not always possible, especially in cases in which the women spoke hesitantly or haltingly. In such instances, I found myself switching to a more forced question-answer format, asking questions on the various themes as they occurred to me in an effort to keep the interviews going. I realise now that this response was premised on the view that silence is an awkward problem and not a potential resource in an interview (Poland and Pederson 1998:294).

Also from Hollway and Jefferson (2000), I was convinced of the need to biographically situate my respondents. Hence I began all the interviews by asking the women to tell me about themselves and their backgrounds, which served in any case as a good icebreaker. However, because of the limited interview time and, I suppose, my anxiety to ensure that my specific research themes would be covered, I tended not to linger on the women's biographies. This meant that I got only a superficial sense of where they were coming from—another reason why I decided I could not use the FANI method, as it relies on life-histories and repeat interviews with research subjects. Indeed because of the time constraints, my supervisor had suggested to me that realistically I could only hope to ask and listen for “moments of autobiography” from the women. With this in mind, I was particularly interested to hear of moments or accounts of violence which the women had experienced.

I typically introduced the theme of violence through a discussion of the women's daily routines and social interactions. This opened up space for them to talk not only about their past encounters with violence, if any, but also about encounters they anticipated or feared in their daily lives. I sought these experiences and fears, or rather the women's representations of them, as empirical data that could provide access to the “processes of subjectivity and the production of self” (Byrne 2003:30; also Mehta and Bondi 1999:67). That is to say, from the theoretical position sketched in Chapter 2, I took it that the manner and substance of the women's talk of violence and vulnerability would reveal something of the ways in which they constructed their gendered subjectivities and experienced their gendered bodies. Giving space and attention to women's subjective experiences and fears is, in any case, an important feminist intellectual and political project (Byrne 2003; Kelly and Radford 1996). I would venture that this was all the more necessary in my study as the experiences of male violence of which many women

spoke—experiences *other* than rape after all—are ignored or downplayed within mainstream discourses of gendered power relations, abuse and violence (Kelly and Radford 1996).

At the same time that I asked the women about their experiences of violence and fear, I wanted, indeed needed, to hear more than these. Given that our conversations were premised on their stated non-experience of rape, focusing the interviews on their other experiences might have precluded the topic of rape from arising at all or in detail. The case was also made in Chapter 2 that forms of knowing such as opinion and imagination which may not be directly experiential in origin are valid epistemological resources for the purposes of this study. Accordingly, I sought the women's opinions, imaginations and even generalisations about rape in South Africa. I sometimes asked for their views on the manner in which rape is represented generally or by certain agents (e.g. the media) or groups (e.g. racial groups) in South Africa today. Likewise we often discussed *my* personal and political views on the matter, in response to the women's questions or as I volunteered them—a methodological strategy I return to in the discussion of self-reflexivity below.

The mode of interviewing I describe here can be characterised as analytical relative to Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) strictly narrative style. These scholars stress that the researcher should not prompt the respondent for analysis, should not ask 'why' questions. But as Saukko points out, a problematic assumption is in play if the researcher asks her respondents to share their "'raw' experience," or even "raw" opinion I would add, and then presumes to single-handedly subject this data to analysis (2002:253). Doing so implies that research subjects cannot critically reflect upon the social discourses and unconscious motivations which shape their experiences, opinions and imaginations. It implies that only the researcher has such critical faculties, to see through the discursive or psychological fog as it were. Following Saukko (2000, 2002), I rather take it that the research subject can and most often does theorise and deconstruct her own experiences and positions, and therefore can be asked for *her* theories in the interview encounter, as I attempted to do. This method is congruent with the ontological and epistemological theories proposed in Chapter 2, where it was suggested that although the subject is discursively constituted, she is no mere dupe of social discourses.

I take this to be an important point, and I stress it not only for its methodological implications described above, but also because it challenges the dichotomy between the researcher as the “knowing” subject and the research participant as the object to be “known” (Saukko 2002:253). The status of the researcher relative to her research subjects is a tension which animates feminist scholarship committed to democratic research principles and practices (Oakley 1981; Saukko 2000, 2003). Taking into account that the research subject is able to theorise herself and her given context reminds us that the researcher does not by definition know more than the research subject, and does not have privileged or objective access to some truth about the latter or about the research topic, in this case rape in South Africa. It opens up space for self-reflexivity, as it prompts critical reflection on who, indeed, the researcher is, and how *she* presumes to know and thereby construct knowledge in her work. I move into this space below.

### **The Researcher’s Voice: Self-Reflexive and Ethical Considerations**

Self-reflexivity is a central tenet of feminist scholarship. It is premised on the notion that research and theory building are not value- or power-free acts, and that the researcher is not a neutral, disembodied agent who merely reports on her findings. Feminists (and post-modernists) argue that the researcher’s subjectivity, social location, and politics deeply shape the knowledge which she produces, from the very conceptualisation and focus of her research project through to its final presentation (Mama 1995). If so, the will to self-reflexivity is not only epistemological, but also political and ethical. It is concerned with elaborating the researcher’s role, power and responsibilities in knowledge construction. Yet, practically speaking, this means that to be self-reflexive is a massive task, a potential “‘swamp’ of interminable self analysis and self-disclosure” (Finlay 2002:212). To manage this challenge, Finlay (2002) proposes a typology of different modes of reflexivity and suggests that the chosen mode be “consistent with [one’s] epistemological and methodological commitments” (2002:213). Broadly, my commitment is to give voice to a certain sample of women, albeit not uncritically so, as discussed above. I have therefore chosen to reflect in this section of the chapter on some of the ways in which *my voice* metaphorically and literally shaped theirs.

The first place in which I think my voice influenced those of my research subjects was in my efforts to recruit them into the study. As discussed earlier, I recruited participants primarily through the use of posters on campus which stated in bold that I was seeking women who “have not been raped.” While all the women in the study voluntarily identified as such, it is impossible to determine the extent to which this was a salient or conscious identification for them *before* they came across the posters (or emails for those who saw them). This point matters given that my very project is to explore how aware such women are of rape in South Africa and how, therefore, they think of themselves relative to it. It means that the mere facts of learning of my study and agreeing to participate in it may have influenced the women’s sense of self relative to rape. The same dynamic was all the more likely when they were actually in the interview space. Though, I attempted to fashion the interviews as mere talk between two subjects, they were necessarily an ‘unusual’ experience for my interviewees and myself. Thus the fact of being in this conversation about rape may have shaped or heightened the women’s awareness of the issues at hand, and impacted their responses accordingly. As one woman whom I name Vanessa said to me: “I’ve never really had a major conversation about rape with anyone.”

The tension I am tracing here is effectively one between my research aims and the practices I deemed necessary to achieve these aims. Yet while I am suggesting that the interview context itself may have influenced the interview data—for now leaving aside the intersubjective dynamics *within* the interview—I am not saying the women’s responses were therefore false or distorted. I am rather highlighting the fact that they were embedded within a certain context, and must therefore be read and analysed with this context in mind. An interchange between a second respondent, Sasha, and me, illustrates the point I wish to make here. Having spoken of her perception of rape in South Africa as something that is perpetrated by a distant “other,” I asked Sasha if she ever imagined that it could happen in her “circle.” Her response is below, with my voice in square brackets:

When I’ve said things like well my, my guy friends would *never* do something like that, date rape [yeah] em.. there’s a small part of me that doesn’t believe in myself when I say that. [Really?] Definitely! Yah, [hm] now that I think about it. [But ok, so is that something that you.. Is it just because I’m asking you?] Just because there’s a?

No, it's something that's crossed my mind before [yeah] but it *is* because you're asking me so I am analysing now [ok, ok].

In this instance, I attempted to be reflexive as my respondent spoke, worrying that she was contradicting her earlier statements about which kinds of men perpetrated rape because of the later question I had put to her. If so, this could be read as an example of how I, the researcher, 'biased' the research findings. Sasha's response complicates any such conclusion. She explains that her revised position on which kinds of men may rape is indeed in response to my question, but that it is also one about which she has thought before. She acknowledges that it is because she is now being asked to consciously think about the possibility of rape in her circle, that she is recalling and stating her normally silenced view. It is the very 'unnaturalness' of the interview context and the probing questioning within it which opens up space for her to reach or remember conclusions which, she implies, she might ordinarily deny or forget in her more everyday contexts and conversations.

This example is important epistemologically, and a matter for self-reflexivity, because it illustrates the co-construction of knowledge which inevitably occurs between the researcher and research subject as they talk. It shows that knowledge and meanings are actively produced *within* the interview conversation, not simply to be found *through* it. Moreover, it emphasises that the researcher is an inevitable, indeed key, participant in any such conversation. Sasha's comments suggest too that it is misleading to set up a dichotomy between what respondents say in an interview and what they 'really' say or think. This tempers any presumption on the researcher's part to go beyond or behind what is said to capture her respondent's 'true self'—a mode of analysis that is anyway inconsistent with a post-structuralist view of subjectivity as multiple and shifting.

Finally, Sasha's example, together with the earlier point that the interview experience may have heightened the women's awareness of rape in South Africa, relate to my key ethical concern that participation in my study should not leave the women feeling more fearful or vulnerable than they normally did. I imagined this would be a real possibility as I planned the study, given that the interviews would (and did) cover their experiences and fears of violence, potentially stirring up difficult memories and images. I must admit that I did not know what definitive, practical steps to take to mitigate this

possibility beyond obtaining the women's informed consent, making an effort to raise and probe issues sensitively, as well as heeding changes in tone or body language which may have signaled their discomfort or distress. Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) theory of informed consent reassures as to the suitability of these steps. They argue that informed consent is not a once-off cognitive choice the respondent makes, not least as one never knows where an interview conversation will go, but rather a state of emotional comfort which the interviewee indicates by the tone and flow of her responses to the interviewer (2000:88). Though I was attentive to such factors, I believe now that I should have gone further to ensure my respondents' comfort and emotional well being by directly discussing with them how they felt about and after their participation in the interviews.

Besides my concern about the impact of the interview experience on my respondents, I was also anxious to make them feel at ease while we spoke because of my feminist commitment to non-hierarchical and non-exploitative research (Oakley 1981). I also found that I genuinely liked most of the women as we interacted. At the same time, I admit a more functionalist motivation for my efforts to make them feel relaxed, namely that I wanted to encourage them to speak as freely as possible and thereby give me 'good data'—I discuss the ethical dilemma that arose from this further below. My primary effort to make the interview a relaxed encounter was, as mentioned, to structure them as conversations, thus removing myself from the more conventional role of 'interviewer-as-expert.' Instead I presented myself to my respondents as that which I believe I was, namely a student and colleague who was interested in asking a few questions. My young age (24) and status as a UCT student helped in this regard, as it meant I was a peer of the women I spoke with, and was relating to them within the familiar context of the university, carrying out an academic project they could understand. My desire to not come across as a distant or expert interviewer motivated also my willingness to share my own personal opinions and experiences with the women, and to respond as frankly as I could to any questions they posed to me (Oakley 1981).

I consider that two central aspects of my identity directly shaped the intersubjective dynamics within the interviews, and thus my respondents' voices within them. First, I am a young heterosexual woman like the vast majority of my respondents. Second, I identify as black but not South African. My youth, gender and sexual identities

meant that I had similar experiences with men—with boyfriends, in nightclubs and so on—that many of the women spoke of, though we did not always interpret them in the same ways. Because of this sense of shared experience, I often presumed to understand what they were saying or sometimes struggling to articulate about certain incidents. I expressed this sense with verbal and non-verbal cues, and sometimes felt that the women expected this almost intuitive understanding from me, as a similarly situated young woman. DeVault notes in her study of how women talk of domestic work that this expectation of shared understanding between respondent and researcher may be signaled through a simple turn of phrase such as “you know,” or in the halts and pauses women may make in their speech (1990:103). Like DeVault (1990), I noticed that one particular interview transcript was dotted with the phrase “you know,” a consideration of which is instructive for the point I wish to make here.

An everyday event for me, which I personally hate and experience as harassment, is to be sexually objectified through stares, calls or whistles by unknown men on the streets. One of my respondents, Violet, who like me is a young, black, middle-class woman, spoke of a number of such experiences, and largely shared my feelings towards them. A part of our conversation consisted, then, in a lively exchange of stories of these routine experiences of sexual objectification. I maintain that I brought (and still bring) my own experiences as a “resource” for listening, analysing and even constructing the issue as a meaningful topic of conversation between Violet and myself (Devault 1990:104). But I also see that in my enthusiasm at our shared feelings about our respective experiences, I spoke over Violet, casting her story in *my* language and analytic framework. My dominating voice is evident in the excerpt below, in which Violet explains how she feels about and handles unwelcome approaches from men in public. My words are again in square brackets:

I perceive it as a violation [uh-hm] but I kind of, I’m so used to it that’s there’s nothing I can do [hm]. Like I just, I can’t tell the person to stop because they’re not gonna stop [uh-hm] so I just ignore it [uh-hm]. But the point is that every single time a man says to me.. ‘eish Sisi and you’re fresh’ [*short laugh*] or ‘eish Sisi em’ [*laughs*] [like a piece of meat]. You know, *short laugh*, yah, that’s exactly what it’s saying to me.

As Violet gave me examples of what male strangers say to her on the streets, I not only cut her off, but went ahead to offer a characterisation of these examples, saying that in the men's eyes she was "like a piece of meat." These words came from my feelings about my own experiences. Not only did Violet reflect and agree that this characterisation was appropriate, but she used it a few minutes later to rhetorically and angrily ask of a man who had once "tapped [her] butt" in public: "Who do you think you are? Like you think I'm just a piece of meat?"

This example, as with Sasha's earlier, again highlights that the voice, perspectives and even character flaws of the interviewer cannot be excised from the interview data. This voice shapes the research subject's responses. Beyond this, the matter I wish to flag here is the tension which my sense of shared experiences created for my ability to listen to the women I spoke with. On the one hand, that which I took as my own relevant experiential knowledge enabled certain discussions and shared meanings to arise in the interviews, such as with Violet above. But at the same time, this sense probably led me to forego deep probing into those accounts which sounded already familiar or known to me. It may also have led me, as in the example above, to put my words in the women's mouths. Again, I am not suggesting that it corrupts the research findings, but rather that it must be traced and taken into account in data analysis as fully as possible.

I take it that my identity as a foreigner had the opposite effects of the dynamics I am describing here, in so far as it positioned me more as the listener than speaker. The fact that I am not South African and had only been in the country for a few months when I embarked on the interviews meant that many of the women I spoke with were keen to 'educate' me about the local 'realities' of crime and safety. This was beneficial for my aims as researcher because many of the warnings and safety tips that they shared contained a wealth of often implicit information on the themes of my research. However, a more significant and, for me, ethically and emotionally difficult outcome of my foreign status concerned the manner in which race and racism came up in my interactions with the white women in this study. I want to discuss this issue in some detail because I take it to be important. It also serves to shift my present self-reflections on the interview process to the methodological and ethical questions raised by my analysis and representation of the women in this study.

I am a Nigerian, thus a black African, and obviously, in my manner and even speech accent, relatively privileged and culturally exposed. This, I have been told by local friends, is still something of an anomaly in post-apartheid South Africa, or at least in Cape Town in particular. I am certain and, again, black South African friends have concurred, that it was my foreignness in this respect which explains the frankness, if initial hesitancy, with which many of the white women in this study spoke to me of race and racial issues, broadly of their fear of the 'black other.' Put differently, I do not imagine that they would have spoken as frankly had I been a local black woman, or if I had been a less 'anglicised,' middle-class, and therefore apparently discursively accessible African. As student and researcher, admittedly looking out for interesting data, I was grateful that they spoke so candidly to me. Moreover, I take it as an indication of my ability to create an environment in which the women felt comfortable enough to speak on these difficult and sensitive issues which, I have proposed, is an ethical task for the researcher. Yet the fact is that from my position and politics as a black woman, I found many of their views problematic and at times blatantly racist, especially the implicit or sometimes too facile associations of black men with crime, rape and violence,

The ethical difficulty for me in such instances was to know how to react. I was sometimes torn between my instinct to object strongly to what such women were saying, and my desire and need, as I said, to collect data, allow the interviews to proceed, and make my respondents feel at ease. These personal and academic interests, combined with my general sympathy for my interviewees, sometimes led me so far as to excuse or justify what they said back to them, so that they would not feel bad—or stop speaking. I recall, for instance, one woman who looked so guilty to me as she spoke of her fear of black men that I rationalised what she had said back to her, inwardly cringing and feeling like a fraud, which I noted in my post-interview notes and when I later heard myself on the interview tape. With increased time and distance from the interviews, from the presence and warmth of the actual women, I find that my sympathy and patience for their racialised views is even more diminished. Instead I sometimes feel irritation and anger as I re-read them in the transcripts and attempt to analyse them in the pages to come.

This matter leads me to that which I take to be my largest ethical challenge in this thesis: to represent my research subjects in a fair and nuanced manner, especially in those

aspects which I personally found objectionable or problematic. A related dilemma is how, indeed, to presume to analyse the words, stories and even analyses of all the women in this study, in view of my commitment to hear their voices and my methodological inclination to eschew the position of all-knowing researcher (Hoskins and Stoltz 2005; Saukko 2002). As Hoskins and Stoltz put it, “the challenge seems to lie in the ability to hold an analytic perspective, while remaining empathically attuned to the ways participants make sense of their lives (2005:99). I know no neat solution, except to strive to analyse my interview data and my respondents’ words with a certain generosity of mind, to always try and contextualise what they said, and to be, above all, reflexive and honest in the moments in the text, in the next two chapters of this thesis, in which my personal ideas and biases are clearly speaking.

### **Data Analysis**

The theoretical framework of this thesis posits a discursively constructed, knowing and imagining subject. Accordingly, I take a discursive analytic approach to the interview data in the following two chapters, meaning I seek to trace the discourses which the women draw upon to construct rape and thereby construct themselves as gendered and embodied subjects. I understand discourses here as socially constituted and available schemas of interpretation, meaning and knowledge (Foucault 1990; Mama 1995). Discourses, in Foucault’s famous dictum, “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1972:49), in that they delimit the terms in and through which an object is known, and thereby intersect with, and constitute, the material. Discourses are historically and culturally situated, hierarchically positioned in any given context, and subject to resistance, contestation and change (Foucault 1990; Mama 1995; Mehta and Bondi 1995). It is therefore possible to think of discourses as hegemonic or subaltern, and to conceptualize discursive change, relative to institutionalized power and knowledge (Foucault 1990; Mama 1995). Foucault argues, moreover, that discourses are always polyvalent; thus “we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse... [but] a multiplicity of *discursive elements* that can come into play in various strategies” (1990:100, emphasis added).

For the purposes of this thesis, as mentioned above, I analyze the women's discourses of rape in two ways. First, in Chapter 4, I explore how they construct the phenomenon or crisis of rape in South Africa, including how they plot it in time, space, social and historical context. My interpretation and analysis here focuses on the content of the women's ideas of rape. Subsequently, in Chapter 5, I interpret how the women talk about themselves relative to rape. Here I pay attention to both the speaking and spoken subjects of their discourse (Bryne 2003; Sclater 2003), reading especially for the different gendered positions which they take up. This mode of discourse analysis is consistent with the post-structuralist theories of the subject presented in Chapter 2; it operationalizes discourse as "an analytic tool for reading subjectivities" (Mama 1995:99).

Methodologically, the work of discourse analysis entailed mapping, deconstructing and reconstructing the women's talk and stated practices to apprehend something of their social, intersubjective and subjective sources and effects (Foucault 1990; Mama 1995; Saukko 2002). It was an exercise in interpretation but also critique, in line with feminist post-structuralist commitments to challenge problematic social discourses and power relations. The analysis I present in the next two chapters grew out of my immersion in the fifteen interview transcripts. I read in and across them all, repeatedly, looking for recurrent, implicit and explicit ideas, themes and metaphors in play when the women spoke of rape and self. As Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson explain, it is by comparing research subjects' accounts that "a pattern becomes apparent that says something about the more comprehensive structures or discourses with which [they] are involved" (2001:414). The analysis required also my immersion in the literature reviewed earlier in this work, concerning discourses of rape, women's fear, vulnerability and sexuality in South Africa and beyond. This was necessary to identify and contextualize the likely themes and contours of the women's talk.

Some words, finally on my mode of data transcription and presentation in this work: It struck me as both necessary and honest, as I transcribed the interviews, to record what was said as fully as can be possible on paper. Therefore I noted, in an admittedly idiosyncratic manner, the interjections, long and short laughs, stutters and little yet expressive sounds that pepper conversation. I also attempted to note obvious changes of tone as I heard and interpreted them. All these details are included in the excerpts from

the interview transcripts which I present in the next two chapters. For ease of reading, laughs, sounds and changes of tone are italicised in brackets, as are words that were inaudible on the interview tapes. Words that the women stressed or emphasised are italicised as is convention. My voice is always placed in square brackets.

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## 4 Constructing Rape

This chapter explores how the women in this thesis discursively construct rape in South Africa. From the interview data as a whole I identify four closely interrelated, inflecting but occasionally contradictory discourses which the women deployed in speaking about rape in their society. I term these the statistical discourse; the crime discourse; the race discourse; and the gender discourse. The first three of these discourses together work to construct the rape of women as a prevalent phenomenon in South Africa, but one that is normally distant from my research respondents, concerning the Other. In the fourth, the gender discourse, we begin to hear anxieties from some women that rape might actually be located closer because it is ultimately something that men do. I suggest below that the women's various emphases on these four discourses of rape depend on their assumed legitimacy. This legitimacy is, in turn, related to the ostensibly 'expert' nature of the source from which the discourses derive, as well as their experiential familiarity to, and social resonance with, the individual women. Mapping the women's discourses of rape in South Africa is the first concern of this thesis. It sets up the next question, explored in the following chapter, on how their constructions of rape implicate their very selves.

### **“Rape is a *Huge Issue*”: The Statistical Discourse of Rape**

The statistical discourse of rape was deployed by nine of the fifteen women I interviewed.<sup>1</sup> It referred to the rape statistics in South Africa, thus drawing upon the “narrative of numbers” (Nuttall 2004:19) that is prominent in the public sphere, as mapped in Chapter 1. However, much as described then, the women who invoked the rape statistics tended to do so in imprecise ways. In all cases except one, these statistics were cited self-referentially, as “the statistics”, “the stats”, offered without any numerical content. Yet, importantly, this lack of precision was rarely problematised by the women

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<sup>1</sup> An additional two women referred to the statistics on gender-based violence in South Africa more generally, not rape specifically.

despite what other sources of information would suggest to her. Speaking of rape, she said:

It's not that close to home in terms of my friends and stuff [hm]. Em I know one girl who was raped. [Oh really?] . . . Em..but..yah otherwise it's not all that close to home [yeah, yeah]. But then you hear the statistics, it's like the AIDS statistics [hm], you hear them all the time and you like, well you know it's out there [hm hm] but you, people don't talk about it [hm hm].

Vanessa made a similar comment, though she spoke much less authoritatively about the rape statistics: "I mean I don't know anybody whose been raped [hm] and I don't.. yah I haven't heard stories of someone who knows someone [hm hm] but it's always around you [hm]. Like I think – does South Africa have the biggest statistic or..?"

These two comments self-consciously point to a tension inherent in the women's use of the statistical discourse. On the one hand, the women introduced the statistics to assert that rape is extraordinarily prevalent in South Africa. Yet the fact was that most of them reported knowing few, if any, other women who claimed to have actually experienced it. The result, as Alex put it, was that rape often did not feel "close to home," meaning close to one *personally*. This meant it was instead constructed and imagined as "out there," happening elsewhere in South Africa to distant Others, though Alex and other women did recognise that rape is usually silenced and may therefore be more prevalent in their social circles than they hear. Alex and I talked briefly about the alleged rape of the girl she did know, to which I will return in the discourse of crime below. I then went back to her comments cited above, wanting to know to which statistics she had been referring:

[You, you said you hear the statistics and so you know that it's, you feel that it's something that's out there just from the statistics] hm [can you tell me like what sort of statistics you know? Or like, or where the information comes from? Do you see what I mean?] Oh yeah em.. I don't know any statistics offhand I got to be honest [hm]. Em, but em it's quite often in the media and like, so in newspapers and on television you hear it, about stuff, and em you know even in our intro course at UCT, they did something on safety [oh really?] and a guy came in with like pepper spray and that kind of thing. And so you're constantly being..told about it.

When probed, Alex admitted that she did not in fact have any particular figures or statistical sources in mind. Instead, like Sarah, she had a general sense of the magnitude

of the rape statistics. This sense was constructed from a multiplicity of sources of information, in total from “stuff” she had “constantly” heard and been told, including advice on how to stay safe. Yet it was the statistics which served to legitimise and contextualise all this information. Despite Alex’s inability to trace or quantify the rape statistics, and despite their apparent mismatch with the prevalence of rape in her community, she nonetheless invoked them as a key source of her knowledge of rape in South Africa. As she explained in the first quote above, it was *precisely* the statistics that reminded her that rape was a common reality for women in South Africa: one did not ordinarily hear of rape, “but then you hear the statistics.”

This comment, with the others above, is suggestive of the power and truth effects of the statistical discourse of rape, as well as its dominance and familiarity to the women. As we have seen, even when the statistics could not be clearly substantiated, sourced or matched to one’s experiential knowledge, they were assumed to be authoritative. The epistemological power of the statistical discourse lay for the women in its putative bases in science and quantification. Indeed all except one of nine women who referenced the statistics assumed that they reflected or revealed *the truth* of rape in South Africa. Even Sarah, earlier, questioning the accuracy of the figures was not suggesting that they be rejected as false. She cited the known figures as a basis from which to imagine amplified, more appalling ones.

The power of the statistical discourse was also apparent in the instances in which the women used it to ground a contestable point about rape in South Africa. The statistics *qua* statistics were in such cases assumed to be neutral and thus, again, a source of the truth of the matter. For example, Violet cited statistics to counteract prevailing racist stereotypes of rape in South Africa. I asked her, a black woman, if there were specific types of men that she feared, and explained that one motivation for the question was that most of the white women I had interviewed spoke of a fear of unknown black men. This sparked a conversation about that which Violet described as “such a strong sense of fear in the white community.” Violet believed that this fear was heightened by the media but unsubstantiated because most white South Africans had not actually experienced the crimes they feared. She went further to problematise their racialised fears as they related to rape, saying:

Interestingly, I read this in a *Varsity*<sup>2</sup> article a few years back that said that, em, the majority of rapes are not by strangers, they're by date rape [uh-hm] and they stated some statistic which I can't quote, but speaking about how there were more white date rapes [hm] than black date rapes [uh-hm].

By contrast, Sasha, a white woman, claimed that the statistics located rape predominantly in the black community, in the underprivileged townships to be precise. In addition to the evidence of the statistics, Sasha explained that she imagined rape was located in such contexts because she knew of only one woman in her white, elite environment who alleged being raped. Sasha acknowledged too that her mapping of rape might stem from her subjective bias about which kinds of men rape—a theme expounded upon in the discussion of crime and race below. In view of these last two reasons, the discursive and also moral work of the statistics was to *legitimise* Sasha's claims about rape, race and class in South Africa, to prove to me that they were not wholly unfounded or prejudiced. In the excerpt below, I was asking Sasha how she claimed to know that rape and gender-based violence in South Africa were strongly correlated to poverty, in view of her own privileged class positioning:

[Where does the information come from for someone like you? Like how do you know that?] Yah, em I think the statistics that are. Because I suppose in my environment em I feel like it's not happening..Ok part of it comes from the statistics I hear, and another part would have to come from my own personal bias [yeah] that in my environment I feel *so* sort of separated and away from it that it can only be these *other* groups of people. . . And also the statistics. I mean statistically, I, I think the.. it is, they do show that they happen..em it happens more in the townships [hm hm] and where there're gangs around [hm] and in the sort of poorer areas. Statistically that is, that is what happens.

The juxtaposition of Violet and Sasha's statistically-based claims about the location of rape in South Africa clearly indicates that neither the rape statistics nor their deployment are neutral matters, an argument made in Chapter 1 in reference to public and politicised contestation over the figures. Violet and Sasha's competing claims suggest that one's use of the statistical discourse of rape is socially situated, and so therefore is the statistical imagination which ensues. Their contrary examples suggest that different people may come to know, reference and repeat different statistics. Certainly this may be due to the

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<sup>2</sup> *Varsity* is the student newspaper at the University of Cape Town.

different sources of information available to one, but may also be due to one's positionality, and the ideas of Self and Other that are likely to resonate and be recalled. For instance, Sasha recognised self-reflexively in the quote above that the statistics she knew of matched and confirmed her broader ideas and prejudices too as to who in South Africa rapes, why and where. These ideas, she also recognised, were shaped by her social positioning.

Neo was the only woman to explicitly argue that social factors shape the statistical discourse and thus the statistical imagination. Thus she problematised the apparent authority and neutrality of the statistical discourse itself. Like Violet, she was responding to my comment that many of the white women I had interviewed seemed to associate black men with rape and crime. Neo said the following of these women's fears:

I don't blame them because statistics have shown, but then remember, keep - what I'm about to say I will say it - but keep in mind that rape manifests itself in various forms like I said [hm]. But, you can have date rape.. you know we could, marriage rape, you know like. But statistics that we read about, because the media has so much control here [hm], em usually the culprits tend to be black [uh-hm]. So I can understand why they think that way, I would never call them racist just for saying that [hm] you know. But having said that, the rape behind closed doors, if you, you, it's not reported so I don't know.

Neo was agreeing that the *known* statistics may indeed show that black men commit more rapes than other South African men. However, she questioned which kinds of rape these statistics measured, and also which sets of statistics even became known and why. It was Neo's view that intra-communal forms of rape such as date and marriage rape tended not to be included in the statistics and narratives which the media present to the South African public. Implicitly, then, she was proposing that these kinds of rape, "behind closed doors," probably occurred within the white South African population at least as much as the black, a claim which feminists here have also made (e.g. Bennett 2005; Moffett 2006).

In this way, Neo was deconstructing the political aspects of a discourse which claimed to 'prove' through ostensibly neutral statistical enquiry that rapists in South Africa tend to be black men. She recognised this racialisation of rape as a hegemonic construction in South Africa, hence her refusal to harshly judge white women who subscribed to it. Yet she argued that any statistical discourse which constructed and

or, if so, was not held to delegitimise the point for which they were invoking the statistics. This suggests the degree to which the discourse of rape statistics is dominant in the present context such that it may function discursively despite vague or unspecified content. Eschewing precision, Sarah, for instance, was emphatic in her claims about what “the stats” do and do not tell. In her words:

I mean rape is a *huge* issue in this country [hm], it really is you know. And it's so under-reported you know. The stats as they stand are horrific [hm] and a lot of women don't report rape so it's probably *double* that [hm] you know.

This comment illustrates the workings of that which Nuttall terms the “statistical imagination” of rape in South Africa which, she says, “often suggest[s] [even] wider social *imaginaries*” (2004:19). Sarah implicitly referred to arguments made by anti-rape activists that the known statistics belie the true extent of women's rape experiences in South Africa. In referencing this line of thinking, Sarah constructed an even greater imagination of the ‘real’ figures. Her imagination “stretche[d] and transcend[ed]” (Stoetzler and Yuval Davis 2002:316) her claimed knowledge of the existing statistics and her knowledge of the tendency for rape to be under-reported. Thus she imagined and proposed that the figures probably needed to be doubled. Certainly Sarah offered this as an arbitrary, not literal, computation. It was to convey her point or, rather, her imagination of the context she was describing, namely a horrifically rape-dense South Africa.

As is clear in Sarah's words, the women's use of the statistical discourse resulted in a subjective awareness and imagination of rape as very prevalent in the country. Sasha also constructed rape as a frequent experience for South African women through her invocation of the statistics. She was the only woman to put a figure to them, saying:

Em you'll know better than me what the rape statistics are like and [hm you mean here?] yah if you're researching into it [yeah] yah. Em, but like you know there're always adverts on TV: ‘one in every, a woman is, one woman is raped every 3 seconds,’ em . . . And em it is a reality that it is happening the whole time.

Sasha's hesitant recollection of a set of figures, which she also acknowledged as only one amongst others, led her to nonetheless conclude that rape was an ever-present “reality” in South Africa. Alex shared this view because of what she knew of the statistics, and

coloured rape as such was neither neutral nor factual, but rather linked closely to power—the white media in this case. Neo’s argument echoes that put forward in Chapter 1 that the local media tends to misrepresent rape in South Africa by unduly focusing on cases of black, criminal perpetrators. Below in the crime discourse of rape, we will see that the image of a criminal rapist was in fact dominant in the women’s talk.

### **“Some Creepy Looking Stranger”: The Crime Discourse**

The crime discourse was characterised by the notion that rape is a violent act committed by a random stranger of criminal or pathological disposition. This construction of rape was almost always in play in all but two of the women’s *general* talk of rape; that is, when they were not referring to specific incidents, types or scenes of rape. Because it concerned crime and criminality, this discourse was strongly inflected with a class dimension. Further, it was often racialised by the white women I spoke with to concern black men—a subject matter explored in the following section on the race discourse. Thus unlike the statistical discourse which constructed rape in terms of its prevalence and probability in the national context, the crime discourse of rape concerned its local particularities and protagonists. It functioned to identify the person of the rapist and his victim too, thus constructing specific “rape identities” (Hirsch 1994). It emplotted the act of rape, locating it in time and space. And it provided a motive for, or psychology to, the rapist’s assault, which ranged from sheer criminal intent to racist revenge. Implicitly this discourse constructed rape as a legal crime, proscribed by law and therefore formally redressable before the law. Yet this was not its main focus. As suggested, the discourse rather implicated crime and criminality by constructing rape as an experience which *came with*, and was *caused by*, rampant crime in South Africa.

The crime discourse had many sources in the women’s talk of rape, which perhaps explains its recurrence and strength. It featured in five stories of other women’s rape or attempted rape experiences. It was implicit in discourses and training seven women reported receiving from “expert” self-defense instructors, school and other authorities. An image of the rapist as criminal was also always present in casual safety tips, rumours and urban legends that family and friends apparently shared with a number

of women. Mimi and Janet spoke of close girlfriends who had been raped by unknown men, whose stories they knew of first-hand. Mimi's account of her friend's alleged experience exemplified the trope of 'stranger-danger,' in which rape randomly occurs in a dark, lonely place, where the would-be rapist lurks. Mimi recounted that her friend:

was walking.. she was walking to a friend's house and she took a shorter, a short cut instead of the long one. The short cut is where there's almost no-one around. . . and then this guy, I think he was waiting in the bushes or something, and then..while she was walking he grabbed her into the bushes and then [wow!] yah.

According to this account, the rapist rapes for the sake of it, for whatever perverse pleasure he gains. Hence he premeditates, lying in waiting for any potential victim. Suzanne recalled imagining identical scenarios though she now problematised them, as we will see much later in the chapter. She said: "I think you always think that..rape is going to happen from some..some em, some creepy looking stranger lurking [hm] down the path at the side of your road."

Janet's account of her friend's experience was of a gang-rape committed during a housebreaking when she was home alone. This scenario, in which one crime leads to a second crime of rape, is often reported in the local press. It discursively locates rape inside other kinds of crime. Because of this, it spatially locates rape not just in threatening or quiet public areas, but also in those spaces normally frequented, including the private domain too—in short, wherever crime may occur. Sarah spoke of two friend's experiences of crime, one carjacking and one housebreaking, in which dynamics similar to those Janet described were in play, though neither resulted in rape. The gist of the housebreaking story was that all members of a household were tied up when their home was broken into except for one woman who was forced to accompany the intruders around, revealing the family's valuables to them. The idea, as Sarah described it, was that neither this woman nor the tied-up members of her household would resist the ongoing crime, recognising that she would be highly vulnerable to rape if they did.

The manner in which Sarah presented this example to me, coupled with the fact that she could not remember its exact source, suggested its dominance as a rape scenario in her imagination. Sarah started recounting the example by saying: "I've had like friends who have been em like, their house has been broken into and em they're, sort of tie

everyone up and whatever..” But in the next breath, the subject of the story changed from “friends” to one friend, and then almost immediately to a friend of this friend: “I’m trying to think who told me this but like that definitely happened to a friend of mine, one of her family friends was like, housebreaking situation happened [hm] and they were all in the house at the time and they took the girl like around...” Because of the shifting subject of her account, it was unclear to me if Sarah was speaking of a general trend in housebreakings or of a specific incident. What I read, though, is that the account represented for Sarah a script or trajectory of crime in which rape figured as highly possible or likely, even though it had not actually occurred in the story she was recounting. How or wherever Sarah had heard of this example of a housebreaking, it had become in her mind a narrative of rape. She recounted it to me not simply to relay one woman’s particular experience, but to make a more general point about the location, perpetrators and enacting of rape in South Africa.

This scenario had considerable impact on Sarah’s imagination of her own risk of rape as we will see in Chapter 5. It was also deeply implicated in her analysis of the apparent prevalence of rape in the country today. Sarah expressly theorised this prevalence to be a result of the high crime rate, arguing:

I think because crime is so accepted here. . . I think that crime is far more of a sort of daily existence kind of thing here [hm] and em, so, maybe that sort of encompasses rape, you know, there’s more opportunity for it [uh-hm]. Em I think, cause I think a lot of the men necessarily that do rape aren’t..serial rapists [uh-hm]. Do you know what I mean? I don’t think they, like they say, I don’t think they go out to [yeah for that] rape a woman [yeah]. I think they, if the situation arises, then they might. And maybe one given night they do and the other night they don’t, you know.

To Sarah, rape in South Africa tended to come with and through other crimes, less from serial rapists or men who go out with the explicit intention to rape a woman. If so, most rapists were also criminals of some other sort, raping when the “opportunity” or “option” presented itself which, in their line of business, was any “given night.” According to this thinking, the ultimate *reason* why these men raped when they could was because they were already criminally inclined. It was because of the kind of men that they were.

Put this way, the logic of Sarah’s analysis clearly classified and pathologised rapists as the rogue, criminal stratum of society. Her discourse excluded seemingly

'normal' or 'nice' men from consideration. I challenged Sarah on this last point, asking if the possibility of violence crossed her mind as she interacted with men she knew. Her reply was an emphatic no: "Definitely no-one in my immediate circle of friends [uh-hm] or boyfriends or ex-boyfriends. . . Definitely no-one..that I interact with or am friends with, or are friends with my friends." With this, Sarah completely distanced the possibility of rape from her 'normal' life and extended social circle. While Sarah did state that she was aware of the possibility of somebody slipping a date-rape drug into her drink when she was out in a nightclub, she framed this within the bounds of same discourse of crime, saying of the imagined perpetrator: "but that's not necessarily someone I know... it's more just people that are in the vicinity, which you could argue is criminals as well." Sarah was adamant, then, that rape was the act of a criminal mind. By definition, it could not be perpetrated by the kinds of men she normally associated with, or even their friends.

This idea that rape was the act of a criminal stranger was dominant in the thinking of most of the other women though, unlike Sarah, a number imagined that rape was also often premeditated. The idea of stranger-danger prevailed even when the women had heard stories or been through personal experiences that contradicted it. Feminist scholars have indeed noted in various national contexts that stranger-danger discourses are hegemonic in popular and institutional constructions of rape, as well as in safety advice given to women (Stanko 1993; Morgan and Bjorkert 2006). This construction of rape was directly or indirectly present in the women's accounts of their self-defense training, and in their recollections of safety information disseminated at their high schools and at UCT too. Such information often pertained to the various forms of crime which one might face in daily South African life, hence the emphasis on public and indiscriminate threats. Nonetheless, the advice that directly concerned rape always imagined it as a random, aggressive assault by a criminal or crazy stranger.

Anna and Nancy had taken short self-defense courses, the former with an assumed expert instructor who "had a lot of experience with..em rapists, she'd actually interviewed them..you know in prison." The advice and defense moves Anna recalled from the class were implicitly premised on a violent and strategised attack by a stranger. For instance, Anna explained a safety strategy she had learnt which involved firmly

brushing off requests for the time from strange men in public because “you know as soon as you take your eyes off them, they might attack you.” Mimi recalled talks in school which were similarly predicated upon the notion that the threat of rape lurks in public: “They made us aware about it you know [hm] especially the girls [hm]. You know they tried to to em.. I mean they had a lot of lectures on it [hm] about safety you know, stay in groups, you know stuff like that.” Arguably the advice to “stay in groups” fails to account or prepare its audience for the prospect of rape situations in which women are in private spaces, with intimately known men, or in which they are coerced or threatened by symbolic, not overt or physical, violence (Morgan and Bjorket 2006). The same could be said of the suggestion to “shout fire instead of rape” so that people will come to help, recalled by Vanessa as “familiar” from her school days.

Besides tending to construct danger as public and indiscriminate, stranger-danger constructions of rape functioned to imagine specific spaces and scenarios as unsafe. Some, from Vanessa, who admitted she was full of “urban legends kind of stories,” included: a woman in an empty parking lot at night, fumbling for her keys, with “shopping bags and stuff”; a woman going to a public bathroom alone “in a shopping center late at night.” Vanessa received such information in regular emails about how to stay safe from her mother, away and anxious in Johannesburg. She was jokingly ambivalent about the value of these emails and their effect upon her nerves, concluding though: “I suppose it’s better to be aware.” The kinds of awareness about rape she had reportedly gained from these emails included that:

You shouldn’t go into parking lots alone cause the most attacks on women occur *in* parking lots [oh really?] at night. . . rapists in particular look for women who are not holding like some sort of weapon [uh-hm] so like an umbrella, or a set of keys is good. And clothes that they can easily rip open [hm]. And apparently some people, I don’t know if this is true, carry around scissors.

Again the construction here was of a man on the prowl, looking for random, isolated female targets and possibly even carrying implements to expedite his dastardly deed.

While, certainly, such constructions of the rapist and the rape scene have been empirically borne out for some women in South Africa, a critical feminist perspective would problematise that which I have here termed the crime discourse of rape. The critical question would be to what extent the terms and images of the discourse represent

the dangers women most often face, and thus the dangers they should be most warned about or focused upon. Feminist and other research has shown that danger for women most often lies closer to home than the crime discourse would have it (Stanko 1995). If so, the reasons for, and effects of, the emphasis on stranger-danger and criminal rapists must be questioned. As Hirsch (1994:1025) argues, the fact is that there are “multiple political issues at stake” in all representations of rape and in the rape identities which these construct.

One political result of the focus on stranger-danger suggested by the foregoing examples from the women is that it functions to code known men and intimate spaces as inherently safe. The crime discourse therefore does *not* represent the full scope of women’s rape experiences or threats. Nor does it lend itself to a deeply gendered analysis of these experiences or their complex motivations—that is to say, an analysis in terms of gender relations and hierarchies which feminists would advocate (e.g. Hirsch 1994; Moffett 2006). Rather, these complex dynamics are too simply criminalised and pathologised: in the woman’s examples, the rapist was imagined as a criminal, violent or sick man. Although theorising domestic violence discourse, Ferraro’s (1996) assertion about the consequences of such analytical reduction is apt here. She states that this “discursive focus abstracts acts of violence as a pathology to be remedied, separate from a critique of the relationships of dominance through which it is constituted” (1996:78). In other words, because the discursive focus proposes individualised not structural analyses of the violence in question, it advocates remedies along these same lines, namely individual punishment. Thinking this way, Janet proposed that for men in South Africa who rape babies: “castration is the way forward.” While such sentiment may be understandable, it does not deeply address the question of why men rape in the first place.

A second political and practical effect of the discursive emphasis on a rapist-criminal is in the safety strategies it recommends to women, some of which have been highlighted above. Because, as argued, the crime discourse misrepresents the extent of the dangers that may lurk for women in the public sphere relative to the private, it does not offer them accurate or sufficient maps or tools with which to assess and negotiate their safety (Mason 2001). The emphasis on strangers and public spaces does not prepare women to recognise or handle situations in which they face threats from men they know

well or perhaps intimately. Recall, for instance, Anna's self-defense lesson; the advice to not take one's eyes off alien men who approach in public clearly does not apply to interactions with one's father, male lover or friend. Implicitly this instruction says that such men do or will not attempt rape. Rather, within the crime discourse, women are told to avoid dark and empty public spaces, walking alone and so on; in short they are told not to 'be stupid.' It becomes "the responsibility of the *individual* to avoid potentially violent situations (Morgan and Bjorkert 2006:449) and 'clearly' dangerous men. This subtly but effectively shifts responsibility for a woman's potential victimisation on to her and away from the man who would commit the assault.

Still from a feminist perspective, a third and highly problematic outcome of the crime discourse of rape being described here is that it implicitly sets up a hierarchy of rape. "Real rape" (Estrich 1987, cited in Bumiller 1987:77) becomes rape as defined by the frame of the discourse, namely a random and savage attack versus an experience of marital or date rape for instance. The former is discursively constructed as more 'real' or legitimate in terms of the victim's right to call her experience rape, and affects the likelihood that she will be believed by official and non-official judges (Bumiller 1987; Hengehold 2000). It also shapes ideas about the extent of the 'trauma' she is imagined to suffer and thus the sympathy and other therapeutic resources she may or may not receive. As such, in constructing a certain image of rape and the rapist, the crime discourse also constructs an image of the "'worthy victim' who cannot be construed as contributing to her assault in any way" (Hengehold 2000:198). Such notions were implied in Alex's comments about the one friend she knew of who claimed to have been raped. In the discussion of the statistical discourse above, Alex was heard to mention the experience of this friend to signal the discrepancy between the national statistics and the seemingly low prevalence of rape in her local social network. She recounted her friend's story to me as such:

Em I know one girl who was raped [oh really?] and it was, em it was by her boyfriend so it's, was more, it wasn't, like not that rape between boyfriend and girlfriend is any better than any other rape, but it was more, like I think a case of..you know, not a good understanding between them [oh ok]. That type of thing, than a brutal like just attack [yeah].

Alex did not go so far as to dismiss her friend's alleged experience or to dispute her subjective labeling of it as rape. Yet she stumbled to affirm to me that rape by a boyfriend is not "better" than other forms of rape, having started her recollection of her friend's allegations on a slightly dismissive note ("it was by her boyfriend so it's, was more, it wasn't..."). However, in her next move, Alex proceeded to downplay the cause of the alleged rape to a misunderstanding between the two parties, thereby exonerating the boyfriend of any inappropriate or malicious intent. Alex also concluded the account by comparing what apparently happened—a mere misunderstanding in her opinion—to a brutal attack. The strong implication was that the latter constituted the standard of rape against which Alex was measuring her friend's experience, which would explain the overall structure and tone of her account.

Similarly I heard the model of real rape at work in Kudzai's initial comments on a friend's rape allegations. Kudzai insisted that she was generally oblivious to the issue of rape and was not even sure how to define it. She explained this unawareness as partly due to the fact that one hardly ever heard of such crimes in her home country, Zimbabwe. Therefore, Kudzai told me, she had not really understood what a friend meant when she had confided that an uncle had raped her. In reference to this friend's story, Kudzai mused: "I don't have any knowledge about rape and things like that [hm]. So em I don't really know what constitutes rape and can you say..that you know, 'he's raped me' even if you haven't screamed?" When I pressed Kudzai for her definition of rape, she went on to propose that rape has occurred if a woman takes "reasonable steps" to express non-consent to sex, "even if you don't scream or whatever." Yet I had pushed for her definition because I was surprised by the standard for determining rape embedded within the first comment Kudzai had made. I took it to imply that a woman can not claim rape if she has not made it vocally and even publicly clear, in this case by screaming, that a certain sexual advance is unwanted. This relates to the notion of real rape because it ignores the possibility that a woman's resistance may be complicated, perhaps even muted, by psychological and material dynamics which prevent her from publicly exposing her assaulter. In the case of Kudzai's friend, for instance, the uncle and alleged rapist "provided accommodation" for this woman while she pursued her education. Thus

there was presumably a relationship of dependency which might explain why Kudzai's friend did not report screaming.

Olivia was the only woman of the fifteen I interviewed to directly critique the kinds of criminalised constructions and images of rape that have been under consideration in this section of the chapter. In stark comparison to the other women, I experienced Olivia to have a determinedly 'political' take on the issues of rape, gender-based violence and crime in the post-apartheid context. Once I broached these issues, she explained them to me in terms of the violence and repression of the apartheid system, the socio-economic inequalities of the new order, and the patriarchal nature of local communities and institutions. Therefore she sought to contextualise these issues, and thereby put her own relatively few and, in her view, minor experiences of crime into perspective. For instance, the same question that I used in all the other interviews to initiate talk of the subjective impact of violence in South Africa garnered a more structural and analytic response from Olivia:

[What about violence more generally? Is it something that you're aware of in your daily life, or potential violence?...]I think in the Cape it's em, i-it's more the issue of crime I suppose [uh-hm]. Em because..fighting apartheid, it, there was a low intensity war [hm] in South Africa going on. Eh..and because of the patriarchal nature of our society eh there was lot of eh.. domestic [uh-hm] violence that took place [hm hm] in households.

In addition to her analytical approach to these social issues, Olivia shared that she had witnessed firsthand the domestic abuse of her grandmother and mother when she was growing up, and had been generally aware of such violence in her community. Moreover, she was a survivor of domestic violence herself. It was ultimately this last fact, she explained, which informed her consciousness of, and focus on, potential violence from within the home and community, not from an imagined, distant stranger. Discourses of crime and rape which emphasised the latter simply did not match that which she had come to know from her own lived experiences. In her words:

What what *has* affected me. . . was domestic violence [hm ok] as a, as a young person [uh-hm]. So..I, that's why my concern, my concern is always – we're looking always for this stranger danger stuff [hmmm] out there [yeah] we're not always aware how violence are actually just close by.

Violet expressed a similarly reflexive but more ambivalent relationship than Olivia to the crime discourse of rape in view of her related personal experiences. I present her views here by way of concluding this section of the chapter, because they speak to the fundamental, albeit usually unstated, weakness of this discourse for many of the other women who deployed it. Violet shared two experiences in which male peers at university whom she did not personally know had given her unwanted, persistent attention which she considered stalking. These experiences, the second especially, had left her feeling shaken, violated and disempowered. Nonetheless, Violet asserted, recognising the irony and even irrationality of it, that she persisted in her general belief that socio-economic class, education and exposure were important indicators of which men were safe or not:

So you know I've had encounters of men who..in a sense violated my space [uh-hm, uh-hm]. But I generally..am very..I assume a lot [uh-hm] about males. Like I assume that everybody is kind of, of sound mind and you know and, and I think well of course you wouldn't rape somebody [hm] cause you're at UCT [hm]. You know that sort of [the assumption]. It's very naïve...

Having verbalised this assumption for my benefit, Violet characterised it as “naïve” and “irrational.” The fact was that she *knew*, logically speaking, from her own experiences of being stalked, and also from her involvement in a fellow student's alleged rape experience, that women were indeed raped and otherwise sexually violated by men who were educated, “cultured” and so on—thus men who were not necessarily of the criminal or underprivileged class, and not obviously pathological. Yet, as we have seen, the primary effect of the crime discourse of rape was to paint discrete images of men who do and do not rape, defined precisely by class, education, race implicitly, as well as general criminal disposition.

If so, the tension for many of the women who drew upon the crime discourse to construct and locate rape in South Africa was that, like Violet, they knew of other women's rapes or had personal experiences of their own which contradicted the terms and boundaries of this discourse. Put otherwise, the crime discourse did not offer a sufficient grammar and framework for the women to talk about the various forms, locations and experiences of rape and related acts in South Africa that they knew of or imagined. That this discourse of rape was nonetheless dominant in almost all the interviews must therefore be questioned. I suggested at the outset of this discussion that

the strength of the crime discourse could be linked to the fact that it had many sources. These included institutions and individuals assumed to be vested with authority such as the media or self-defense instructors. Also, discourses and anxieties of rampant crime in the new nation are very dominant in the public sphere such that they could be said to provide an easily accessible framework or set of meanings for the women to construct rape.

At a subjective level, inarguably the crime discourse functioned in the women's talk to distance rape from the Self. Logically it explained one's non-experience of rape, even if discursively allowing for the possibility that random victimisation by crime, and thus rape, might one day occur. But in addition, we could conjecture that the discourse also served a psychological function, namely to reassure about the order of one's immediate community, and symbolically boundary the moral Self from the degenerate Other. For instance, reconsider Sarah, adamant that not only her male friends but even their friends were incapable of rape; Alex who explained her friend's alleged intra-communal rape as a mere misunderstanding between lovers, not a savage attack; or Mimi's claim, not cited here but elaborated upon in Chapter 5, that the only figure in her life from whom she feared the possibility of violence or rape was a "psycho" she regularly met on her train commute. In all these cases, the women were insistently locating danger outside their normal environments, in keeping with the terms of the crime discourse of rape.

Because beginning to step of the frame or bounds of this discourse, Sasha's admission to sometimes doubt her male friends perhaps most evocatively captures the tension I am proposing here. I presented this admission from Sasha in Chapter 3 during the discussion on self-reflexivity. I highlighted it as an instance in which the dynamics in the interview produced a set of meanings that might not have been otherwise voiced. Sasha said, in a nutshell, that although she might ordinarily claim that her male friends would "*never*" rape, a small part of her sometimes doubted this. Anxiety about the moral community sometimes crept in, in other words. My contention here is that perhaps one function of the crime discourse of rape was to keep such anxiety at bay. Below I argue that a similar dynamic was in play within the women's use of the race discourse of rape.

### **“You Think Black Man”: The Race Discourse**

The race discourse constructed rape in South Africa as an act that concerned or was perpetrated by a racial ‘Other.’ It was deployed by all the white women in this study explicitly or implicitly, but featured in only two brief comments from black women, to be explored in due course below. The discourse presumed to explain rape in South Africa in terms of the alleged propensities and practices, or historical and material conditions, of the racial Other. As such, it was not always expressed openly in terms of race, but was also encoded as culture, poverty and crime. Several race theorists note the rise of “culture” as a more politically correct way to talk about race in officially post-racist contexts (e.g. Miles and Brown 2003; Modood 2001). And in South Africa, poverty and crime are highly racialised in discourse and materiality, associated with the black African and coloured populations for historical reasons (Allen 2002; Bremner 2004).

Sasha emphasised poverty, culture and history in her tentative hypothesis on rape in South Africa, thereby avoiding direct mention of race. Having suggested that poverty breeds a sense of powerlessness that might motivate some men to rape, she went on to explain:

And em poverty, the poverty in *this country* at least can be attributed to obviously our really unstable political history [hm] and em..the oppression of the apartheid government on the majority of our population. . . And then there’s also sort of cultural, cultural things. Em..em.. lot of the..but (*breathes out*) no I don’t, see a lot of the..sort of poorer societies have, are very patriarchal [hm] and ma-male-dominant and so there is this feeling that women are..inferior and should be sort of subjected to sort of what men say.

“Poverty” caused by apartheid oppression clearly referred to the situation of the black South African population. Therefore the patriarchal “cultural” dynamics Sasha was alleging were effectively located in black contexts. That Sasha did not explicitly racialise this analysis might have been because she did not want to say anything that could be construed as offensive or even racist by me, a black African woman. This reading is supported by the fact, evident in the quote, that Sasha stammered and hesitated greatly as she spoke, perhaps wary of saying the ‘wrong thing.’ However, it must be noted that she generally presented her views in a very careful manner during the entire interview. She

was analytical and self-reflexive, often thinking through her statements and occasionally going on to reject some for assumptions or implications by which she did not stand. Indeed she stated to me at a later point in the interview that she was wary that her comments on black men could be easily misconstrued, concluding on this matter: “I’ve got to be careful about what I say because it *can*... you can end up arguing for something that you don’t mean.”

An alternative reading of the quote above is possible. While it seems clear that Sasha was deliberately not mentioning race to theorise rape in South Africa, this does not necessarily mean that she was making an argument *about* race, using class, poverty and culture as euphemisms. It is instead possible to read the quote at face-value, as an argument which seeks to link poverty with the prevalence of rape in South Africa but avoids mention of the fact that poverty itself is racialised in this country. This reading would be in line with other comments on class and rape Sasha made during the interview, one of which was presented in the first section of the chapter on the statistical discourse. The result was that Sasha’s analysis located the rapist’s motivations in his deprived material conditions and the cultures that may grow out of this, rather than any essentialised racial or cultural predispositions. Nonetheless, whatever her intentions, the fact is that Sasha’s theory still amounted to a racialised account of rape in South Africa. It did not counter hegemonic conclusions that the rapist is a black man, but rather reached these indirectly and by eschewing overtly racist reasoning.

In fact, only three of the seven white women I spoke with directly, not implicitly, associated rape with black men. Of these three, Suzanne was unique in bluntly suggesting that her views on the matter were racist. Suzanne told me of two personal experiences of sexual assault by white, middle-class men known to her which she closely linked to rape. These experiences will be explored in the section on the gender discourse of rape below. Their significance for Suzanne’s engagement with the race discourse, in her own analysis, was that they showed up her prejudice. Despite having been assaulted by two white men, including an attempted rape by one, Suzanne realised, with shock, that she still tended to automatically envisage or assume that the rapist in South Africa was black

or coloured. Reading a book about a white South African woman's brutal rape and attempted murder by two strangers,<sup>3</sup> Suzanne said:

And..there the biggest shock for me was that her attackers were two white guys. [Oh really?] And I think that really sort of..that made me think, because I had thought..you know be honest, like I'd, when I'd thought of her attackers I was imagining..sort of [hm] black men or coloured men.

Given her own experiences, Suzanne was openly problematising the fact that she had still been taken aback to learn that another woman had been raped by white men—to learn of this discursive (and certainly material) possibility as it were. This sense of shock made her reflect on her dominant imagination of the rapist, leading Suzanne to conclude: “so, admit there is sort of a racist perception in my mind [hm] I think.”

Quite unlike Suzanne, the other two white women who directly associated black men with rape, Alex and Anna, made efforts to source and contextualise their claims, perhaps to thereby legitimate them and avoid the racist tag. Listening from my experiential and political perspective as a black woman, however, I would argue that there were occasional omissions or contradictions which suggested deeper assumptions about the black Other than were being openly expressed. Alex, first, explained her association of rape and black men partially by the fact that some “come across as being very..domineering and stuff [hm] and like they want their way.” Talking about “North African” men,<sup>4</sup> based on her experience with one, she told me that she had heard: “they don't really respect women very much [oh I see] and em they're quite forward with what they want, and they get angry if you don't give them what they want.”

Anna invoked ‘culture’ to explain a black African work colleague's alleged rape, but was explicit in racialising it. Anna described that she had inadvertently learnt of this woman's experience but, in the time since, “I've got to know her better and we can talk about sort of black culture.” She claimed to be paraphrasing this colleague, the survivor, in explaining that within the said culture: “for men to have intercourse with unmarried

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<sup>3</sup> The book Suzanne was referring to was Alison Botha's, *I Have Life* (Penguin Books, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> As a West African, I initially assumed “North African” referred to men from North Africa. Thus I heard Alex's claims about these men to resonate with wider stereotypes about Arab and Muslim patriarchal cultures. However, a South African friend argued that from a local perspective, “North African” means anyone who is not from Southern Africa, thus including Central, East and West Africa. I have no way of determining to which of these geographical zones Alex was referring.

girls [hm], it's like *fine* and then if you have a baby it sort of proves that you can you know, produce children sort of thing." She meant by this that the men's actions were "fine" or acceptable within a cultural logic that valued demonstrations of one's virility or fertility.<sup>5</sup> But as I clarified from Anna, not having fully understood the logic she was describing, the woman in question defined the experience as non-consensual sex, thus as rape, not "fine." My voice comes first in the following interchange referring to the woman's alleged impregnation after her rape: [Well I mean was it a, the result of a rape specifically?] ja ja [So I mean it wasn't consensual?] That's right. [Well that's] yeah it's horrible."

To analyse Alex and Anna's statements, I propose it instructive to consider the sources from which they claimed to derive them, as well as the ways in which they contradicted other statements they made during their respective interviews. Alex admitted that she did not in fact closely know or associate with any black men in South Africa or elsewhere. Her brief encounter with a "North African guy" had been while she was abroad. She described him as "so incredibly pushy" because he had tried to pressurise her to go out with him despite her stated disinterest. Therefore, her subjective sense of the "domineering" nature of black men, a category she seemed to be very broadly defining, was largely abstract and the evidence she cited for it could be said to be very weak, if not insufficient.

Contrast this to some of her experiences with white men. Alex disclosed to me that both her father and brother were physically violent at home, and sometimes "land up hurting someone." She described the brother of a friend as "like a puppy dog" in public, but knew he was a tyrant to his mother and sister at home, where "he loses his temper and he shouts at them and he screams at them [hm] and he makes them cry." Finally, after speaking about North African men in the manner cited above, she recounted her experience of a white man she had once dated who "had an angry side to his personality." Apparently, he would silently convey this anger, and she would sense it, whenever she stopped their physical intimacy from proceeding beyond a certain point. Alex introduced this experience into our conversation as "another thing that em, is quite central to rape,"

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<sup>5</sup> It was not fully clear to me whose fertility was supposedly intended to be exhibited, the man or the woman's.

making the point that it had been uncomfortable and even intimidating for her to be in an intimate situation with a man who was clearly angry because feeling sexually dissatisfied.

Despite these experiences of a number of white men, certainly more substantive than her empirical knowledge of black men, Alex did not make similar generalisations about the former group as she did of the latter. She did not link her stories of the white men above or her experiences of them. They were presented as individuals with particular temperaments whom she knew. I would argue then that a significant discrepancy existed between Alex's stated sources of knowledge of black and white men, and the kinds of constructions she did or did not presume to make about each group. I take this as suggestive of the silent work of stereotypes to shape that which one comes to imagine or 'know' of the Other, and thus the evidence one marshals, and interpretations of this evidence one makes, to construct this Other. I contend, in other words, that Alex's statement about the character of black men was based not just on the evidence she cited, in any case minimal, but also on wider repertoires of racialised and even racist stereotypes and discourses of black people available to her.

These stereotypes and discourses as they relate to an act such as rape include ideas that black men are violent, virulently and 'traditionally' patriarchal, domineering and so on, and that these ways of being are sanctioned by their 'culture' (e.g. Allen 2002; Hirsch 1994). Such ideas have a long history, stemming from colonial discourses of the barbaric black Other, as well as attendant 'civilising' and 'moralising' discourses which construct a hierarchy of cultures with the European and 'modern' on top (Bremner 2004; Hirsch 1994; Miles and David 2003). Such ideas were similarly contained within Anna's framing of her colleague's alleged rape experience as part of "black culture," though it is impossible to determine the extent to which they come from Anna herself or from the woman in question, given that Anna claimed to be quoting her. Nonetheless, whatever its source, the fact that Anna cited this cultural explanation *to me* can be read as meaning that it was a compelling framework for her to think what had allegedly happened to her coworker. Her discourse can therefore be analysed on these terms, as a received and reproduced theory of rape.

Most likely, a woman socially positioned in the South African context as Anna—a middle-class and middle-aged white woman—would be familiar with the stereotypical

discourses of the black Other I described above, even if she did not normally or explicitly subscribe to them. Anna revealed that she was on the whole unfamiliar with black people. She explained her general caution of black men thus: “I grew up in the..sort of the whole apartheid era you know [oh ok], you know. And em black people to me still to a large extent are quite foreign.” Like Alex, she admitted that she lacked complex empirical knowledge of the black Other. Yet this did not preclude her from generalising, minutes later, about black culture, itself a very broad construct, on the basis of the alleged experience and interpretations of one member of this culture. Again she did so by locating the epistemological authority in her colleague’s voice. However, Anna’s declared unfamiliarity with the culture in question, together with the broader discursive context which tends to stigmatise this culture, most probably also explain why she did not complexify or problematise her colleague’s words to me. Instead she claimed to reproduce them, in the process essentialising black culture and presenting it as monolithic and static, which are also stereotypical constructions of ‘the African’ from a European, ‘modern’ perspective (Hirsch 1994).

The extent to which stereotyping of the Other served to racialise constructions of rape in South Africa is also apparent in a statement Janet, a black woman, made about the Afrikaner community. Her statement provides a telling counterpoint to the associations Alex and Anna have been seen to make about black men and rape. Janet had the following to say:

Like I know there’s a myth, and I’m not too true {*sic*} how this is but apparently it’s quite true [hm] that with Afrikaners like you know [uh-hm] em the fathers sleep with their daughters [oh really?] to like take away their virginity..[Em ok why, I mean why would taking their virginity be a thing to do?] I think it’s, it’s – I’m not sure. But like I said it’s a myth.

This “myth” linked a certain form of rape, incest, and a tendency towards this form with a particular racial and cultural group. In making this allegation, Janet homogenised the group of men in question. Moreover, her invocation of a myth rather than specific stories or examples she may have heard of, for instance, implied that the rape of one’s daughter was something that Afrikaner fathers generally did, *as* or *because* they were Afrikaner fathers. Although Janet did not put it this way, she was suggesting that the alleged tendency was ‘cultural’ in the sense of a shared script of meaning and action (Geertz

2000). Hence, from Janet's perspective, her claim was generalisable to the population of men she named, and hence she, as a cultural outsider, could not actually explicate its logic to me.

Janet framed her claim as a myth, thus casting some doubt on its truth status. Yet she was not prepared to entirely relinquish or deconstruct it. She still insisted "apparently it's quite true," though she supplied no actual evidence for it. This speaks to the power of stereotyping and myth-making to construct enduring images of the Other, especially to the degree that this subject is distant, alien and perhaps even unsympathetic from one's situated and invested perspective. As I suggested, Janet's claim is telling if held in contrast to those heard thus far from white women, Anna especially. Janet's claim can even be read as an inversion of Anna's, insofar as it alleges a cultural logic *in Anna's group*<sup>6</sup> which drives its men to rape its young women, much as Anna had alleged about Janet's group. If neither woman described their *own* group as such was surely because this would not have been subjectively compelling or meaningful, including that it would not have matched their experiences of these groups, including their non-experience of rape. Anna actually spoke of receiving inappropriate sexualised advances as a child from a father and uncle of two white families with whom she had briefly lodged. However, in neither case did she interpret these experiences as culturally scripted or motivated, as Janet's myth would. The language of this myth was unavailable or not compelling to her as a member of the group in question. Instead Anna made sense of these experiences in terms of the "altogether. . . somewhat odd" character of the two families.

My point, then, is that deconstructing the claims the women made concerning rape and race in South Africa reveals something of the discursive space in which unacknowledged ideas, stereotypes and prejudices about the racial Other were in play. In this case, that fact that the race discourse of rape was overwhelmingly deployed by the white women relative to black in this study can be related to the preponderance of discourses linking black men to rape and related acts, relative to white men. The fact is that discourses, images and representations of the black rapist (and criminal) abound in the public sphere, as do variously motivated theories—cultural, sociological, racist and so

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<sup>6</sup> Anna had migrated to South Africa from Europe as a child and her family had identified then most closely with the Afrikaner community. She did not say, and it was not clear to me, if she still identifies with this community.

on—of his actions (Moffett 2006). In opposition, discourses and theories of the white rapist are relatively scarce; illustrated, I suggested before, by Suzanne's surprise in reading about a case in which the culprits were white.

The perpetrators of rape were not the only subjects constructed by the women's racialisation of rape in South Africa. Three women suggested that rape may sometimes also have a racialised motivation, such that the racial identity of the woman would be a factor in her victimisation. Incidentally the two white women who made such comments about white victims were Anna and Alex again, while a black woman, Neo, imagined a subjective case in which she could be targeted for being black. Anna, first, briefly referenced a story she had heard from a colleague of a black man on a public train who had attacked a woman. Apparently, when the man had realised that his victim was not white, he had released her saying words to the effect: "oh you're not white. I would, I would have raped you if you were white." The idea was that the man would or did not rape women 'of his kind' but was looking for the racial Other, in this case white women. Anna made sense of this man's race politics, as it were, by saying: 'I think there must be a lot of, a lot of hatred and envy [hm] that sticks around.' Her reference was to the oppression certain communities had suffered in South Africa's history which might make them full of hate and jealousy towards white people such that they might target white women for rape.

Alex repeated this same idea and logic, claiming to have the impression that white women were sometimes the targets of rape in the new South Africa. To make sense of her claim, it is necessary to put them in the context of her related comments on race politics in the new nation. Alex conveyed to me that her family had been detrimentally affected by post-colonial changes in Southern Africa: a family member in South Africa had been retrenched due to black affirmative action policies, and two had fled farm seizures and violence in Zimbabwe. Speaking of violence on farms in Zimbabwe and also South Africa, the latter allegedly "very hushed by the media," Alex explained that it sometimes felt that crime was purposely directed at white people. She continued:

And then I, I get the impression that rape is too. Like I don't have stats and stuff to back it up but just the way it's portrayed, comes across quite often as like.. eh angry black guy whose cross about the country's situation [hm] and the fact that he's em.. poor and stuff, em getting his revenge by raping a white woman [hm].

Hinting at the power of the statistics to prove ‘the truth’ of her claims, Alex’s contention was that black men target white women for rape as a form of racist revenge. She proposed the historical and socio-economic, if still pathological, motivations that would make such an act meaningful to the man as revenge. The rapist she thereby imagined was a disempowered and angry black man. His victim, by contrast, figured in Alex’s discourse as pure and innocent, for whom embodied, racialised privilege had become a dangerous signifier in the new order. She was the symbol of the previously dominant order, such that to rape her was imagined to represent an act of insubordination (Haag 1996; Sharpe 1993). As Alex constructed it, the white woman’s body and sexuality were effectively pawns of a racialised male political contest. However, in the context of her quote, and in keeping with her larger point, Alex did not problematise the *gender* politics of this imagined act of revenge, but rather the racial aspect.

Alex spoke of this rape script as an “impression” generally and often portrayed to her but was unsure of its exact source, as we see more below. Many scholars have argued by way of historical and discursive analyses, within and also beyond the South African context, that this is in fact a colonial and patriarchal rape script (Etherington 1988; Martens 2002; Moffett 2006; Sharpe 1993). One could posit that it is therefore part of the historical memory of a woman such as Alex. Moreover, Moffett argues that such rape narratives continue to dominate in the contemporary, post-apartheid context. She characterises them as the “standard stories of rape in South Africa” (2002, cited in 2006:135). Alex’s invocation of this script, in view especially of her struggle to source it, would suggest that it is indeed “standard,” simply familiar to her. In Alex’s description, using words that echo Moffett (2006), this script circulates in her world in the form of “stories.” Following directly from the quote above, Alex continued:

And I think that might just be a stereotype but that’s what I’ve got in my head [hm, hm, hm] so. [But where. You say it’s portrayed like that, by who? I mean] Em..maybe by stories that are told..em [uh-hm] (*timidly*) yeah, I’m not sure exactly [uh-hm]. I suppose (*bolder*) it’s just, just the things you hear [uh-hm, hm. But can you?] I em [sorry I mean I’m curious] yeah [because when you say stories that are told do you mean in the press or like stories that kind of?] Just stories that kind of filter around [hm].

It seemed to me that Alex became momentarily timid, her voice dropping, when I pressed her for more details about the rape script she was describing. She realised that she could not actually say with certainty where it came from, and recognised that it might be based on a stereotype. Even so, Alex maintained that she was certain of the existence of this script, and it was compelling to her, though she was unsure of its empirical enactment. Again following from her words above, Alex said: “Sorry I’m not sure where I get that from [no, no, yeah, yeah I mean] but I know that’s definitely very clear in my head [yeah], that I’ve got - when, when you think of rape you think of..black guy and it’s terrible.” Alex’s subsequent realisation was that she also had an immediate association between black men and crime, which she characterised as “horrible.” Yet she went on in the very next breath to say, with a short laugh, “but I know I’m not the only one who thinks like that.” I heard this as an attempt to justify, by contextualisation, the obviously sensitive and problematic views about race which she had just expressed. She was flagging the existence of a known or imagined community, to which she belonged, which subscribed to, and circulated, discourses of the sexually threatening black Other. With her little laugh, Alex was also saying, most implicitly, that she was not going to deeply problematise or relinquish the discursive position of white female victim available within this rape script, despite her recognition of some of its flaws.

I propose very briefly—for psychoanalysis is beyond the scope of this thesis and my expertise—that Alex’s comments can be read in light of Allen (2002) Bremner (2004) and Nuttall’s (2004) arguments on the psychoanalytic aspects of white talk of crime, violence and rape in the new South Africa. They can also be related to analyses of black rape scares in colonial South Africa (and, again, elsewhere), which scholars have variously theorised as manifestations of white, typically male, anxieties about political-economic instability or changes in gendered and other social relations (Etherington 1988; Martens 2002; Scully 1995). Bremner postulates that for white South Africans, crime—racialised black of course—has become the prism or “imaginary” through which the 1994 transition, effecting a loss of political power, institutionalised dominance and thus security, has been refracted (2004:461). It has also become the discourse in which the concomitant sense of instability and disempowerment may be socially expressed. Hence

“feelings of anxiety, impotence, loss, social decay, frustration and anger have been re-ordered through the rubric of crime” (Bremner 2004:461).

In view of such theory, my reading of Alex’s comments is that they are an articulation of anxieties about the uncertain place of the white Self in the new racial order. This anxiety is expressed through the historical and still dominant trope of the black male rapist violating the white female body. My analysis is further supported by the context in which Alex made the comments, namely while alleging white victimisation through affirmative action and farm seizures, and explaining how such changes have diminished her sense of ‘South African-ness,’ a theme excavated in Chapter 5. Finally, a psychoanalytic reading of Alex’s statements is also suggested by her apparent decision to continue to subscribe to this rape script even after she problematised its origins and empirical accuracy. This suggests that she may have had some “investment” in this particular kind of script, in Hollway’s (1984) sense that she subjectively and intersubjectively gained something from it. Perhaps, for instance, it allowed her to justify to me in the interview her stated anger at, and reported self-segregation from, the black and now politically dominant Other (also Allen 2002; Bremner 2004).

But if the rape script Alex described has a long and deep history, it also has a converse, with an equally long and possibly more brutal facticity. As Scully notes, the historiography of interracial rape in a context such as South Africa, and current discourses I would add, tend to focus on “elusive myths” of rape of the kind Alex shared. This ignores the “pervasive rape of black women by white men” (Scully 1995:337). Historically, the fact is that black women in colonial contexts have been more vulnerable to interracial rape than white women, a key reason being their intersectional—political, class and even spatial—subordination to white men, white racism, and white institutions (Crenshaw 1991; Scully 1995). Neo, a black woman, was not alluding to this history but was making a more general point when she suggested, in a throwaway comment, that a white man could also have racialised motivations to rape a black woman such as herself. Speaking of where or from whom she located the possibility of rape, she asserted: “Could even be my lecturer. *Any*-thing goes for me [hm hm]. You see, ‘oh his fantasy is to have sex with a black girl.’”

This statement came in the context of a broader assertion, examined in the discussion of the gender discourse of rape below and further in the next chapter, that she did not rule out any kind of rape scenario or potential rapist *a priori*. Therefore, her hypothetical example was that even her lecturer, implicitly a white and seemingly ‘respectable’ man could perpetuate such an act. The hypothetical motivation she supplied was one of in which she, as a black woman, was exoticised by such a man for whom she represented the Other and thus sexual adventure and excitement. Neo was referencing also old, racialised discourses of black women’s imagined hypersexuality, in which these women figure as “tantalizing objects for white men’s sexual dreams and fantasies” (Arnfred 2005:19). From Neo’s standpoint, relative to a white woman such as Alex, this was also a meaningful, imagined scenario in which race and racialisation—but also gender, power and desire— might motivate rape. However unlike Alex, Neo was not suggesting that race and race politics would be the *cause* of rape in her hypothetical case. Instead she proposed race as sometimes bringing an additional dynamic to the rape of women which Neo viewed, more generally and more fundamentally, as a gendered phenomenon. Gender is the focus of the following and last section of the chapter.

#### **“A General Attitude of Men *Across* the Country?”: The Gender Discourse**

The gender discourse constructed rape in terms of gendered relations between men and women. At that which I will call its most fundamental level, this discourse was inherent in all the women’s talk of rape in South Africa. At this level, the discourse gendered rape as something men do to women, in the literal sense that the rapist was imagined as a man and his victim a woman. This gendering of rape is apparent in all we have heard from the women in this chapter, in the discourses on the statistics, crime and race discussed above. It was also embedded in the manner in which *I* designed and carried out this research project, for example in the questions I asked my interviewees about their interactions with men, the kinds of men they feared and so forth. Only one woman, Violet, went beyond the scope of the discussion as I had implicitly though unintentionally boundaried it, asking me how I would theorise male-male rape.

I propose however that a discourse or set of ideas about gender was manifest at another level in some of the women's constructions of rape in South Africa. The present discussion will focus on the gender discourse at this level, looking at examples from five of the fifteen women interviewed. In the excerpts to be discussed, the discourse emphasised gendered aspects of men and women's subjectivities and intersubjective relations as central to imagining and explaining rape. It emphasised the social construction of gender, in short, as a causal variable in rape, over other factors such as crime, poverty and race which we heard invoked earlier. For this reason, the gender discourse was at times deployed in tension with the other discourses of rape the women drew upon. Excavating the gender discourse from their talk and contrasting it to the others above is therefore instructive to illustrate how the women variously used and moved through all four discourses of rape that I have identified and separated for analytic purposes in this chapter.

Because emphasising gender as a cause of rape, the gender discourse also differed from the other discourses we have seen above in terms of the rape identities it constructed. It identified the potential rapist as a man quite simply, not specifically a black man, a criminal, a figure located in the poor townships or lurking in uninhabited public spaces. He was neither bound in space nor time, nor was he assumed to necessarily assume a pathological form. Likewise, the terms of the discourse did not identify the imagined victim by her race or class status, or by her spatial location. She was defined by her gender identity, by the fact that she was a woman. For this reason, the gender discourse of rape appeared in some women's talk at the moments they were imagining and positioning themselves, as women, relative to the threat of rape. I do not elaborate on this subjective aspect of the discourse in the discussion to come because it is the concern of the following chapter

Tumi is a woman who has not been heard yet in this chapter. She repeated when we spoke that she was not really conscious of the issue of rape and hardly thought of it as a threat in her daily life. Accordingly, most of our discussion focused on her fears of crime, mugging in particular. Yet on rape she said the following: "I've heard a lot that you know rape actually happens, eh with people you actually know but..I, I haven't heard of any stories [hm] actually." She made this statement having shared two stories she *had*

heard, one involving her sister and the second a friend, in which these women had resorted to physical struggle to resist sexual advances from their male friends while socialising in their rooms. Although Tumi did not explicitly frame her comment or two narratives as such, they depicted rape as an act that occurs or is attempted in the course of men and women's interactions *because* of the interaction itself and the differential expectations and behaviours of the gendered subjects within it. Tumi did not figure rape as possible or attempted within the scenarios she described because of any particular attributes of the individual men within them such as their race, class or even pathological character, as a different discursive focus might. In her account, what had essentially happened was that a "guy" was "chilling" with a woman "until whatever time and the guy seems to get the impression that this is going somewhere," at which point aggressive sexual moves were made.

Tumi's narration of these stories remained descriptive; she did not analyse or deconstruct them. Suzanne, in contrast, sought to understand and theorise rape in terms of gendered dynamics, because speaking from and struggling to make sense of her own experiences. As mentioned earlier, Suzanne had two experiences which she directly linked to rape and which, she explained, had directly shaped her analysis of it. In the terms of my analysis, Suzanne's experiences had caused her to move through various discourses and theories of rape to arrive at gender. Suzanne recounted first that she had once been forcibly pinned against a wall in a nightclub by a boy she knew while he shoved his tongue down her throat. He was a member of her affluent community and in her high school class. She reported that he had held her so tightly that she had marks on her wrists when eventually released. Suzanne's second assault was also committed by a middle-class white boy whom I will call Thomas, an acquaintance from a college where she had been taking a course. It was a case of attempted rape in which this man locked her in an empty bathroom, threatened her with a broken bottle and tried to tear off her clothes. Suzanne relayed to me that she had eventually managed to defuse the situation by staying calm but talking continuously to Thomas, variously pleading and threatening to scream or prosecute him.

I told Suzanne later in the interview that in comparison to the other women I had already spoken with, she was one of the few to raise the possibility of rape "in her circle,"

not only “on the other side of town.” Her response was that it was perhaps these two experiences that had taught or, more precisely, *shocked* her into realising that potential dangers from men lurked closer than she had ever previously considered:

Maybe these couple of experiences have made me realise that it can be guys that I sort of.. know. . . Em it is still hard to think, but I suppose like this incident with Thomas, it took me completely by surprise [hm]. I, the..shock was, it was just em unbelievable shock. . . I never even.. *never* would have even crossed my mind that something like that could happen [hm] or that anyone of these guys I knew at the college could [could be like that] could be like that.

Suzanne could not fathom, in other words, that men such as these, with whom she normally associated and enjoyed herself, could inflict this kind of violence upon her. These two experiences of sexual assault directly contradicted the discourses of rape and male violence otherwise known to her, and the kinds of men and spaces she had therefore imagined as dangerous. To repeat and expand upon an excerpt from Suzanne which I presented under the crime discourse of rape, her earlier feeling had been:

like nothing could happen to me, like [uh-hm] you know rape, I never even considered that it would happen to me.... I think you always think that.. rape is going to happen from some, some em, some creepy looking stranger lurking down the [hm] path at the side of your road [hm or the bushes something]. Yeah it's. I didn't think, you know, these good-looking guys from Bishop's and Rondebosch Boys, the top schools [yeah], like boys' schools, you know, are going to be rapists [hm] you know. It just didn't, didn't make sense.

Her experience had taught her that the stranger-danger or crime discourse of rape was insufficient to chart and negotiate potential danger, because this discourse excluded wealthy, ‘normal’ boys from consideration.

Apart from the pure shock that the two incidents had occurred, the second especially, Suzanne struggled to make sense of why. It was in this regard that she began to frame her experiences in terms of hegemonic gendered norms which may excuse male violence against women and ignore its adverse effects upon them. In short, she began to take up the gender discourse of rape as I have defined it here. Observing the way her two assaulters nonchalantly acted after the events for instance, Suzanne came to consider that assaulting a woman was not opposed to being “respectable” for these men. It was simply one aspect of their masculine identity. Speaking of the first boy who had since gone on to

gain public recognition as a religious and morally upright member of their shared community, Suzanne explained:

I've come to think there's things that guys think are acceptable [uh-hm] like I've said but.. that like in his mind, he can be religious and pious and good [uh-hm, uh-hm] and that is still ok, what he did [and do that], in his mind.

Similarly, Suzanne wondered what it was about Thomas, including his family background, that could have motivated him to try and rape her. She explained that in her anger she had wanted to cast him in a pathological light, to see and show others that there was something fundamentally wrong with him. This was not possible though because from her interactions with him before the incident, and her observations afterwards, Suzanne had to admit to herself that he was not fundamentally wicked: "I wanted everyone there to sort of see what a scumbag he was [uh-hm uh-hm] and like to recognise it. But he wasn't, he was just a normal guy."

Ultimately, as indicated, this was the perspective that the gender discourse gave those women who deployed or emphasised it over others. It constructed rape as an act that "normal" men, of various hues, dispositions and social backgrounds, could and did perpetrate. Discursively this was possible because the will to rape was located within, and explained by, a gendered subjectivity versus, again, a racial, criminal or class subjectivity. Violet, for example, dismissed suggestions by some of her male friends that a friend of theirs had been falsely accused of rape with the words: "It's not so much that they don't believe that men can rape [hm], they just don't believe that that specific man can rape [uh-hm]. As to the reason why they believe he's special, I don't know." The implication here was that any man could be guilty of rape; there were no "special" characteristics which *a priori* meant a particular man would never rape a woman. Moreover, Violet theorised rape in South Africa in terms of socially constructed notions of masculinity, including their dialectical relationship to femininity:

From my understanding em of of, and from what I've heard and read about like [hm] rape and that, is that em it's not about the sex. It's, it's a power struggle and it's about men who are struggling to..men who are struggling to to find their identity [uh-hm], their sexual identity as a man [uh-hm] in the sense that em – ok maybe not sexual identity. I guess what I mean is: what does it mean to be a man [uh-hm] and what does it mean to be a man and in relation to a woman.

Violet was proposing that men raped because of their subjection to notions of masculinity which involved asserting power over women. In this case rape was not about sex *per se* or sexual desire, but rather gendered power relations and identities. Sasha concurred on this point in relation to the phenomenon of gang rape in South Africa. She suggested it was about men being “macho,” that is proving their masculinity to other men through an act of violence upon women. Making this analysis caused Sasha to problematise her earlier view, heard in various guises throughout the chapter, that rape in South Africa was linked to poverty in the country. Of gang-rape she said:

that has more to do with like m-m, like male, macho, macho ideologies [hm] than than even poverty, sort of em, trends [hm]. So actually there is so much that factors into it so [hmm] I suppose I have to reassess my initial statement that I think poverty breeds it.

Sasha’s references to “it” in this quote were to the broader phenomenon of rape in South Africa, not just gang rape. Having self-reflexively found her ‘poverty thesis’ to be lacking to explain gang-rape, Sasha went on to consider the dynamics that might drive another form of rape, date rape. She had told me earlier in the interview that the only woman she knew who claimed to have been raped alleged that it had happened when a boy at a neighbouring school had drugged her. Now, pondering “the fact that a wealthy white boy will slip a rohypnol tablet<sup>7</sup> into a gi-girls drink and then proceed to date rape her,” the insufficiency of her poverty thesis again seemed clear to Sasha. Indeed she did not know how to even theorise this kind of rape case: “I don’t understand what men, you know, what..forces are driving him to do that.” This led her to question what, indeed, could be concluded about the phenomenon of rape in and across South Africa. Her question was if rape was not actually, fundamentally, about gendered subjectivities and relations:

So is it an individual, like psychological thing, em or is it.. like a general attitude of men *across* the country [hm] like from all different..socio-economic brackets? [Hm.] Em is it like some attitude that they have towards women in general, that’s a culture in this country as a whole? [Hm.] I don’t know. But I suppose that’s what you’re trying to find out *laughing*.

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<sup>7</sup> This is a date rape drug which has a sedative effect if ingested.

Feminist analyses of rape in South Africa have and would answer Sasha's questions in the affirmative, arguing that the rape of women by men *does* span class, race and culture in this country, because it is at base about men's "attitude" towards women, to use Sasha's word (Bennett 2005; du Toit 2005). Bennett states of all gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa, not just rape: there is "overwhelming evidence that GBV occurs within all classes, and all South African communities, shaped and identified as they are by race, cultural affiliation and religion (2005:29).

Neo, the last of the fifteen women who shall be heard from in this chapter, claimed to recognise this fact and thereby presented herself as a subject with critical insights into hegemonic discourses of rape in South Africa which would say otherwise. As she spoke, she problematised such discourses explicitly or implicitly, including those which I labeled the statistical, crime and race discourses in this chapter, because they functioned to concentrate rape in South Africa within specific populations. Remember, for instance, that Neo deconstructed the racialisation of the rape statistics in the mainstream media and popular imagination. She argued that this racialisation was politically motivated and that to figure the rapist as a black man was unrepresentative of the full scope of rape that occurred in the country. Likewise, in the discussion on discourses of race above, Neo was seen to suggest that a white male lecturer at UCT was not incapable of raping a woman such as herself, though he would not fit into dominant racialised, classed or criminalised constructions of the rapist. It was in this vein that Neo offered her emphatic response to my question of what cues she had for men that might be a threat to her:

I don't have any categories whatsoever [hm]. It could be the man in a black suit and a red tie... like your corporate man kind of like [oh ok] you know like very corporate, cleaned up [yeah yeah], shaved up, shining shoes. It could be him [hm]. It could be the *bergie*.. [ok]. Could be [ok so you don't discriminate in other words?] Could be the security guard, yeah.... I rule out nothing, I rule out nothing.

With these words Neo was saying that rape was an interaction between men, as men, and women, as women. Therefore the potential rapist defied uni-dimensional construction or representation in discourse. In this extract above, Neo was also constructing and mapping the threat of rape in her own life, and suggesting its subjective implications for her. This is the subject matter of Chapter 5. I offer first a brief summary of the present chapter.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I traced four discourses or schemas of meaning through which the women in this study constructed rape in South Africa. I showed first that many invoked the rape statistics to legitimise their view that rape is now very prevalent in the country. The women subsequently spoke explicitly or implicitly about crime, class, race and gender, variously mixing and melding these variables, to explain the alleged prevalence of rape in their society, and to create the image of the rapist and his victim. Together then, the women's four discourses of rape rehearsed a logic, albeit ultimately incomplete, to theorise and locate the rape crisis in South Africa.

In doing so, the women were constructing and performing themselves as knowing subjects of rape in their contemporary society. They drew upon different sources of knowledge with varying degrees of authority. The most typical sources included other women's alleged rape experiences, expert and self-defense discourses, as well as stereotypes and rumours. The women's relevant personal experiences also figured as an important source of their knowledge of rape including, for many, their starting claim to have never experienced rape, which served then to distance its occurrence from their normal social environments. Despite this, in the next chapter we explore the manner in which the women spoke of rape as possibly implicating and impacting upon them as subjects living in South Africa today.

## 5 Imagining Self

The previous chapter presented how the women in this study constructed and explicated the occurrence of rape in South Africa. This chapter now moves to consider how, in so doing, the women were imagining and speaking of themselves. It explores the gendered and embodied subject positions they variously took up, negotiated or rejected relative to rape. To this end, the chapter proceeds thematically, considering first the women's mapping of danger and safety; then their discourses of vulnerability and resistance; sexuality and violation; and rights and belonging in South Africa. These themes recurred across the data and emerged then as key to explore how the women related rape to themselves, and compared their own experiences to it. Given that the women claimed that they could only speak of rape as a hypothetical experience in their lives, I show below that the imagination became a key site or faculty through which they constructed its subjective meanings and implications.

### **“Just Knowing Rape is So High”: Mapping Danger and Safety**

The women in this study mapped the danger of rape in their own lives according to how they discursively constructed and located the phenomenon in the wider South African context. Because, as argued in Chapter 4, the majority of the women subscribed to the crime or stranger-danger discourse of rape, it followed that they tended to construct their personal risk of rape as public, indiscriminate and embodied by strange men. It was also suggested in Chapter 4 that one effect of the women's use of the statistical discourse of rape was to distance the phenomenon as occurring “out there” in South Africa, to restate Alex's words, because the statistics far exceeded the empirical cases the women knew of within their social circles. This statistical distancing of rape reinforced the notion that the threat was located in public. At the same time, for four women, it set up rape as a danger that one was likely to encounter *because* so statistically prevalent, albeit in the contexts and with the kinds of men discursively associated with rape in the first place, seen in Chapter 4. In other words it constructed rape as likely if one happened to be ‘in the wrong place at the wrong time’ in South Africa.

Anna recognised that her subjective interpretation of the rape statistics was incorrect, yet it still informed her mapping of risk and fear. Having explained that she tended to treat unknown men with more caution than women, Anna elaborated with the hypothetical example of how she would feel if she came across a group of men versus women in “an empty parking lot at night.” This was the very scenario in which “most” women’s rapes were said to occur by Vanessa in Chapter 4—a scenario which I located within the crime discourse of rape. According to Anna, if she were alone and were to encounter a group of men within a quiet car park, her thought process would be “well always, in any case, the idea that one might get raped you know.” The interchange below followed on from this comment:

[Hm, so you would say that that is..?] Yah it is a big fear [oh really?] you know, ja, ja. The statistics are pretty scary, you know. And I mean, I know that a lot of those cases are actually by people that are known [yeah] and they’re.. [ja, ja].. (*long pause*) but even so.

Anna’s description of the rape statistics in South Africa as “scary” suggested that they had a bearing on her own stated, significant fear of rape. Indeed, the structure of her comments suggested that the statistics, or rather her knowledge or imagination of them, had a *causal* effect on her fear. Intellectually Anna knew that the statistics referred less to rapes occurring in the kind of stranger-danger scenario she had imagined than rapes in more intimate or private contexts. However, with the words “but even so,” Anna was saying that despite this knowledge, the statistics heightened her fear of rape within the scenarios in which she subjectively located the possibility of rape, such as meeting strange men in a quiet public space. Conversely, at no point during the interview did Anna speak of such fear or the risk of rape in the domestic space or with familiar men, though she claimed to know, from the quote above, that this was where the statistics would actually warn her to be most wary.

This point is important because it underscores that while risk may be a statistical matter, one of probabilities, the *imagination* of risk, which informs people’s fears, behaviours and safety strategies, is subjective. It is not a “mathematical function of actual risks” to borrow Koselka’s words (1997:304), but is informed by a multitude of factors including one’s social positioning, experiences, and, again, imagination and understanding of the very danger in question. Consider Mimi who theorised rape in South

Africa with the maxim “desperate people do desperate things,” meaning by this that the rape crisis was linked to the rampant poverty in the country but also the act of (consequently) warped minds. Mimi spoke at considerable length about a “psychopath” figure she came across almost daily on her train commute from home to campus. Her description was of a destitute, foul-smelling man, possibly on drugs, who “singles out young girls” on the train begging for small change. When I asked Mimi, out of the context of discussing this man, if rape was ever on her mind, she referred immediately back to him. Because she always refused to give this man any money, Mimi claimed to fear that “he might.. you know assault me or even rape me [hm] you know that’s why I’ve been thinking a lot about it.” To explain why it made sense for her to conceive that her interaction with this man could end this way, Mimi continued: “Just knowing that rape is high in this country now [hm, hm], it makes me.. more..you know [hm] thinking along the lines that he might.”

Here Mimi was drawing on both the crime and statistical discourses of rape in South Africa, her personal theory above that rape was linked to desperation, as well as her embodied emotions of discomfort around the man on the train, to construct a subjective “geography of danger” (Valentine 1997:70). She cited her “knowing” of the rape statistics as the legitimate source of her view that rape might be a possible script of action for the man to vent his frustration upon her. Her reasoning in this regard was that the statistics showed many men in South Africa were now enacting this script, that is raping women, so *she imagined* that this individual man also could or might. Thus her knowledge claims about the statistics stimulated and shaped her imagination of her personal risk. They gave a certain meaning to her routine encounters with the man on the train which went beyond the present to anticipate and fear a possible, future experience. This imagined location of risk, coupled, again, with Mimi’s uneasiness around the man, led her to try and avoid him on the train, including sitting in a different coach if necessary.

Alex and Sasha also claimed to have experienced feeling at risk of rape in South Africa via their statistical imaginings of it. It could be argued that Alex, like Mimi, told of experiences in which nothing actually happened, in which she had not even had physical contact with the men she claimed to fear. These experiences were of “catcalling,”

that is being subjected to sexualised calls from unknown men in public. Alex's experiences are significant from a feminist perspective because she reported feeling uncomfortable within them and because, as feminists argue, they are the kinds of routine enactments of male power under patriarchy which may heighten women's feelings of gendered vulnerability (e.g. Kelly and Radford 1996). Alex had just returned from a long holiday in England so she was able to provide a telling comparison between the meaning she made of such experiences here in South Africa and abroad. In Alex's subjective experience and analysis, catcalling was more sinister in South Africa than in England: "I found overseas, even when guys catcall and that kind of thing [hm hm], you don't feel.. the fear that you feel when you're back in South Africa." Interested in this comment, in part because it spoke to my subjective and embodied experiences of moving across a number of national spaces into South Africa in 2006, I probed further:

[Hm, well, well why do you think, like, the fear is stronger here than overseas, if it's the same sort of.. catcalling or whatever?] Em maybe.. maybe because it's more serious here [uh-hm] and I know like of the statistics and stuff, that more people get raped [uh-hm] and that kind of thing.

Reasoning similarly to Mimi, Alex drew a direct causal link between her claimed knowledge of South Africa's rape statistics, her interpretation of her experiences, and thus her mapping of risk and fear. Prior 'knowledge' of the statistics led Alex to read or imagine an ominously threatening undertone in certain kinds of sexualised encounters with men in South Africa that could otherwise be experienced as routine and fleeting, if unwanted or even offensive. She contrasted the same experiences of catcalling as "funny", "it wasn't like bad in any way" in England, a country not statistically and discursively constructed as rape-dense. Her subjective imagination and experience of catcalling as dangerous was therefore specific to the South African context. Indeed Alex said that these experiences served as "the most common thing that you get that [hm] reminds you of.. the fact that it is dangerous" to be woman here. It followed from this that she made efforts to keep safe by, for instance, avoiding certain roads where she knew there were lots of construction workers because these were often the kinds of men who catcalled: "like Claremont Main Road, I hate that road, like I never walk past unless like I really really have to."

To characterise Alex's interpretation of the meanings of catcalling in South Africa as a function of her imagination is by no means to dismiss it as "illusory or faulty" (Stoetzler and Yuval Davis 2002:322). Nor is to discount that women (and men) may have important intuitions about their danger and safety which cannot be rationalised. Rather, Alex could be said to have been imagining the meanings of catcalling in that she was constructing knowledge about her experiences which transcended her constructions of what actually happened when men catcalled, namely they called and she ignored. She was thinking beyond the 'facts' of these experiences as she recounted them to me to imagine what they could mean, imply or lead to. That this imagination of danger is situated and subjective is illustrated by comparing Alex's feelings about being catcalled in South Africa to other women such as Violet and Suzanne. Violet said that it was an everyday event for men to make sexualised comments to her on the streets here. However, she did not construe this as fearful or ominously implying rape, but rather as an irritating and insulting experience. Suzanne, by contrast, as we will explore in the discourses of sex and power later in the chapter, reported that she used to find it empowering to attract the male gaze by being overtly sexy in public.

Sasha's reconstruction of a mugging experience is useful to further the point I am making here about the centrality of the imagination to the women's constructions and charting of their personal risk of rape. Sasha recounted to me that she had once been mugged in broad daylight in Cape Town. When two men came after her, she dropped the things she was carrying, including her wallet and phone, and ran for safety. She assumed the men took these things but crucially, Sasha was not sure if this was all they had wanted: "my gut, my instinct or my, my gut reaction or gut feeling was that they actually wanted *me* [yeah] to drag *me* (*inaudible*) so that was a terrifying sort of feeling." She theorised the origins and logic of this feeling thus:

overseas if you get mugged em you know, it's a horrible experience [hm], they might sort of flash a knife at you and rip your bag off but it's not y, you don't ever think that it's *you* that they want [hm]. Whereas in this country, with sort of *rape* statistics being where they are [hm] em.. the, the additional *fear* that is added on to that, or the additional suspicion that you get [hm] is that they actually want *you* as well.

Sasha was explicitly drawing on the statistical discourse of rape in South Africa to contextualise and make sense of her mugging experience, as we have heard Mimi and

Alex also do. Yet she could be said to have been working her statistical imagination in a slightly different manner from these women, perhaps because she had been imagining rape in the context of an actual, physical attack. While Mimi and Alex invoked the rape statistics to identify the future possibility of rape within certain routine experiences, Sasha was constructing rape as probable within the moment of her attack, because she imagined, thinking of the statistics, that rape was its very *motivation*. Her “gut feeling” had been that the men ultimately wanted not her bags, but her very self and body (“*you*”)—an imbrication of rape of selfhood we will return to later. Sasha imagined that rape was the men’s ultimate intention because she imagined the statistics to show that this was now the case with certain men—here criminals—in South Africa, which would not necessarily have been her fear had she been mugged “overseas.” As Sasha later elaborated, she had not only feared rape more than mugging when the men attacked her, she had *expected* it more: “I don’t just mean it’s *scarier*, I’d say that’s what you anticipate [hm] it’s, it’s the thing that you’re more wary of.”

In this last quote, Sasha was claiming that the heightened expectation of rape as possible in South Africa caused her to live in a state of general wariness and anticipation. While this may be so, it must be noted that Sasha’s mapping of her risk and wariness of rape was bounded by her discursive constructions of the phenomenon in the country. In Chapter 4 we saw that Sasha focused on the public space as potentially dangerous, in part because she racialised and classed rape as the affair of the distant Other. This meant that she did not ordinarily locate the threat or possibility of rape in her predominantly white, affluent world, but tended to think of it as something she might only randomly encounter in democratic public spaces, such as on the street where she was mugged. Importantly though, Sasha did recognise that her risk of such encounters was mediated by her privilege and social position. Her mugging, she explained, had been out of character for the wealthy suburb in which it had occurred: “It was very strange [yeah] especially in like a really, i-it’s a, it’s it’s a nice suburb. . .not what usually goes on there.” Another white, middle-class woman, Anna, echoed that in practical terms, her class status reduced her personal risk of rape—that is, risk as she subjectively located it, namely in public or if her private space was breached by a stranger. Anna noted that her class power shaped her use of, and passage through, public space, and also enabled her to better protect her

private space: “I can afford to be more protected you know [uh-hm]. I don’t have to catch trains late at night and things like that.”

Mimi, we just heard, was a woman who *did* travel by train twice daily and located her risk of rape precisely in this commute. She recounted that in the past her father used to drop her off on campus by car on his way to his work. Presumably some change in circumstance had brought an end to this arrangement and Mimi, who I located as coming from a lower middle-class background, did not have her own car like more economically privileged women such as Anna and Sasha. Nonetheless, Mimi too characterised traveling by train *at night* as beyond the bounds of conceivable risk for a woman such as herself, while recognising, like Anna did above, that others might not be so fortunate. Moreover she directly linked the potential risk of such a journey to rape. When I asked her if she ever took the trains at night, Mimi laughed:

nooo (*laughing*) never [oh really?] I would never ever travel train by night oh gosh, that’s like asking to die (*short laugh*) [really?] basically [is it that bad?] I think it is because em, rape is so high in this country you know. . . so I’d never do that (*short laugh*) [Hm, but do people do that? I mean?] Ja I think there is, because some people work night shift and they have to take the train [take the train] that time.

Neo took a different approach from the women heard from thus far when it came to imagining and mapping her personal risk of rape. This was because of the also different manner in which she constructed and understood rape in the first place. As we saw in Chapter 4, Neo drew strongly on that which I called the gender discourse to refute notions that rape was the province of only certain kinds of men in South Africa, or that it did not happen “behind closed doors” in all communities. Consequently, we saw that she presented herself as a woman who made no blanket distinctions between men when she imagined their potential to rape. To restate her words on this from the previous chapter: “I don’t have any categories whatsoever. . .I rule out nothing, I rule out nothing.” Just as rape was, for Neo, primarily a matter of gender relations, not race, class or crime, so she constructed her risk of it primarily in terms of her gendered identity and body. This meant that she located the threat or risk of rape to herself, as a woman, as potentially coming from anywhere, anytime, from any man. Again recalling her words from Chapter 4, the potential rapist could be her university lecturer, a corporate, working-class or homeless man.

The subjective impact of this view, Neo explained, was a constant, though usually subconscious, fear of rape. Feminists have argued that this is true for many women in patriarchal societies (Gordon and Riger 1981) though I have suggested through the empirical examples here that this fear was variable, subjective and situated for the women in this thesis. While a woman like Neo claimed a general and therefore continuous fear, we just saw that Anna and Sasha emphasised their fear in public, and other women in Chapter 4 and below reported fearing particular kinds of men such as criminals or black men. I interviewed Neo in an empty room on campus where she had hidden away to study. Having said that she did fear rape, I asked: “like what sort of scenario do you.. imagine or fear, do you see what I mean?” At first Neo did not take kindly to this question, sounding irritated as she said: “what do you mean, I don’t sit down and imagine scenarios.” She thought that I was asking her if she ever imagined the experience of being raped, whereas I clarified that I was asking about what scenarios she took to be “threatening.” Neo replied with the words:

anything eh, even sitting in this room.. [Hm, you mean being here alone or what?] Yeah. I mean I don’t think anything would happen, I’m most probably going to be fine, it’s such a small faculty [hm]. But yesterday I was here up until like 6, 7, and that’s when people are leaving and stuff you know [yeah], I was like ‘oh god’ [it’s quiet ] it’s quiet.

In this excerpt, Neo was revealing something of the strategies she had used to calm her fears and reassure herself that she would be safe when she had been alone in a quiet building—vulnerable in a context of risk in other words. She was doing that which Koselka calls “reasoning,” being “a strategy to contain fear” and “a way of maintaining sufficient courage to avoid fear and, thus, to live without it (1997:306). Neo’s further words suggested that “by reasoning the fear out of her mind a woman can gain more confidence and reclaim space for herself” (Koselka 1997:306). Neo explained to me that after having thought about the risk of rape and her vulnerability as she studied alone in the building the evening before, she had eventually forced herself to put such thoughts out of her mind so that she would not be paralysed by them but “you know, just live your life.” She was consciously managing her fear and rationalising away her subjective sense of risk, concluding therefore that she would “most probably” be safe.

Yet counter to Neo's example which, as I said, appears to fulfill feminist theories about the centrality of the fear of rape to women's identities and lives, other women claimed that they hardly imagined or feared the risk to themselves under most circumstances. As I will argue in the following section of the chapter below, this did not mean they did not position themselves as vulnerable to rape if it were ever attempted, but that they did not imagine any such attempt as likely. Olivia, for instance, claimed that she did not really see much risk of rape in her life, and did not report feeling at risk when, like Sasha, she had been the victim of a mugging. Other women like Vanessa expressed more consciousness and concern about crime in general, not rape specifically. Still others claimed to be unaware of their risk because they were ignorant about the issue of rape itself. I want to conclude this section of the chapter by considering two such women: Kudzai and Tumi.

We saw in the previous chapter that Kudzai presented herself as deeply uninformed about the question of rape in South Africa or indeed elsewhere, in part because it was never talked about in her native Zimbabwe. She responded to my question asking if she thought about, or was aware of, rape with the words: "hardly at all.. I'm not terrified of rapists, maybe because I.. never experienced someone close who has been raped." Tumi was seen also in Chapter 4 to claim a normal state of obliviousness to the issue of rape, and thus claimed the same about her personal risk of it. She repeated that she was "paranoid" about becoming a victim of mugging, an experience a number of friends had suffered around UCT. Proudly telling a friend that she kept safe by leaving all her valuables at home while out jogging, Tumi recounted that it had come as a shock to be told by this friend: "that's not the only thing that happens to women, what are you talking about?" Her friend was referring here to rape, naturalising it as a gendered phenomenon which therefore, necessarily, concerned Tumi as a woman. "Like oh!" was Tumi's recalled response to this friend, as she came to terms with her apparent naiveté. The sense from Tumi was that her friend had made realise that her preoccupation with keeping safe from would-be muggers had led her to naïvely leave rape off her risk map. According to this friend, there was still a risk inherent for Tumi in going jogging, namely that she was exposing her gendered *body* to danger.

Tumi had earlier said to me that the possibility of rape did sometimes enter into her mind when she heard relevant “stories,” which would cause her to reflect on her relative risk and safety. We heard two such stories from Tumi in Chapter 4, in which her sister and friend had been forced to “scuffle scuffle” with male friends to escape from their sexual advances. It was after I heard Tumi tell these women’s stories that I asked her if rape was something that *she* thought about. Her reply:

Not really come to think about it. I know when a story like that comes out you start thinking about how safe you are [hm], and being very careful with the males you know, only hang out with the males you know for a fact, not acquaintances. But not really, shame.

As with the exchange with her friend cited above, Tumi seemed to be realising as she replied to me the extent to which she lacked a normal consciousness of rape as a personal threat. Moreover, she was recognising that breaks in her relative unconsciousness of rape tended to be short-lived, and did not lead her, “shame,” to fundamentally reassess her risk and modify her behaviour accordingly. Intrigued, I could not resist commenting to Tumi that her claim to feel generally safe in Cape Town differed significantly from most of the other women I had interviewed. Tumi proposed to theorise this difference, saying:

I don’t know, I think sometimes though it’s also the experiences you’ve had. If it’s never happened you don’t think about it cause it’s never happened [hm] but once you’re faced with it, or somebody you know it actually happened to, then it’s a bit more concrete than an idea [yeah]. Cause I think now it’s still an idea. Sure I know it happens but it’s never happened to anyone I know [hm] so it’s like [it’s distant] yeah.

My comment to Tumi which prompted this reply had been referring to the other’s women reported fears of violence generally, whereas it is clear from the quote above that Tumi was responding about rape specifically. Her theory was an epistemological one, in which she cited experience, including the experience of other women’s rape experiences, as a source of knowing which would shape and give substance to one’s subjective views and fears of rape. In this account, experience had the power to transform abstract or even absent knowledge of a social phenomenon such as rape into a concrete and significant reality. Ideas, however, had lesser epistemological status in Tumi’s theory; and in her personal life thus far, rape was only an idea.

This theory is of course counter to the epistemological premise of this thesis, as outlined in Chapter 2. Moreover, it does not suffice to explain why women such as

Kudzai and Tumi claimed a much lesser awareness or personal fear of rape than others, since all the women in this study claimed not to have had the experience of rape. In the terms of the epistemology of this thesis, Tumi and Kudzai's stated unawareness of rape can rather be related to their relative disengagement with, and absent investment in, ideas and discourses of rape. As I showed in Chapter 4 and mentioned above, both women claimed not to know much about rape in the first place, Kudzai especially. Kudzai even suggested that this lack of knowledge was discursive by claiming that rape was simply not on the agenda in her home context. Therefore my analysis would be that she lacked a language with which to speak or frame rape, and did not have access to discourses which presumed to tell or warn her about it. Put simply, she did know much about rape therefore she did not discursively imagine herself relative to it. Tumi, similarly, had heard and knew much more about the threat of mugging from friends, hence it was the imagined experience of crime which predominated in her mind. Conversely, as I have attempted to argue in this section of the chapter, the ideas and discourses with which other women constructed rape, and the extent to which they knew and subscribed to some over others, deeply influenced how they imagined and also experienced rape as a possible occurrence in their own lives.

#### **“As a Woman”: Discourses of Gendered Vulnerability and Resistance**

In this section of the chapter, I explore if, how and to what degree discourses of vulnerability and resistance figured in the women's self-positioning relative to rape. The theme of vulnerability is deeply intertwined with the women's discursive constructions of risk, danger and safety, and was strongly present in all of the excerpts above. Yet while the discussion above concerned where and with whom the women located risk in their lives and imagined themselves to be vulnerable, here the focus is on their constructions of this vulnerability in itself. That is to say, the present discussion is concerned with if and why the women imagined and experienced themselves as vulnerable or resisting actors, *within* their various scenes of risk. The separation I am proposing here between the women's subjective sense of risk and vulnerability is heuristic. But it also emerged from the interview data because, as I said above and will endeavour to substantiate here, all the

women except one, Hazel, constructed themselves as inherently vulnerable to an act of violence such as rape even if they did not feel at particular risk of it. Imagined risk and vulnerability were not equivalent in other words.

Sarah's example fleshes out the distinction between risk and vulnerability I am suggesting here. In Chapter 4, we saw Sarah to firmly believe that rape in South Africa was perpetrated by criminal men, for which she gave the example of rapes occurring during housebreakings. It followed that she situated her own risk of rape in the possibility of being a victim of a housebreaking. According to Sarah, the thought of this crime, housebreaking *with* rape, scared her more than any other, though she could not say with certainty how likely it was relative to others she might experience:

Em and of all the crime possibly that could happen to me, *that one* freaks me out the most [hm] definitely, definitely, definitely. Whether it's more of a, an option when I say that, I mean if it's more likely or not [hm hm] is, is, I, I, I don't know.

Within Sarah's inability to quantify her relative risk of this crime was the recognition that it may never actually occur. She spoke in the conditional; she did not construct the experience of housebreaking as a given. Indeed Sarah did not think that the experience of any crime was an inevitable part of life in South Africa; she remarked that despite having lived in Johannesburg all her life, with its "huge reputation" as crime-dense, she had never personally been victimised by any crime whatsoever.

Nonetheless, if she *were* someday a victim of a housebreaking, thus within her imagined scene of risk, Sarah insisted to my evident surprise that her rape would be virtually inevitable: "I would, I would almost say it's like a foregone conclusion like, that if they did break into the house and I was in it they probably would rape me like [really?] yah I would think so." She immediately contradicted this view with the reference, cited in Chapter 4, to a female friend of a friend who had suffered a housebreaking and was made to follow the thieves around the house but was *not* raped. Despite this contrary example, Sarah continued with her initial line of thinking:

I would think like in a situation like that.. I – if someone walked into my house and I was there, I would just assume that that was going to happen to me [yeah] you know and that would be my first thought, like 'how do I get out of here without being raped,' as opposed to like anything else.

While this excerpt hints at the possibility of resistance or escape, I want to focus for now on Sarah's construction of herself within the scene as above all vulnerable to rape. When pressed as to why she so strongly associated rape with housebreaking that she would imagine that the two almost inevitably went hand in hand, Sarah conceded that she had no statistics or 'facts' to back it up: "I don't think it's a particularly educated opinion. . . I haven't sort of heard like out of a 100 housebreakings, 90 of them result in rape." Rather, she continued, her view was based on her subjective imagination or "gut" feeling of how vulnerable one would be to rape in such an encounter:

it's just for me like I think because you're so vulnerable in that situation [hm] eh I think that the men who are breaking into your house, they are obviously aggressive – when I say that like they're breaking into your house so there's a level of aggression. . . . Yah it's more sort of a gut thing. Maybe it's because I would be so scared of it [uh-hm] that I just assume, like *that's* the obvious thing that's going to happen [hm, hm] you know.

These comments were speculations about the likely actions of the men within the imagined rape scene, based on constructions of their masculinity. At the same time, the comments were premised upon, and functioned to (re)produce, a certain female subjectivity relative to such men. This subjectivity is one of gendered and embodied vulnerability to rape. The gendered subject with which Sarah identified, and the body she implicitly imagined herself to inhabit within the scene, were marked by their "obvious" rapability. Furthermore, Sarah offered her very fear of rape as another reason for why she imagined her rape—and hence her rapability—as almost certain if faced with male intruders in her home. In the terms of Marcus' (1992) poststructuralist analysis of the scripted nature of rape, Sarah was taking up and imagining performing the position of a subject of fear *even before rape or indeed the rape scene had occurred*. Marcus argues that this is the very subjectivity assigned to women in a patriarchal rape script which thereby, precisely, encourages their rape (1992:390-4; also McCaughey 1998:285).

Causally linking women's fear to the occurrence of rape is by no means to suggest that the fearful subject is therefore responsible if her rape occurs, having brought it upon herself. Rather the point here and in Marcus' (1992) work is to problematise the material and embodied effects of hegemonic discourses of women's vulnerability to rape. The theoretical position in Chapter 2 was that such discourses may have an adverse impact on

women because, amongst other things, they limit the ways in which women imagine their capacity for violence and therefore also limit their embodied reactions to threats or incidents of violence. Neo's story provides a compelling enactment of this theory. She told me about an experience with a man she had met and holidayed with in a group of mutual friends. According to her, the two had spent a lot of time together, even platonically sharing a bed for want of sufficient sleeping space. When, one afternoon, this man asked Neo to follow him to an isolated room of the house to check his e-mail, she did so without hesitation. Once they got there, he locked the door—innocuously and out of habit he later explained. Yet Neo recounted that she had immediately begun to imagine that she was going to be raped or otherwise sexually assaulted. Her reaction:

I panicked. . . I freaked, I was like frozen. . . You see that's probably like.. my closest – cause I was like 'my god' [hm] that's the thing, first thing that came to my head you know. [But 'my god' what? Like?] What if he decides to force himself on me? I mean look we'd been flirting or what, what have you [uh-hm friendly, yeah yeah] like kisses here and there like the whole week [uh-hm] but nothing substantial. . . Yeah so that's why I pan, I froze you know, because I had no idea what this man was gonna do.

As Neo started to say but did not complete, this was the “closest” she had ever been to the threat of rape or, rather, the imagined threat—for the man unlocked the door once he noticed her reaction and assured her that he had not had untoward intentions. The possibility of rape (“that”) was the “first thing” that had occurred to Neo upon realising the facts of the situation: locked door; alone with a man; far away from the rest of their friends. Neo also imagined that she was witnessing the unfolding of a rape scene because there was a precedent of sexualised interaction between herself and the man, albeit consensual. Finally, the scene also seemed cut from a familiar script, she explained, because it matched discourses and warnings of *other* women's rape experiences she had heard: “in my head I started playing – be it had I seen it on Oprah [hm] or I read about it [hm] – like situations like that started playing themselves so fast in my mind you know.”

Not unlike Sarah's imagined scene, Neo contrasted her experience of a frightened and largely helpless self with a man she had felt could have his way with her if he wished. Certainly the context lent itself to this imagination of a high risk of rape, especially if we take into account Neo's repeated emphasis that she did not rule out any man as potential rapist. Neo's feelings of vulnerability and risk were perhaps also not

unrelated to the fact that she is a very petite woman, who said that she generally felt vulnerable to violence because of her small size. Neo did not comment on the man's physicality by comparison but she did comment on his great character, describing him twice as someone she had felt she could really be with, and also as "a proper man," "a proper boy" for not making any sexual advances in their shared bed and for being otherwise chivalrous. There was a sense from her then that her reaction to the locked door had been out of sync with the tenor of their previous interactions and her ordinarily positive feelings towards him. In fact Neo confessed that she could not fully say where her response had come from, even asking me what I thought I would have done in the situation to gauge whether she had been over-reacting. Thinking back to her reaction, she said: "that surprised me though [hm] that surprised me, my reaction surprised me. Cause here was this wonderful man..."

Neo's deictic confusion over her own behaviour can be theorised in terms of a split or multiple subjectivity, variously constituted by different or even competing discourses. Looking from the present of the interview, the strength of her reaction did not seem rational or warranted to her. However I propose that it can be explained by her subjection to dominant discourses and scripts of women's vulnerability and rapability. Neo's reaction suggests that in the few minutes the door was locked, her dominant, almost instinctive, sense of self, which overrode other considerations in her relationship with the man, was of a subject necessarily vulnerable to rape by him. For this reason, Neo constructed herself as a subject in that moment bereft of agency, waiting to see "what this man was gonna do." Confirming Marcus' prediction of what it may mean for women to become subjects via identification as objects of male violence, Neo's deeply embodied response to her imagined threat and vulnerability was to freeze: "involuntary immobility and silence... shocked stunned terror" (Marcus 1992:394).

The taken-for-granted deployment of discourses of women's gendered vulnerability to rape that I am suggesting for Neo was in fact also true for all but one of the other women I interviewed. As I suggested earlier, these discourses were embedded in the women's comments on risk and danger in the first section of the chapter above. Remember Mimi's discomfort with the strange man on the train; Anna who imagined her risk in an empty parking lot; Sasha who feared that her muggers might have wanted her

body, not just her bags. Within the context of their variously imagined or experienced risk of rape, the women constructed their vulnerability and violability as inherent. Even Violet who claimed not to see much actual risk of rape in her life naturalised her vulnerability to it. She distanced the possibility of rape by saying: “honestly it’s, it’s the Other, really it’s something that I hear of em [you mean happening to other people say?] hm hm.” Moments before, Violet had tried to verbalise for me the typically unconscious process by which she distinguished between safe and unsafe men. She speculated that she might consciously wonder about the risk of being raped by a man she knew only “if we’re going to be in a situation where I feel like I could be vulnerable.” She was telling with these words that her vulnerability to an assault such as rape was latent, if not always manifest or remembered. This vulnerability preceded and mediated her imagination and mapping of risk because it was an attribute of the gendered subject who might (or might not) one day face risk.

Though I am contending that discourses of vulnerability were central to the women’s gendered subjectivities, this did not mean that many did not also say that they would somehow struggle and resist if rape seemed possible or likely. What I wish to highlight, rather, was that the women perceived their vulnerability to men, male violence and rape as inherent or natural, with resistance, if any, following from this original ‘fact.’ Most women naturalised their vulnerability implicitly in the very manner in which they imagined rape affecting them. For instance, they tended to reflect on the possibility that they might *be raped*, not just that rape might *be attempted*. And, as I said, this sense of self as first vulnerable directly impacted the way the way in which they framed their potential resistance to rape. Specifically, because all the women except Hazel constructed themselves as by definition less physically strong and able than men, resistance was imagined not as a matter of physical struggle, but of avoiding or, if unavoidable, escaping, risky situations. In Sasha’s words:

at the end of the day, men are str, physically stronger than woman, and I don’t think there’s a lot that women can do if they’re already *in* the situation [hm]. So that’s why you’ve got to just take every measure that you can [hm] just to avoid it. And that’s where like awareness and like prudence comes in.

Anna gave an example of how in her everyday life she avoided the risk of rape, framing it as a matter of prudence, of “rather being safe than sorry.” Being a woman who ordinarily

liked to go walking on Table Mountain, she saw risk in a public space such as Newlands Forest.<sup>1</sup> In response to my question of “how real” rape was for her, having already established that it was something she did think about, Anna reflected silently for a while before saying:

I mean I sort of imagine going for a walk by myself in the forest [hm]. I mean you hardly ever meet anybody that you think looks like any kind of threat you know, [hm] but what are you going to do if he really does want to attack you?

Here again, as has been argued for others above, Anna constructed and imagined herself as fundamentally rapable if rape was what the man in the scene “really” wanted to do. The result for Anna was that she did not go walking alone in the forest, or even alone with her dog. She experienced this as an unjust and gendered loss of her freedom, as we will hear her protest later in the chapter.

Tumi provided a different example of resistance to the possibility of rape, an example of resistance when “already *in* the situation,” to repeat Sasha’s phrase from above. Tumi’s experience was similar to Neo’s which we considered earlier, if less ambiguously recounted. Her story was that after once visiting a male friend at his home, first he had made her feel uncomfortable by hugging her goodbye for too long, and had then grabbed the door as she reached for it, to obstruct her exit she assumed. Tumi recalled: “Ah I think I saw black. I – all I remember was that I went for that door.” I asked, to clarify, if the two were alone in his house at this point, causing Tumi to remember that there were in fact other people around so “I was overreacting come to think of it.” “But” she continued: “I think it was the way it made me feel, like actually he could just.. block that door and there’d be nothing really I could do [hm] cause he was a lot stronger, he was a rugby player.” Unlike the other women whose examples we have seen so far, Tumi was explicit in locating her sense of relative vulnerability in the man’s apparently greater physical strength. Hence her reading of the situation had been that she would be virtually helpless if he did succeed in blocking the door. The feeling this thought evoked was one of disempowerment and fear, therefore Tumi resisted by fleeing before the imagined outcome could even occur: “I just, I grabbed that door and I ran out there.”

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<sup>1</sup> Newlands Forest is a protected indigenous and planted forest at the base of Table Mountain in a suburb of Cape Town.

Other women spoke of running as a favoured strategy to get away from danger—speaking generally, not solely in relation to the danger of rape. Suzanne, reflecting on “tricks” learnt from a physical self-defense course, concluded: “run is the best advice [yeah]. In fact I still even, when I’m walking I think about that, and like walking in high heels [hm] I, I – that’s like I think I may have to kick off my shoes and run.” She was revealing herself here as a subject so conscious of her vulnerability to violence and thus of her potential risks that she imagined and planned exit strategies even before any violence occurred. Living in this kind of “assiduous state of vigilance” because of fear of violence is a gendered reality for women, Pain argues (1997:234; also Hollander 2002). A related strategy for keeping safe four women spoke of was to project oneself as invulnerable, confident and unafraid when using public space, what Koselka (1997) describes as the “bold walk.” Sasha, for instance, said that she was always pragmatically aware of potential danger and the people around her in public “but you can do it in a positive way you know [yeah]. Just walk with a sense of purpose.” Mehta and Bondi label this as the discourse of “being sensible” which they claim women deploy and practice in part to stop their fears of violence from running their lives (1999:75).

Likewise, Nancy described a consciously chosen, embodied performance of resistance to the imagined threat of rape. Having identified empty public bathrooms as spaces in which a would-be rapist might skulk, she said that when going into one: “the way that I walk and that I stand changes [hm], I become more into a potentially defensive mode than if it’s a busier bathroom where there are lots of people around then I can be more relaxed.” Nancy was actually one of four women who reported taking physical self-defense courses,<sup>2</sup> and had also done karate as a child. She was very positive about the psychologically empowering aspects of her martial arts and self-defense training but it was not clear if she felt equipped by them to physically defend herself. Her reference to an incident with her male partner suggested not necessarily. She shared that her partner had once pushed her and she, wearing socks, had slipped. In Nancy’s words: “that terrified the hell out of me... that kind of thing scared me [uh-hm] when you’re a little bit – you don’t actually have as much control as you think you do.” Meanwhile, two of the

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<sup>2</sup> Other women had received self-defense lectures in school, for instance, and had “experts” speak to them. Here I am referring to those who had taken physical self-defense courses.

other women who had taken self-defense reported that they did not feel particularly confident in their ability to re-embody or enact the lessons learnt, in part because their courses had been very brief. This speaks to McCaughey's stance that self-defense training requires women to "enact the destruction of femininity" and "rehearse a new script for bodily comportment," such that it requires considerable time and practice to be effective (1998:281).

McCaughey's (1998) view that self-defense instruction takes time to seep into the feminised body is premised on a phenomenological theory of gender, which theorises it as the material embodiment and practice of discourse. The example of Hazel, standing in dramatic contrast to all the other women in this study, would seem to confirm this theory in relation to women's self-defense and violence. Of all the women I interviewed, Hazel was the only one who presented herself as confident in her ability to resist or initiate physical violence, even supremely so. Hazel had been practicing a martial art for most of her life following her parents' encouragements that she learn how to protect herself. More generally, she claimed that she had been raised to be, and had therefore become, physically tough. Declaring that it was very hard for her to control a physically violent reaction once she got angry and had an "adrenaline rush," Hazel reflected on where this tendency might have come from: "I think that's me, and I think that's got much to do with brainwashing from my mother, from small. Like my mother always used to teach me don't let anyone mess you around." She had come to embody her mother's discourse in other words. Further, Hazel linked her physical confidence back to the practices and play of a childhood with many male cousins who:

had no mercy for me as a girl. So I think that's where it all stems from [hmm], it's like always I had to be strong, and like basically no tears and fight your way and if you fall get up, don't even dust yourself. . . so I think it's just much to do with how I grew up.

Here, as elsewhere in the interview, Hazel was explicitly distancing herself from dominant social constructions and behaviours of a "normal" girl. Indeed, she took up gendered subject positions and employed language to describe her attitude towards violence that could be read as typically masculine or even macho. For example, Hazel's theory that her tendency to violently react to provocation was the consequence of an "adrenaline rush" referred to a discourse of natural aggression which is usually gendered

male. Ironically it is even a discourse that is sometimes invoked to explain men's violence against women who allegedly 'provoke' or 'titillate' them (Anderson and Umberson 2001). Hazel also painted herself as a defender of vulnerable others, other women especially, which is another masculinised subjectivity (Hollander 2001). She claimed to have joined bar fights in the past to help her male "buddies; she would definitely intervene "if I see some guy strangling a chick;" and if a friend were to be suffering domestic abuse, Hazel's stated advice would be "first time call me, we'll sort it out. And I'll bring back up if I have to, always do."

Given her subjective positioning relative to violence, and her discursive and claimed material shows of "physical mastery" (Mehta and Bondi 1999:77), it followed that Hazel did not imagine herself as inherently vulnerable to an act such as rape in the manner of the other women above. Contrary to these women, Hazel naturalised the idea that she would be able to physically defend herself if necessary. She identified as a potential subject of that which Marcus characterises as masculine, "subject-subject" or "dialogic violence," in which each fighting subject expects the other to resist such that the outcome of the violent encounter is not predetermined (1992:396). Hazel further claimed that her willingness and ability to physically fight were known facts about her, which therefore positioned her in others' minds as a subject to be reckoned with and respected. She elaborated, for example, that an ex-boyfriend had once said: "he wouldn't try anything stupid or harsh around me like, he's like 'he knows what's good for his health'. . . basically wouldn't try rumbling me around or messing me around." This was a reversal of dominant gendered scripts because, in Hazel's recounting of it, her ex-boyfriend had positioned himself as a potential object of *her* violence and had therefore treated her with due deference.

Arguably Hazel's celebratory attitudes towards her personal potential for violence informed her opinions on the apparent manner in which other women tended to respond to male violence. She proposed a theory and practice to "empower" women which basically entailed women beating their male abusers:

I'd really wanna empower women and like. . . what I want to do, I wanna tell people 'this man that's hitting you, hit him back. You might not hit him back as *hard* as he hits *you* [hm] or like make as big as an impact, but.. it will send out a message. Like

instead of being all defensive and like crouching and like screaming to save your life, do something about it [hm] like be proactive.’

I felt deep ambivalence towards Hazel’s view, especially as she continued to list strategies women could employ to fight men: “And, if you want you can even play dirty, like hell burn him with boiling water if he’s sleeping, throw some sugar on it as well, or tie him up or something, like you know.” My ambivalence to this advocacy of female counter-violence was informed by the feminist thinking that violence itself is a deeply masculinised script, such that for women to choose to employ it to end male violence is akin to using “the master’s tools” (McCaughey 1998:277).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, a feminist reading would problematise Hazel’s theory in so far as an emphasis on women’s counter-violence as *proof* of resistance places responsibility for rape or other male violence on to the women who suffer it because they may be said to have ‘not resisted enough’ (Jordan 2005; Marcus 1992). Also, constructing physical violence as the “proactive” response to violence as Hazel did, negates the many other important forms, including the mental or psychological, through which women express agency in the face of male violence, and survive their abusers (Jordan 2005). I would in fact argue that Hazel’s dismissive attitude towards the kinds of responses women’s may show to male violence is based on a masculine, hegemonic definition of what it means to be a strong, acting and surviving subject.

Suzanne’s account of her successful resistance to her would-be rapist fleshes out some of the problematic limitations I read in Hazel’s definition of proactive resistance. To briefly restate it, Suzanne alleged that an acquaintance, Thomas, had locked her in a bathroom and threatened her with a jagged beer bottle, making verbally clear his intention to rape her. Suzanne told me that she surprised herself in the manner in which she had handled and ultimately defused the situation. She did not resist Thomas physically, but with words. As she explained:

You know you never know how you’re gonna react in a.. situation like that [hm] and like under, in an emergency or stress or trauma, but but I surprised myself. I remained pretty., calm and collected and I just I kept talking. I said ‘don’t do this, I don’t want

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<sup>3</sup> McCaughey (1998) actually argues that she used to feel this way about women’s self-defense until she embarked upon it but I borrow this characterisation of women’s violence (borrowed first from Audre Lourde) to make the point.

this, I'm scared, let me out.' I said 'I'll.. charge you, you'll go to jail, I'll take you to court, just [hm]. Do this I'll scream.'

Eventually, she said, Thomas gave up and casually walked out of the bathroom. Right at the end of the interview, after Suzanne had reasoned that her preferred safety strategy would be to run away from, rather than fight back, a male assaulter because "they would be so overwhelmingly stronger than me," her thoughts turned back to the incident with Thomas. Reflecting on it anew, she said:

I guess in a way I was fighting back [uh-hm] in a way [uh-hm] Em (*long pause*) em..but..I don't think I would have been able to fight him off [uh-hm]. Em I think I fought more with my words [yeah]. I don't know I just have this sense that I had to keep talking, I had to keep talking, I don't.. I don't know why.

Suzanne appeared to be only now realising in the context of telling me about her experience that she had indeed 'fought off' her assailant, in a manner not validated by masculinised discourses of resistance and agency such as Hazel endorsed. Suzanne's resistance, in the form of calm words, and drawing on her imagined right and ability to seek legal redress if Thomas did rape her, can be cast in terms of Marcus' (1992) analysis of rape as a gendered script. Marcus contends that in the unfolding of this script, the would-be rapist "strives to maneuver another person into the role of victim" (1992:391), such that a moment to resist or rewrite the scene becomes possible for the latter. While the style of Suzanne's resistance may not have shifted the terms of the rape script to the radical degree Marcus (1992) advocates—for she pleaded *with* Thomas, invoked the wrath of the law if *raped*, and *assumed* her physical vulnerability to him—she nonetheless succeeded in interrupting the script, thereby stopping Thomas from raping her. Suzanne revealed herself to Thomas to be a subject with power, not a pre-constituted victim. Questions of if and how women may exercise power and agency as these relate to sex and sexuality run through the discussion below.

### **"That Ability to Say No": Discourses of Sex, Power and Violation**

This section of the chapter explores how the women talked about heterosexuality, sex and sexual power, in general and in reference to themselves, relative to the phenomenon of rape. The themes of sex, sexuality and power are, of course, fundamental

to the issue of rape, as rape is a sexualised violation or abuse of power (du Toit 2005). Because the women in this study identified as never having experienced rape, it followed that they constructed their own sexual experiences in opposition to it, that is as *not rape*. Rape served therefore as the imaginary through which they constructed and defined the boundaries of ostensibly normative sexuality and sexual experience. Conversely their constructions of normative sexuality provided them with a discourse to imagine what was wrong about the experience of rape, that is where its specific violation or pain lay.

Suzanne was most explicit in contrasting her own ‘normal’ heterosexual experiences to rape, though with a telling ambivalence that speaks to feminist critiques of the meanings of this sex for women in patriarchal contexts. Suzanne shared two significant experiences in this regard. She told me that she had “felt really like pressured” by a desperately pleading boyfriend to consent to her first sexual experience a few years back. “I didn’t really want to” Suzanne explained, but because she had promised to sleep with him by a certain date, she felt obliged when the time came. She also felt obliged because this boyfriend spent a lot of money on her, a student with no income—“he was so good *to me*”—such that she felt sex was the only thing she could give in return. Now, in a serious relationship with another man, Suzanne shared that she still often had sex when she did not really want to. She explained that she had been on a course of medication for some time which had left her “completely not interested” in sex, because deriving no physical pleasure from it. When she tried to broach the topic with her boyfriend, “he completely got defensive [hm] and thought that I was insulting his manhood,” such that she dropped it and instead continued to consent to sex. Suzanne’s analysis of the meaning of sex for her in these two experiences was:

It feels a bit like a.. I don’t know, duty’s not the right word [hm] but it’s.. em, something it’s, it’s like an, it’s like an economic arrangement [hm]. You, he gives you love and trust and.. material stuff [uh-hm] and, and this is what you’ve got to give him.

Conversely, Suzanne tried to imagine how the two boyfriends mentioned above, and a third she had also slept with, would characterise their sexual experiences with her. She wondered if they would even be *aware* that she had been (and still was currently) a sometimes less than willing partner. She reckoned no: “I bet if you were to ask James and

Nick<sup>4</sup> and other guy I was with if they've ever slept with anyone when they didn't want to, I'm sure the answer would be no [no, yeah of course]. I'm pretty sure of that."

Despite Suzanne's critical feelings and visible sadness about these sexual experiences, she deliberately stated to me that they were not rape. When I said to her, partially in an attempt to make her feel better, that I thought it was actually common for women to sometimes feel and concede to sexual pressure from their male partners, Suzanne agreed, saying: "yes I mean so that has abso – that is completely not rape.. but I don't know, also it doesn't seem 100% kosher [uh-hm, uh-hm] either if you think about it properly." Suzanne clearly expressed her ambivalence with this comment. While she did not define her experiences as rape, she did not alternatively construct them as normative or right. She did or perhaps could not neatly label them; they fell into a discursive black hole as it were, somewhere unspeakable between her opposed constructions of rape and normative sex. Arguably, the unstated norm by which Suzanne measured her sexual experiences was the mainstream liberal model in which sex it said to occur between equally consenting, empowered and rational partners, rather than a feminist model of heterosexual interaction. I would argue this because Suzanne did not extend her critique of gendered power inequalities to other aspects of her relationships which a feminist subjectivity might problematise. She did not critique the apparent fact that part of her boyfriend's role in the relationship was to give her "material stuff"; her critique was rather that she felt expected to give sex in return.

As feminists do argue nonetheless, Suzanne's analysis problematised as simplistic the notion that women consent to or refuse sex with a verbal and unambiguous yes or no. On the one hand, Suzanne suggested the complex gendered dynamics and pressures which influence a woman's verbal consent to sex. But she also suggested the non-verbal hints and cues a woman might give to signal non-consent or an absence of sexual desire. Suzanne supposed that in her case, the men she slept with had either deliberately ignored or failed to read these latter cues because of their own sexual desires which they, *and she*, therefore gave precedence. In prioritising the men's desires over hers, Suzanne was acting out a subject position available to women in that which Hollway calls the "have/hold discourse," in which "women's sexuality is seen as a lack" in itself, rather

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<sup>4</sup> These are pseudonyms.

subordinated to, and servicing, their desire to maintain their heterosexual relationships (1984:232). Suzanne's sexual subjectivity can also be read in terms of her investment, albeit ambivalent, in gendered discourses and practices of emotional labour. According to Suzanne, she had silenced her own emotions and need to address her lack of sexual desire so as to allow her boyfriend to feel good and secure about his masculinity and sexual prowess.

Neo suggested with a very similar example to Suzanne that the model of equally willing heterosexual partners does not always pertain in real life. She invoked the example of having to sometimes "compromise" with a sexual partner, meaning consent to sex when one did not really want to, to imagine how much worse rape would be and feel. Because of an inaudible moment on the interview tape, it was not fully clear if Neo was claiming the experience of sometimes compromising to sex or if she was imagining this from her experience of *never* compromising. The latter seems more likely in her comments below. In either case, Neo was granting her experiences epistemological status from which to extrapolate and imagine, by comparison, the feeling of rape. "Think about it," she said to me:

when you're with someone, like say your boyfriend [hm], but you just don't feel like being with them [hm] and and, when you somehow decide to compromise – (*muttering*) that's not (*inaudible*) I'll compromise on to start with – but if you decide to compromise, it's not quite a good feeling [hm]. But compare that to someone who just, you just don't know them from god knows where, then they come you know, like aach!

Considering, or imagining, that it already did not feel so good for one to give in to sex with a familiar partner, Neo was suggesting that it would feel even worse ("aach!") to have a total stranger force his way sexually—incidentally an example which naturalised rape as the act of a stranger. Neo's logic constructed the normative heterosexual act, that is sex which was neither forced nor coerced, as a deeply intimate one. It went further to construct *the ideal* sex act as one which was fully and autonomously desired by all participating subjects. Neo was claiming this ideal for women and for herself, especially if we read her as saying above that she never would or did compromise to a boyfriend's sexual demands. Yet the autonomously desiring sexual subject is actually gendered male in dominant discourses of normative heterosexuality because, quite simply, these

discourses construct men as initiating sex with women and women as responding to male sexual desire with a yes or no. Neo was alluding to this dynamic above with her starting point that women may sometimes compromise to men's requests for sex thereby, she was implying, compromising their autonomous sexual subjectivity. This was what Suzanne reported doing for the sake of her relationship. Both women seemed to concur that while this was not rape, it was also not ideal.

Echoing Neo's idea about the intimacy of sex, Sasha went further to identify the sexual subject with the very self. She imagined the meaning or violation of being raped by comparing it to her experience of mugging discussed in the first section of the chapter. Sasha theorised: "when you're mugged, it's a possession, it's property, it's not part of you. When you're raped obviously it's act – it's probably the deepest sense of violation that you could have [hm] cause at least it's your own, it's violating your own bodily integrity." Hence Sasha explained that after she had escaped to safety from her muggers and imagined rapists: "I sort of touched myself (*touching herself*) and I'm still all here." The discourse Sasha was deploying, indeed naturalising, to construct her sexual and embodied subjectivity is one which Foucault (1990) has famously deconstructed and historicised as western and modern. It is a discourse which deeply implicates sexuality and sexual practice with the very core of being and identity. This discourse also locates the self within a discrete body, as that which Jackson terms "the self as a container" or "bounded individual" (1993:116). If, then, rape is discursively constructed as the violation of sexual and bodily integrity, and the sex and body are the loci of selfhood, it follows that rape is not just a physical violation of the flesh. It is also, indeed more fundamentally, constructed as a metaphysical violation of the soul. It was following this discursive logic that Sasha could suggest that her self remained whole and present ("still all here") after her experience, because she had been mugged and stripped of material possessions only, not raped and stripped of selfhood.

Repeating this idea, other women imagined the violation of rape as subjectively and psychologically damaging, or spoke of friends who had been raped as irrevocably scarred in these ways. Neo made several references to the "baggage" and "luggage" two of her friends had carried since being raped. Olivia spoke from her exposure to the work of an anti-rape organisation. She elaborated upon some of the necessary procedures to

“reduce secondary traumatisation” of rape victims, and signaled the “need for people to talk about the experience,” “sometimes tell it over and over again as a way of healing,” “but only when they are ready.” Hazel naturalised, almost predicted, the emotional aftereffects of rape for survivors: “the denial, the self-blame and things like that, they overpower for a very long time [hm], they overpower the woman.”

The language of inner trauma, emotional baggage and scarring comes from psychologised discourses of the subjective impact of sexual abuse (Levett, Kotler, Burman and Parker 1997; Mardorossian 2002). As Olivia’s comments above suggest, these discourses attend and structure expert discourses and practices of therapeutic counseling as a means to contain or minimise trauma. Levett *et al.* argue in reference to child sexual abuse that such discourses are now hegemonic and globalized, but actually originate from modern western sites (1997:127). In their analysis, these (like all) discourses, especially to the extent that they are dominant, may be productive of subjective realities. That is, they may structure the subjective meanings and expectations of an experience even before it occurs (1997:128). Janet imagined how she would feel if raped by recalling her friend’s experience, drawing at the same time upon psychologised discourses of trauma. She said: “it’s so traumatic... I, I can’t imagine what that feel [hm] – I think I’d just cry because I was violated you know.”

Alex differed slightly, explaining that she used to fear the trauma of rape much more in the past than now. She said of her previous imagination of rape: “I think it was the ultimate worst thing that could happen, I couldn’t imagine going through that [yeah]. And now I still, I’m definitely scared of it [hm] but I think I could probably cope if I went through it.” She was resisting the normalising and disciplining effects of discourses of trauma and the damaged self by claiming that they did not have an absolute hold on her imagination. I probed further to understand what specifically Alex claimed to have feared so much about rape in the past. Her reply theorised the imagined violation or trauma of it in terms of a loss of personal power. “Why it’s so bad,” Alex explained of rape, is that:

as women we’ve got like a lot of power, and our power is that we, we’re the ones who are actually in control of relationships because we say how far it can go and like [hm] on the physical level that is [uh-hm uh-hm] and so we’ve actually got a lot of control as women. And em that just made me think well when you’re raped that’s what you’re losing, you’re losing that ability to say no [hm hm] and that is our strength.

Alex reported that this theory had been sketched out for her by male friends, and had been a revelation because she had previously thought men were the “lucky” ones “cause they get to go out with girls [hm] and like we’ve got to sit back and like wait for someone to come ask us out.” Her original idea, in other words, was that men were the active and therefore powerful subjects in heterosexual relationships, whereas she had now been made to see that women’s very passivity endowed them with greater strength. According to this theory then, normative heterosexual intercourse is something women *let* men do to them; rape is something women *are forced* to let men do to them—a fine line in my hearing of it.

Alex’s theory positions women as ordinarily powerful—able to control sex, sexual relationships and therefore men—because they are the objects of male desire. Paradoxically it therefore grants women subjectivity and power in their very objectification. Not surprisingly, contrary to Neo’s ideal above, this theory is silent about women’s autonomous sexual desire. Hegemonic discourses do indeed ascribe women power for the reasons Alex proposed, but not in her benign and positive manner. According to discourses of “bedroom power” or “bottom power,”<sup>5</sup> women’s hold over male sexual desire leads them to tempt, tease and manipulate, to cause men to lose their heads as it were. Such discourses are problematic because they may serve to dismiss women’s rape allegations against men. Violet relayed one such case. She told that she had once accompanied a fellow student to the hospital after this woman claimed to have been raped. Having interacted with the woman immediately after the alleged incident, and having heard the doctor’s diagnosis of “forced entry,” Violet had no cause to disbelieve her. She discovered, however, that some of her own male friends, being also friends with the accused, thought the woman was lying. Violet remembered their arguments thus:

You women.. you have too much power. Do you realise you can destroy a man’s future just by lying and saying that.. you did not consent to a sexual act?. . . Women just have issues, she just wanted him and she couldn’t accept the fact that he didn’t want more from her.

Violet’s recollection of her male friends’ arguments was that women’s ostensible sexual power—again the power to say yes or no—meant that in practice men were vulnerable to

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<sup>5</sup> These terms were suggested to me by my supervisor, Prof. Jane Bennett.

false rape accusations. Women were constructed as manipulative and likely to abuse their power. Further, Violet's reconstruction of her friends' reasoning was that it cast women as sexual subjects who might say no to sex or otherwise appear unwilling, but really mean yes. They play games, they "just have issues"—highly problematic claims from a feminist perspective because they serve in discourse as frequent male justifications for rape (e.g. du Toit 2005:260).

During such "vexed" conversations with her male friends, Violet resisted their constructions of women as sexually manipulative by arguing the alleged victim's case. She had also had cause to resist such constructions in reference to her own sexuality. Violet strongly hinted but did not explicitly state that she had chosen to be sexually abstinent because of her faith. However, she explained that men did not take this seriously because they assumed it was a sexual identity she performed in public, to be respectable perhaps, out of which they could privately seduce her. She repeated a conversation she had once had with a man who was interested in her, who had dismissed her assertion that she was happily single and, implicitly, abstinent. Violet quoted him as challenging her with words to the effect: "if you were in my room, I'd show you... please you're a woman at the end of the day." The attitude being expressed, as Violet understood it, was that women's sexuality and bodies were ultimately available to men, in part, again, because women played games or did not actually know what they wanted. Violet directly linked this attitude to the possibility and prevalence of rape in South Africa, as it meant that some men did not really believe women's non-consent to sex or even recognise their right or ability to refuse it. "In the context of like our sexual, our bodily integrity," Violet explained, the attitude was "please you're a woman, like give it up.... How could you not wanna have sex with me?"

In railing against such attitudes, and also in her implied practice of abstinence, Violet was rejecting the sexist positioning of women as always-available objects of male sexuality. She was rather asserting that which she took as her right and, again, her capability as a woman to control her own sexuality. She was defining this as a position of power. Neo suggested another, namely that a woman could initiate sex if she wanted to. Speaking hypothetically to a man who would justify rape on the basis of a woman's allegedly sexualised behaviour, she said: "if I walk around naked, leave me alone. I don't

say you must do whatever.” In other words, she was rejecting the notion that a naked woman, much less one who was scantily clad, was sending a ‘clear signal’ that she wanted sex. Quite the contrary, Neo asserted to the same hypothetical male figure: “if I wanna have sex with you, I’ll tell you probably eh, so don’t tell me I’m wearing this or that...don’t do things by inference and deduce stuff.” Her idea was that a woman was able to decide and declare her desire to have sex—remember her ideal of autonomous desire—such that it was not the prerogative of men to presume or make assumptions as to what a woman was ‘begging for’ or ‘really wanting.’

Other women such as Hazel and Vanessa concurred that no matter how a woman behaved or dressed, she did not deserve or cause her rape. This is a progressive discourse which opposes the standard rape myth that ‘women ask for it.’ It is disseminated in the South African public sphere by feminists and anti-rape activists, yet its deeply contested nature was made stark during the Jacob Zuma rape trial in 2006, in which both his defense and supporters outside the court argued that the woman’s manner of dress had suggested that she wanted sex.<sup>6</sup> Both Hazel and Vanessa referenced the trial to contest this rape myth. Suzanne showed more ambivalence towards the myth, pondering also what it might actually mean for women to be sexual and sexually powerful in a man’s world. She told me that she had recently gained quite a bit of weight and jokingly recalled that when she was “lighter,” she had owned a “power outfit,” sexy and revealing, which she used to occasionally don. Now, she said:

being overweight, I feel safer than I did [hm] because I feel I’m not as attractive [hm] anymore [hm] and.. I’m sort of less of a sex object [uhhm, uhhm]. Em.. in a way so I feel good, it keeps men away, men’s attention... but but I also feel like I’ve lost some power as well.

The contradictions apparent in this quote, in which Suzanne was subjectively linking her risk of rape to her sexual attractiveness, can be seen as a result of her varied investments in competing discourses of women’s attractiveness, power and also sexual responsibility. In the first place, Suzanne referenced mainstream discourses of women’s beauty which construct weight gain—which I say deliberately for I did not think Suzanne was

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<sup>6</sup> Jacob Zuma was the former deputy president of South Africa who was accused of rape by a family friend in 2005. He was tried and found not guilty in 2006 but the accuser was vilified by Zuma’s supporters and forced to leave the country for her own safety after the trial.

“overweight”—as a factor which diminishes from women’s attractiveness to men. The contradictions largely followed from this because Suzanne had mixed thoughts and feelings about what it might mean for her to be less attractive to the opposite sex. On the one hand, she felt that this made her safer from rape because it meant she drew less male attention. This view took the “male sex drive discourse” to its extremes, suggesting that a woman may not only be “the object that precipitates men’s natural sexual urges” (Hollway 1984:233), but that an attractive women may even precipitate her rape, having over-stimulated the male sex drive. This is another expression of the rape myth mentioned above which places responsibility for rape on the way women look and behave, and leads them to accordingly police their self-presentation. Hesitantly buying into this myth, Suzanne reflected on her younger self to say that in the explicitly sexual manner in which she had sometimes dressed and carried herself, for which she had gotten a lot of male attention, she had perhaps walked “a thin line. Maybe I was sort of tempting danger.”

But despite feeling this way now, the fact was that Suzanne recalled a sense of greater power in the past, when she had had visible proof that she was sexy to men: “I felt completely, more in control. I felt in control, completely and powerful.” Hollway argues that it is taken for granted that for women “there is status and power attached to being attractive for men” (1984:233). Yet a further tension arose for Suzanne from the fact that she now had a consciousness that “the world is sort of conniving to.. to make it a man’s, to make it a man’s world,” a key aspect of which she identified as the constant sexual objectification of women. Thinking back, then, she felt that she had perhaps objectified herself for men’s sexual delectation, such that the accompanying sense of power she remembered feeling now seemed suspect. Suzanne’s growing feminist consciousness was clashing here with her subjection to, and previous attempts to embody, dominant discourses of women’s heterosexual attractiveness and value.

Other women tended to complain rather than in anyway celebrate the feeling that they were almost always sexually objectified by strange men—whistled, called at and approached on the streets, and so on. For most the experience was disempowering, “degrading towards women” in Kudzai’s words, though most also reported a tendency to ignore or even laugh it off. As Violet explained it, the experience alienated her from her

sense of self and worth because it reduced her to her sex, apparently valuable for this purpose alone. Along the same lines, Janet alleged:

as a woman, I feel like our value as such has really been disregarded.... And you don't feel like you're in an environment where you can be safe. You don't feel like you're in an environment where you can be free too.. – I don't know if that's the right word – but demonstrate your sexuality.

Being an openly sexual woman seemed, in other words, a dangerous proposition in the contemporary context. Not only did Janet characterise this as restricting one's subjective sense of self and worth, but she constructed it also as a loss of freedom or an infringement of a normative right. The themes of women's rights, citizenship and belonging in South Africa, given the question of rape, form the subject of the next and final section of the chapter.

#### **“In This Country”: Discourses of Rights, Citizenship and Belonging**

This final section of the chapter explores how, in relation to the issue of rape in South Africa, the women in this thesis constructed their rights as women and as citizens. Through this lens, it considers how they theorised the nation itself. Seven women traced a tension between women's ideal or formal rights, and the realities of their and other women's lives in South Africa today. They constructed the country as one in which women's rights are not sufficiently known or respected by many men, hence the prevalence of rape. As a result, many further claimed to subjectively experience South Africa as a place in which it is particularly dangerous to be a woman now, as Janet was seen to say just above. Significantly, the conclusions on the state of the nation tended to be more pessimistic for the white women in this study relative to the others, two of whom were more deliberately optimistic about what it means to be South African now, despite the alleged rape crisis.

The notion that women have the “right to bodily integrity” has already been introduced in the section above. Violet, as we saw, characterised this as the right of women to control their sexuality and body, including the right to refuse sex. She argued that within the South African context, this gendered right was not necessarily accepted *or even known* by some men. She explained then that she tended to assume that a man's

awareness of this right was correlated to his degree of education and exposure, which she therefore took as an indication of how “safe” he was. Although Violet did question the rationality of this assumption as we briefly saw in the discussion of the crime discourse in Chapter 4, she first reasoned:

... tied with education is a sense of, of, of, of understanding about women’s [uh-hm] rights. . . . And even though the men, so-called men might not necessarily process it and accept it, they at least are aware of it [uh-hm] and I think the fact that they’re aware of it is different to men who don’t even know about it [uh-hm uh-hm], who don’t even realise that ‘hey! a woman has the right to bodily integrity’ [uh-hm]. You know there’re some men who don’t even know that.

Indirectly Violet was suggesting that the notion of women’s bodily and sexual rights is new and progressive, hence awareness of it is not necessarily widespread but linked to education. And by highlighting the possibility that some educated men may know of, but not accept, these rights, she was saying also that they are still contested, not absolute or taken-for-granted even by those in the know. Ironically, there was a fundamental tension in Violet’s discursive construction of these rights, which perhaps points to the alleged contestation over them. On the one hand, Violet naturalised women’s right to bodily integrity, positing this as a given in itself. Look back, for instance, to the manner above in which she describes those men who do not even know, “hey!”, such rights exist. Manicom notes that rights discourse in fact functions in this way: “rights operate within a universal idiom;.. it is their transcendent status, their broad moral register that, that can be seen as the basis of their political potency” (2005:38). Yet at the same time, by acknowledging that women’s sexual rights may not actually be widely known or respected in South Africa, Violet was flagging their historical and political construction in the country. She was recognising, if not in these words, that the rights she invoked in fact constitute a political discourse or set of ideas, moreover one with a relatively short and still unsettled history in South Africa. Thus in actuality the rights Violet was claiming for women are *not* given.

Vanessa struggled to make the same point that women’s rights exist but are not necessarily known in South Africa, and to propose that rape was located within this disjunct. Her struggle to articulate her argument suggests that Vanessa may be less exposed than Violet to feminist and rights-based discourses because while it seems clear,

in my reading, that she was referring to women's right below, she did not actually use this language. Responding to my request to hear her theory on the alleged rape crisis in South Africa, Vanessa said:

em I think it's a mix of reasons. I think people – like the whole social network is like *really* behind [hm] and we are like struggling with a whole bunch of social issues and stuff [hm] and there's a whole lot of.. – just education and that type of thing [hm]. So I think maybe people aren't aware of like... women's.. I don't know how to say it. I think women are seen in a different wa – not as progressive in this country as being like powerful yet, [hm] that type of thing.

Vanessa was implicitly comparing “this country” to others to suggest that the prevailing attitude to women, the way they are “seen,” was not as “progressive” as elsewhere. She linked this to the scale of the present social problems in South Africa, including poor education. The result, according to my understanding of Vanessa's comments, was that women's right to be powerful or have power was on the whole not recognised or enabled by the society.

The link to the specific issue of rape came via a hint at women's *sexual* rights when I tried to clarify Vanessa's meaning. I followed on from her comments above to offer my understanding of what she was saying about women in South Africa, proposing: “it's almost like they are second-class or something.” By this I was suggesting that she was describing women as second-class citizens, subordinate to men. Vanessa agreed, illustrating her point further with an example of some men's sexual behaviour towards women: “yeah exactly so it's not like – I mean if the guy wants sex then why shouldn't he get it, like that type of thing [hm that sort of attitude] yeah. And I just think, yeah there is not a lot of awareness.” Her meaning then was that an awareness of women's power or right to choose or reject sex was generally lacking in South Africa. Men denied women this right by instead arrogating it on to themselves, such that if they wanted sex, their attitude and action was to ensure that it happened regardless of the woman's position on the matter. Sasha similarly argued through a different example that it seemed that some men here felt they had a right to women, in the pursuit of which they denied women an aspect of their selfhood. Sasha referred to her daily experiences of men sexualising her by catcalling on the streets. She felt that these men effectively took away her right to be “just a person going about my everyday” business. Instead, the fact of her embodiment as “a

young attractive girl” meant that these men made her into an object of *their* power and rights. In her words: “it feels that if they can shout those things at you, they have sort of a right to, or a right to you.”

Thus Violet, Vanessa and Sasha were variously alleging the existence of a discursive and attitudinal context in which women’s rights to sexual and subjective autonomy was not taken seriously or respected by men. If, in view of this context, Violet positioned herself as a bearer of such rights, it followed that she represented herself as a subject always struggling to assert them against men. Violet constructed several of the experiences in which men had made unwanted romantic or sexual advances, including her two stalkings, in terms of clashing discourses and subjects of rights. She framed her resistance to such experiences as motivated by her right to embodied integrity, and her related right to the autonomy to decide if, and under what conditions, she would interact with men who expressed interest in her. Speaking of her first stalker who had persistently followed her, she explained: “when I encounter men like that I don’t shy away. . . I say ‘listen leave me alone’ [uh-hm] like you know, ‘just respect my private space.’” The idea of private embodied space as the subject’s right or property was repeated in Violet’s commentary on her second stalking experience: “I’m one person whose very sensitive to that sort of thing... invading what I perceive as my space.” She further explained why she had felt violated and disempowered by this experience, and another in which a man had refused to accept *her* refusal of him. It was because of: “that element of coercion. . . just that sense of not giving me the ability or the choice to decide for myself how I would like – *if* I would like a relationship at all and if so how it should be [yeah] and you know the boundaries.” In short, Violet was contrasting some men’s apparent proclivity to coerce women to do their will with her rights as a woman to choose and boundary her heterosexual and bodily interactions.

Jackson proposes that the discourse of personal space and boundaries, based on ideas of liberal individualism, constructs the idea that the embodied subject is or must be aware of her or his “emotional or physical limits, and communicate those limits to those who might otherwise violate them”(1995:115). Hazel strongly claimed this delimited subject position by right. She shared that she had and was prepared to use force to police her bodily space, to resist those who might wish to deny her this right. Her attitude, she

explained, was: “Don’t invade my personal space. If I let you in, I let you in. But if I don’t let you in, don’t force your way in.” According to Hazel, the limits of this space were precisely demarcated: she claimed for herself a “metre zone of personal space, cause that’s what I allow [hmm]. There’s a meter radius, I’m the mid-point and there’s a circle, like a meter around me.” It followed from this strongly held sense of bodily space and limits that Hazel proposed that any unwanted, sexualised act to her body was, for her, akin to rape. The following interchange occurred between us as she explained her thinking to me:

And sometimes I even think that to me rape goes further than actual penal, penis penetrating vagina [hm]. It’s not for me where it ends or where it starts. [Uh-hm so what do you mean? Like what else would be?] I mean for me basically if you physically violate me in any way [uh-hm], I would sort of say that’s rape class 1. [Ok do you mean like if somebody hits you let’s say?] No, no, no, I’m talking about feeling me up [ok like sex..] sexual harassment ja [ok], you know.

Hazel was contending here that a definition of rape which focused on the vagina was not broad enough. Given her sense of independent ownership of her body, and her claimed right to choose who could or could enter her bodily space, she was proposing to remap rape to concern a breach of the integrity of this space as a whole. She was also suggesting that mainstream definitions of rape did not encompass the range of bodily assaults that might subjectively feel like “rape class 1” to a woman. Neo reiterated Hazel’s view on the narrowness of dominant definitions of rape, referring to South African law specifically. She did so not from a subjective sense of her normative bodily limits, but rather from a more academic position as a law student, and also as a non-South African who had lived in other countries with different legal structures. “The definition of rape in this country is bullshit” Neo complained, because limited to “forced penetration” by a penis. She explained how she would expand this definition in South Africa :

First off, granted that they don’t have any criminal laws on sexual harassment [hm], I would bring that in there because look.. rape can take still many – it’s like sex, sex is not just penetration [hm] you know what I mean? [hm] So why if you, the fact that you only touch my breast you know, that’s rape I’m sorry!

Arguing that sex comprised a range of activities, not just vaginal penetration, Neo’s point was that rape, as non-consensual sex, should also include these activities. Neo went on to problematise the legal definition of rape in South Africa in terms of its emphasis on force

and penetration by a penis, as this respectively overlooked the possibility of non-physical coercion and the use of other penetrative objects. Finally she critiqued the legal framework because it excluded male rape (“called sodomy”) and the possibility of women rapists. Not surprisingly then, her conclusion, with a sigh, was: “we have a long way to go (*slight laugh*) it actually frustrates me.” It is interesting that Neo spoke of “we” here, identifying with South Africa or perhaps South African women in particular, to suggest that there was still a battle ahead for the complexities and full range of women’s rape experiences to gain due legal recognition.

Olivia took a more optimistic perspective to the current state of South African law and related institutions relative to rape, because it was also historical—recall that she was only one of two women in the sample who had grown up under apartheid. Olivia recognised that there was still much work to be done for the “equality entrenched in the constitution” to be “translate[d] into rights” and transformed attitudes towards women. But she also felt that South African society and state institutions had come a long way. In Chapter 4, Olivia was seen to critique stranger-danger discourses of rape on the basis of her experience of physical abuse in a relationship, as well as her childhood witnessing of other women’s domestic abuse in her family and community. Her analysis of the discursive climate during her childhood was that there was no language to speak or critique domestic violence against women: “people didn’t term it like that [uh-hm]. Eehh it was more this kind of thing of ‘yes she deserves it’ or whatever, there wasn’t a *de*-constructing [uh-hm] of that.” Comparing this to the current level of legal attention to women’s abuse, Olivia spoke to the argument I proposed in Chapter 1 that rape and other forms of violence against women have been put into public discourse in post-apartheid South Africa, that is made speakable and thus addressable. Olivia viewed this as progress, explaining:

I think in the communities where I grew up, this thing of violence against women [hm] was quite a major [uh-hm] em issue. But because it wasn’t the time yet [hm] for it to be looked at – I mean our governments did quite a bit on eeh.. kind of *speaking* to those issues [uh-hm] and the Domestic Violence Act, with kind of.. civil society organisations pushing for that [hm] has been quite a big, major step [step yeah] because it’s, it’s beginning to kind of say ‘hey we need to legislate here.’

According to this comment, the “time” had now come to speak violence against women, and the discursive shift to put it on the agenda had been led by civil society pressure on the government. It had resulted in official recognition that domestic violence was not beyond the province of the law. With regards to the particular issue of rape, specifically the treatment of survivors, Olivia likewise saw progress in the fact that “the state’s busy experimenting with different models to [hm] make it less traumatic. I mean reduce secondary traumatisation.” For instance, she explained to me that there are now “facilities in South Africa” where rape victims could receive comprehensive and sensitive treatment: “You go there, you are treated with respect [uh-hm], they em counsel you first, tell you what the process is going to be [uh-hm], settle you down, em a forensic nurse takes the sample. . . And then they call the police [uh-hm] to take the case, the statement.”

But for Alex and Sarah, imagining the experience of being raped, the South African police represented one of the last institutions they would want to deal with. Alex explained that the police were sexist and insensitive. She claimed to have once witnessed them being this way to a bleeding woman who had come into the police station alleging domestic violence. Sarah’s comments about the South African police focused rather on their reputed incompetence. She imagined that even if “by some miracle” the police caught her hypothetical rapist:

in this country. . . they’ll get off on some technicality cause the police didn’t sort of like take the fingerprints properly or whatever you know [hm]. And that to me would be a *big* issue you know. . . you’ve been attacked by this person so you would feel particularly vulnerable [hm] and em, yah, like you know exposed.

Her view then was that the police, contrary to their official mandate, were unable to keep South African citizens safe from rape and rapists.

As evidenced by much of the preceding discussion in this chapter, the themes of safety and security relative to rape and also crime were important to the women I interviewed. Six of the women constructed safety and security as rights or goods which they should ordinarily enjoy, but which the threat of rape and crime denied them in contemporary South Africa. This was presented as an index of the kind of society they lived in, and thus as bearing upon their lives as its citizens or inhabitants at this historical moment, as gendered subjects especially. Suzanne, for instance, strongly felt that South

Africa was a particularly dangerous place in which to live, and described how her heightened, daily feelings of fear here had been clearly out of place when she visited Israel, a country which she realised was itself not at peace. Hence she spoke of “the fear and anxiety that we have here in South Africa,” saying “I don’t think I’d ever lose that sort of fear [yeah] that I, that fear that we live with on a daily basis here, that’s so normal here.” Fearfulness was equated to being a member of an imagined community of South Africans (“we”), especially as Suzanne considered that this fear was now “normal” and general, not “just confined to women only,” “I wouldn’t say it’s.. completely just a woman thing.”

As proof of this last point, Suzanne told about her boyfriend and a male friend who had both been mugged in Cape Town and had been very afraid. More generally, she claimed to know that her boyfriend felt fear of crime but, she was clear to specify, “I mean he’s not scared of rape, that’s not what he’s scared of.” Fear of rape was rather a specifically gendered fear, thus a part of what it meant to be a South African *woman*. While Tumi did not claim to “know” such fear herself, interestingly, she reflected as an ‘insider-outsider’ on other women’s fears:

We live in fear. . . we feel very unsafe, we feel – I think a lot of women feel unsafe, that’s the one thing I do know [hm]. People don’t like going anywhere where they don’t know anyone, where they have to go by themselves [hm] so.. that’s sad actually that you have to live a life where you constantly have to make.. you know measures for in case this happens.

This was a critical comment about the diminished quality of life for women in a society in which they always have to think about and take measures to keep safe. Casting such an existence as “sad” implied that a happier alternative or norm was possible. Some of the safety and risk-avoidance strategies the women in this thesis reported using have already been considered in the earlier sections of the chapter. For example, Anna was cited earlier as saying that her perceived risk of rape in an open and accessible space like Newlands Forest meant that she did not go walking there alone or even with her dog. Anna experienced this as sad and unjust, as Tumi was suggesting above, and as feminists have contended about the impact of women’s fears of crime, violence and rape (du Toit 2005; Stanko 1993). Anna protested this lost ability to go freely into the Forest:

I think it's bloody unfair (*laughing and raising voice*) because I think men can always do this, you know. My husband really, he likes to go walking really early.. like in summer he leaves at about 6 or so... and I just wouldn't do that on my own. [Hm but I mean do you think, does he not feel worried about?] No he doesn't [anything?] no he doesn't.

In contrast, Anna had earlier in the interview related how free and mobile she felt while visiting family in Europe: "I just like felt completely different. . . I used to kind of even go out in the *evening*, at 11 and walk around in the streets. . . and felt *safe* you know." Her description of a gendered loss of freedom and confidence in public space pertained specifically to South Africa, likewise the gendered subject of fear she was claiming was a part of her South African subjectivity.

Du Toit contends that one meaning of women's fear of rape in South Africa is that "large stretches and innumerable pockets of space in every woman's and girl's living environment are physically inaccessible or dangerous to her, so that her agency is seriously curbed" (2005:261). For this reason, she argues strongly that rape in South Africa should be conceived as a matter of citizenship because it strips women's of their rights, including those Anna claimed to miss here relative to Europe, which could be characterised as the rights to move and feel safe in one's society. Arguably, Alex, who perhaps most protested the meanings and subjective impact of rape upon her as a South African woman, was concerned less about its implications for her citizenship than her *belonging* to the new nation. Van Zyl (2005), drawing on Yuval-Davis (2003) distinguishes between citizenship and belonging, using the latter to characterise one's subjective and emotional sense of nationhood. Belonging, Yuval-Davis proposes, is "thicker" than citizenship because it refers not only to one's formal place, rights and responsibilities within a society, but also one's emotional attachments to these things and the society as a whole (2003, cited in Van Zyl 2005).

For Alex, a young white woman, the combination of rape, crime and the allegedly unjust manner in which affirmative action was being implemented in the new South Africa meant that she felt under attack, like she no longer belonged. Alex claimed an original loyalty to South Africa: "it's the one thing, I've always said to myself I will never move away from this country. . . because yeah I have always been so proudly South African." To be "proudly South African" is a phrase from a public, democratic-nationalist

discourse which aims to cultivate a sense of pride and recognition amongst all South Africans in the new 'rainbow nation.' However, Alex reported, things had felt different when she came back home from a long holiday abroad. Specifically, she had felt a heightened sense of insecurity to the point where she began to consider that South Africa could no longer be her home: "And then when I got back from overseas I just, I felt so unsafe and it's the one thing that would make me move away, definitely. [Is what the?] Is violence, the fear and the rape [hm] and that kind of stuff."

It felt to Alex that her previous subjectivity and pride as a South African were negated by the fear that seemed to now define this sense of self. This she framed as a painful loss of her right to be South African and her feelings of belonging: "I think there is a lot of resentment in me because I feel well this is my country [hm] and I want to be safe in my country." Feeling under threat and perhaps even deliberately targeted for rape because she is white as we heard in Chapter 4 was, for Alex, directly contrary to feeling that she had a valuable and tenable place in this society. Two other white women mooted the option of moving away from South Africa because of the levels of violence and crime, and referenced friends who already had. Anna said of crime: "I mean if people leave the country it's because of that." Another white woman, Sarah, commenting on the apparent professionalisation of crime in South Africa, proposed this as "such a reflection on like [hm] where the country sits you know [yeah yeah], and like is there any hope you know?"

In response, and in order to contextualise such views, I want to conclude this section of the chapter on the meanings of being South African that the women constructed by considering Violet and Olivia's words. Violet, a black woman, proposed to me, as Bremner (2004) theorises, that in South Africa now "white people are so afraid [uh-hm]. They're afraid of everything." She theorised that fear of crime was a new discourse, an "idea," on to which many people, mostly white, were latching. Violet was consciously determined to resist this discourse, and also to find hope in the new nation: "I'm not saying there isn't a problem with crime, there is. But all I'm refusing to do is submit to this *idea*, it – to me it feels like a bandwagon." Violet, again echoing Bremner's (2004) analysis, proposed that the roots of this racialised fear of crime lay in the experience of post-apartheid transition for white South Africans, as they were "coming

from a standpoint of having been in a security state. . . so for them this seems like total disarray.” As she continued later: “they are using apartheid as a benchmark. . . and that was not real.”

Olivia had a similar take as Violet, speaking mostly from her position as a subject with a certain set of historical experiences. We have seen earlier and in Chapter 4 that Olivia presented herself as not unduly aware or scared of rape and crime in her life. Also, earlier in this section of the chapter, she was heard to positively reflect on some of the institutional and legal developments that have occurred in post-apartheid South Africa to address the abuse and rape of women here. I remarked to Olivia in the interview that she seemed to have a very different perspective on these issues from the other women I had met so far, who, at that point, were mostly young, white and middle-class—I had not interviewed any black African women yet because of my relative difficulty in recruiting them into the sample described in Chapter 3. Olivia theorised this difference between herself and my other respondents as a product of their different experiences and expectations of what it meant to live in South Africa now, given her positioning as a middle-aged coloured woman who had grown up in a working-class community under apartheid: “I think we lived in different worlds (*short laugh*) [hm] because I mean like often, I still think a lot of white people are protected [hm], young ones in particular. . . so the realities are just different.” She was suggesting here that her class, racial and historical positioning gave her a more pragmatic view on the prevalence and subjective meanings of danger in South Africa. Having never experienced institutionalised protection from danger under the old order, indeed quite the contrary, she did not feel particularly exposed to it now, under the new.

Overall, relative to the black women I met and spoke with, the alleged levels of violence, rape and crime in South Africa served for the white women, Nancy excluded, as a largely pessimistic indication of the present state of the nation. Nancy’s exceptionalism can perhaps be explained by the fact that she explicitly presented herself in the interview as having different, more ‘realistic’ and political views on race, racism and transformation than most of her young, white contemporaries. For instance, she stated to me that she made a deliberate effort to resist at UCT “that white middle-class background that I come from [hm] cause it’s so easy to fall back into that,” and explained that she

moved in a multi-racial circle of friends. Therefore, more like the black African and coloured women in this study, Nancy did not speak of the alleged crises of rape and crime in South Africa as an indication that the country was sinking.

The point in juxtaposing the women's attitudes about the prospects of the new South Africa and their subjective views of their place within it is not to dismiss or valorise some over others. The purpose rather is to suggest the degree to which they were situated and invested according to a multitude of factors including the women's individual and group histories, as well as their current race, class and political positions. Nonetheless, whatever their positionings and politics, it can be said that for all fifteen of the women in this study, the issue of rape in South Africa inevitably served as a diagnostic and discourse of the nation itself. In variously mapping risk and safety in their daily lives, in talking about how they imagined and experienced themselves as vulnerable, resisting and sexual subjects, these women were constructing what it meant for them, as women, to live and be here, now, in South Africa. In the final analysis, the conclusions were not so positive. The following chapter recapitulates and summarises these conclusions.

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore discourses of selfhood, security, sexual violence, and identity amongst a group of South African women who do not think of themselves as having experienced rape. In this chapter, I review the logic of the thesis, and offer reflections upon its central themes and findings. I conclude finally by suggesting some of the theoretical and practical implications of this research.

The context in which this thesis is located is a 'new' South Africa in which the rape of women, and also children, by men, is said to be an alarmingly prevalent problem. Having broadly mapped this discursive context in Chapter 1, I motivate this work by arguing that women who attest to never having been raped constitute an important site through which to explore the meanings of the 'rape crisis.' I argue that such women may be impacted in their daily lives by discourses around them which construct post-apartheid South Africa, the space and time in which they live, as rape-dense. I propose therefore that they may bring a gendered perspective to bear on the alleged crisis, and may also shed light on the extent to which this crisis differentially affects all women in the country today, not just rape survivors.

Chapter 2 further motivates my research focus by elaborating upon its theoretical bases. Drawing on feminist post-structuralist theories of subjectivity, I argue that dominant gendered discourses of violence and vulnerability position women as subjects inherently vulnerable to male violence, and uniquely vulnerable to rape. I propose then that even without the experience of any such violence, women may construct, imagine and indeed experience their selves and their bodies as susceptible to it. Hence they may be influenced by their constructions of the threat and fear of male violence in their lives. Still in Chapter 2, I theorise the epistemological implications of this post-structuralist account of gendered subjectivity, showing that it accords the subject access to knowledge about self and social world through discourse and imagination, not only experience. Thus I propose that the fifteen women in this thesis may construct their knowledges of rape in South Africa and position themselves relative to it by drawing on socially available discourses and narratives of rape, and by subjectively imagining it. I argue further that

these women's constructions of rape are likely to be socially situated and politically invested according to their relative positionings and experiences.

Methodologically, it follows in Chapter 3 that I report asking these women for their opinions, analyses and imaginations of the phenomenon of rape in South Africa, as well as for their narratives of personal encounters with other forms of violence, danger and fear. I reflect in this chapter upon the impact of my own voice, as researcher and social subject, in shaping the women's talk during the interview process. I argue that the intersubjective dynamics between my research respondents and myself form an inextricable part of the empirical data of this thesis, which signals the need to analyse and read their words with the interview context in mind. Thinking beyond the immediate context of the interview, I contemplate the ethical questions raised by my research focus and methods. Specifically, I consider the possibility that the women's participation in my study might have caused them (greater) fear and consciousness of the threat of rape. Although I reflect that I did not take sufficient steps to address this possibility, the richness and density of the empirical data generated within the interviews would suggest that many of the women already had considerable awareness and anxiety about the phenomenon of rape in South Africa before we met and spoke.

The groundwork for the thesis being laid, Chapters 4 and 5 constitute the heart of the work, in which I present and analyse my empirical findings. In Chapter 4, I separate four broad discourses which the women deployed to characterise and make sense of the occurrence of rape in South Africa. I term these the statistical discourse; the crime discourse; the race discourse; and the gender discourse. I note the relative prominence of the first two of these discourses in the women's talk of rape, and the largely implicit racialisation of the rapist as a black man in most of my white respondents' constructions of the matter. I suggest that these findings mirror the manner (discussed in Chapter 1) in which rape has been put on the public agenda in the wider South African context, namely through claims about the statistics, rampant crime and racial dynamics in the country. This would mean that the women in my sample were indeed drawing on locally available discourses to subjectively construct rape. By contrast, I frame the gender discourse of rape as being on the whole less prominent in the women's talk. I define this discourse to concern gender not only in the sense of constructing rape as an interaction involving a

man and a woman, for this gendering of rape identities is in fact ubiquitous in all four discourses. Rather, I theorise the gender discourse as that which foregrounds inequitable, socially constructed gender relations between men and women to explain rape.

Thus defined, I frame the gender discourse as sitting in relative tension with the other discourses of rape, crime and race in particular. Yet by citing self-reflexive comments from some women on their stated theories of rape, and in my own analysis of certain contradictions in their talk, I illustrate that my separation of the four discourses is ultimately heuristic. That is to say, I maintain that the women variously used and moved between all these discourses to construct rape in South Africa. The differences between the women could be said to lie in their emphasis on one or more discourses of rape over others. I show, for instance, how some women came to recognise as the interview proceeded that their initial emphases on crime, class or race to identify the rapist and explain his motivations could not actually apply to all rape cases. Thus I suggest that their various movements through the four discourses of rape occur as they increasingly and self-reflexively seek to theorise rape and respond to my probing questions, and as they draw upon changing sources of knowledge. This demonstrates that the women, as knowing subjects, were not constant or unitary, but rather displayed multiple subjectivities and ways of knowing about rape. It also speaks to my contention in Chapter 3 and above that knowledge production was a dynamic process occurring within the interviews, between my research respondents and me.

Having reconstructed the women's discourses of rape, I move in Chapter 5 to explore their subjective positionings within these discourses. I look at four broad themes across the data through which the women spoke about themselves, namely: danger and safety; vulnerability and resistance; sexuality and power; and rights and belonging. I show that the women discursively and spatially mapped their risk of rape in keeping with their constructions of the crisis in the country. Despite the subjective or idiosyncratic aspects of this mapping, I argue that all but one woman imagined or experienced herself as inherently vulnerable to rape. Thus hegemonic ideas of gendered vulnerability to male violence were deeply implicated in the women's sense of self and body. The relationship between female subjectivity and male power recurred in the women's discussions of their heterosexuality. I argue that a number revealed their experiences of sex and sexuality to

constitute a contested and ambivalent terrain, for they reported meeting, resisting and sometimes yielding to dominant male sexual desire. This desire, and the power which configures it, were linked to the threat of rape. Finally, the imagination and experience of living under such conditions translated for some into a question of women's rights in South Africa today. For these women, the conclusion was that they lived in a society in which their rights, including the right to sexual and bodily autonomy, were constantly threatened by men, hence the prevalence and possibility of rape.

Taken together, Chapters 4 and 5 reveal a tension that could be said to structure the subjective meanings of rape and rape crisis in South Africa for the fifteen women I interviewed. On the one hand, I argue in Chapter 4 that the women's discursive constructions of rape tended to distance the phenomenon from themselves and from their normal daily lives. In variously referencing the "horrific" rape statistics and emphasising crime, class and race dynamics in the country to explain these statistics, the women were effectively claiming that rape ordinarily happened elsewhere—away from the Self, concerning the Other—in South Africa. According to the logic of these discourses, rape was an experience that could potentially implicate the Self only if one had an unfortunate encounter with this Other. Yet at the same time that the women tended to minimise the extent and location of the risk of rape in their personal lives, I contended in Chapter 5 that almost all imagined themselves as inherently or naturally vulnerable to rape, *because* they are women. The tension, then, was that they reported feeling vulnerable to an experience that they also constructed as ultimately unlikely for women such as themselves.

I would conclude that the meaning or impact of this tension for my respondents was that to be gendered and embodied as a woman in post-apartheid South Africa was to live with the imagination and fear of rape. It was to embody a gendered subjectivity of fear and perceived vulnerability to rape, and thus an epistemological subjectivity of knowing, thinking and imagining rape as possible. It was also to live and daily negotiate a psychic and material contradiction between one's sense of natural vulnerability to rape and socially mediated and minimised risk of it. Thus it was to embody a split and shifting subjectivity, marked by ambivalences, silences and contradictions. Certainly the fifteen women, speaking from their various social, subjective, experiential and invested

positions, did not equally or constantly take up the subjectivity that I am describing here. Yet to the extent that they did, this sense of self was rooted in, and heightened by, life in the contemporary context. It was a specifically South African, post-apartheid, gendered subjectivity of fear, vulnerability and knowledge of rape.

### **Re-Imagining Rape and Self: Moving Forward**

To finally conclude this work, I want to say a few words on how its approach and findings could be extended to theorise further and practically address the rape crisis in post-apartheid South Africa. The discursive approach taken here to the issue of rape in South Africa has unearthed a multitude of meanings, ideas and stories which make rape 'real' for a small sample of women who do not claim the brute experience of it—real in the sense that these women construct their identities, daily options and future possibilities around these discourses of rape. We have heard the mostly detrimental effects of these discourses on the women's lives and on their views about others in their society and, indeed, this society itself. The richness, complexity and problematic materialities of these discourses suggest the need to broaden the theoretical and empirical lens through which the present crisis of rape in South Africa is studied and conceptualised. The approach and findings of this thesis suggest, more specifically, the fruitfulness of thinking beyond the frames of quantification, individual experience and institutional structures in order to apprehend the meanings and impact of the rape crisis in the country. There is also a need, arguably fundamental, to more precisely establish the terms of the discourses in which the crisis and contestation is presently unfolding.

The findings of this thesis point also to the need to deconstruct and reconfigure hegemonic discourses of rape in South Africa. Overall, my research respondents' talk confirms existing arguments that rape has been put into public discourse in South Africa in a manner which indicts black men and negates the hope of the post-apartheid project (e.g. Erlank 2004; Posel 2005). If so, it is theoretically, practically and politically critical to explore how and why such discourses of rape are constructed, disseminated and ultimately reproduced by ordinary citizens such as those studied in this work. It must also be questioned why these discourses persist, and what role they play in perpetuating

intersecting gender, race and class hierarchies in this already divided society. The same could be asked from a feminist perspective of the women's emphasis on rape as stranger-danger, and their relative tendency to ignore gender relations as a central, causal variable in rape. The women's theories on rape in South Africa are disheartening in this regard, considering their relatively high levels of education and exposure to a wide range of knowledges, and given past and ongoing feminist activism to raise critical understanding about rape in this society. It suggests the need for renewed and re-strategised activism by South African feminists to inform the public about the nature and causes of the problem.

At a more theoretical level, I venture that it would be fascinating to reproduce a study such as this one with a sample of women who *do* claim the experience of rape, and also with men. Working with rape survivors could allow for further theorisation of the links between discourse, subjective experience and imagination, and the manner in which these influence the subject's construction of a broad social phenomenon such as rape. Studying men's perspectives on rape in South Africa could shed light on the theoretically complex question of whether women's perceived vulnerability to rape gives them particular epistemological grounds and resources with which to theorise and imagine it, as I have suggested in this work. Hearing men speak about rape and rape crisis in the post-apartheid South African context could also generate insights as to where men and women's gendered discourses and subjectivities collide, in which a feminist post-structuralist lens would locate the very possibility of rape. It may allow us to see, in other words, how the possibility of rape in this society may begin to be re-imagined.

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**Appendix 3****Summary of Research Participants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Class Status</b>	<b>Racial Group</b>
Alex	19	Middle Class	White
Anna	45	Middle Class	White
Hazel	20	Middle Class	Coloured
Janet	20	Working Class	African
Kudzai	22	Middle Class	African
Mimi		Lower-Middle Class	Coloured
Nancy	25	Middle Class	White
Neo	26	Lower-Middle Class	African
Olivia	45	Working-Middle Class	Coloured
Sarah	22	Upper Middle-Class	White
Sasha	21	Upper Middle-Class	White
Suzanne	23	Upper Middle-Class	White
Tumi	23	Lower-Middle Class	African
Vanessa	20	Upper Middle-Class	White
Violet	24	Upper Middle-Class	African

**Appendix 4****Interview Consent Form**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby give permission to Simidele Dosekun (researcher) to interview and quote me, using a pseudonym, for the purposes of her master's research thesis. I understand the nature of the research and am satisfied that my anonymity will be protected.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5

## Interview Questions

- ♣ Can you tell me about yourself / background?
- ♣ Can you tell me about your daily routine?
- ♣ As you go about your day, would you say that you are aware of potential violence to you or significant others?
- ♣ In what sorts of situations or places do you feel threatened / vulnerable?
- ♣ What sorts of people do you find threatening?
- ♣ Have you had experiences in which you have felt unsafe or at risk from violence?
- ♣ Can you tell me (then) how you keep yourself safe?
- ♣ What do you think you would do in a potentially violent situation? Do you feel able to handle violence?
- ♣ Have you had experiences in which you have felt unsafe or at risk from violence?
- ♣ Have you had experiences in which you have felt unsafe or at risk from violence from men you know?
- ♣ Can you tell me about your interactions with men in general?

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