Introduction

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Just this week, as I was writing this introduction, I walked across campus to clear my head, only to encounter numerous antirape messages. Printed in chalk on the sidewalk beneath my feet and on sidewalks all across heavily traveled sections of campus were antirape writings, no doubt put there by activist feminist students. These writings declared, "One out of four women will be sexually assaulted on a college campus." "Around the world at least one woman in every three has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Most often the abuser is a member of her own family." "Rape is not sex." "He simply didn't stop when I asked him to. Sound familiar? Rape." "April is sexual assault awareness month. Be aware."

One week earlier, during a public lecture a colleague quoted a scholar of sports culture as saying that in the United States sports, war, and rape are inextricably linked phenomena. After his lecture, my colleague asked me as an expert on rape what I thought about this claim. I told him that comparing rape to other social experiences was, in fact, not an unusual thing to do: scholars and media pundits alike casually invoke rape metaphors, for example, to convey a sense of the "ultimate" degradation or horror or to illustrate the humiliation of nations (e.g., the "rape of Kuwait"). Simultaneously, they neglect the particular experiences of women (and some men) who actually experience rape in masculinized contexts such as sports culture and war.

Over the last ten years, while researching representations of rape in popular culture, I have had innumerable experiences like these, during which rape emerges as a topic, image, narrative, trope, or metaphor in unexpected moments seemingly unrelated to my process of research and writing. Admittedly, encountering activist antirape graffiti (even when written in an ephemeral medium such as chalk) is (unfortunately) not a common experience for most people. Nevertheless, frequent encounters with rape messages are not limited to scholars and/or antirape activists,

such as myself, who strive to be aware of representations of rape in social environments. Whether or not one is conscious of it, beyond the physical rapes taking place every two and a half minutes in the United States (United States Department of Justice 1993), representations of rape pervade contemporary popular media and thus our everyday lives. For example, during every visit to the checkout stand at major U.S. grocery stores, a shopper is apt to see at least one magazine or newspaper with a story about rape advertised on the cover; these might include "special" multipart stories, such as "A Year in Rape" (Bizjak 1995), or continuing stories about specific cases, such as the University of California, Davis, student accused of raping a number of women on campus over several years.[1] And, more often than not Hollywood films represent rape. Stories about rape are also commonplace in first-run and rerun television dramas, talk shows, soap operas, "reality" shows, news programs, and even sometimes situation comedies. Currently, at least in northern California, public service announcements decrying statutory rape appear on the sides of moving buses and on billboards, cautioning men that "sex with a minor is a crime."

In short, given the ubiquity of representations of rape, even someone who is a moderate consumer of mass media would have difficulty spending a week (possibly even an entire day) without coming across the subject.[2] The existence of rape is thus naturalized in U.S. life, perhaps seemingly so natural that many people are unaware of the frequency with which they encounter these representations. I would go so far as to argue that rape is one of contemporary U.S. popular culture's compulsory citations: from talk in public service announcements about statutory rape to talk on the news about the "date rape drug," depictions of rape are a pervasive part of this culture, embedded in all of its complex media forms, entrenched in the landscape of visual imagery.

By suggesting that these examples illustrate an "experience of rape," I do not mean to suggest that encountering discourses about rape is *equivalent* to experiencing the physical act of rape. This book is about representations of rape, not physical rapes. Nevertheless, as AIDS discourse is to AIDS and cancer discourse is to cancer (Sontag 1990), rape discourse is *part of* the fabric of what rape is in contemporary culture. Discourses of rape are both productive and determinative. They are not simply narratives marketed for consumption in an entertainment context or "talk" about real things. They are themselves functional, generative, formative, strategic, performative, and real. Like physical actions, rape discourses

have the capacity to inform, indeed embody and make way for, future actions, even physical ones. They are not simply metaphors for how people behave; as Raymond Williams (1977) puts it, they are "structures of feeling" for how people act in social contexts. The pervasiveness of representations of rape naturalizes rape's place in our everyday world, not only as real physical events but also as part of our fantasies, fears, desires, and consumptive practices. Representations of rape form a complex of cultural discourses central to the very structure of stories people tell about themselves and others. This book is about representation and narrative in relation to rape in U.S. popular culture since the 1980s; it develops and offers a feminist critical perspective on these depictions and stories.

Some Historical Functions of Rape Narratives

This book focuses primarily on representations of rape in post-1980 fictional film and television. However, as a topic rape is virtually "timeless," functioning as a key aspect of storytelling throughout Western history. Importantly, despite this "timelessness," the structure of rape narratives varies historically, depending on cultural and national contexts. Rape is a particularly versatile narrative element that often addresses any number of other themes and social issues. In this section I offer a brief discussion of just a few examples of the social function of rape narratives in various historical contexts prior to the emergence of film as a medium. My goal here is to identify the long-standing discursive effectivity of rape narratives—an effectivity that continues into the present. Furthermore, I choose examples that address issues of gender, race, class, and nation in different, sometimes even conflictual, ways in order to emphasize just how malleable rape is as it helps to produce and maintain social relations and hierarchies.

For instance, Stephen P. Pistono (1988) focuses on the ways rape narratives have functioned in various legal contexts. He finds that in fifth-century B.C.E. Athens the penalty for *seduction* of a married woman was death or torture, whereas for *rape* of a married woman the penalty was only a monetary fine. Pistono argues that this counterintuitive difference between the penalties for seduction and those for rape depended on the assumption that a seducer—but not a rapist—would have regular access to a "man's" home and could even conceivably be the biological father of that man's children without his knowledge: hence, the harsher punishment for access to the

man's "property"—his home, wife, and children. While this historical example places the "wronged man" at the center of the drama, in other legal contexts women held center stage. For example, Pistono reports that prior to 1285 in England women were responsible for bringing forth their own rape charges. In such cases, charging a man with rape often resulted in a forced marriage between the woman and the man who raped her. Alternatively, the woman would be prosecuted for making a false accusation, if her case remained unproven. While either of these outcomes was punitive for women, Pistono reports that couples began to use this legal definition of rape to force their parents to accept marriage based on romantic love rather than on familial arrangement. Presumably, a woman would (falsely) accuse the man she desired to marry of rape; he would not deny the charge; and then the parents would have to allow their marriage. Pistono writes that in 1285, however, the Statute of Westminster gave the king the right to press rape charges, taking from women what little control they once had over the rape scenario. In 1382 a new statute gave fathers, husbands, and next of kin the right to press charges for rape of the women in their families. Pistono argues that as the voice of the accuser shifted from women to the king and finally to the male-headed family, these changes in law resulted in rape becoming an issue of property—protecting the family's land and identity, defining women as the property of the men in their family, and maintaining class and gender relations.

Given the fact that marriage law originally conceived of women as men's property, Frances Ferguson (1987) points out that in Hebrew and Saxon law, a husband's rape of his wife was theoretically impossible, since she "belonged" to him. Shifting her attention from legal to literary narratives, Ferguson goes on to argue that in his mid-eighteenth-century novel *Clarissa* Samuel Richardson challenged the law's definition of rape. Whereas the law viewed rape as a matter of form—that is, of whether or not one was married—Richardson's novel developed a definition of rape as a matter of "psychological states" (99), including questions of desire and intent. Ferguson argues that *Clarissa* thus offered a radical shift in public discourse away from formal familial relationships to questions of individual experience. Ferguson shows how *Clarissa* as a narrative about rape responded to legal structures, helped produce a new literary form (the psychological novel), and redefined rape in terms of individual desire rather than of social structure.

The previous examples illustrate the versatility of rape—functioning both to define property and the family and to support new literary forms

and psychological interiorization—but these are only a few of many complex ways rape has functioned historically. In the context of the colonization of the United States, Antonia I. Castañeda (1993) argues that in the eighteenth century U.S. colonists told *narratives* about Native American men raping white women to justify white male armed violence against Native Americans, while simultaneously using *physical* rape of Native American women as a tool of war against Native Americans and in the name of cultural and national development.

In the later context of the early nineteenth century, James R. Lewis (1992) argues that captivity narratives supported a Puritan worldview, furthered anti–Native American propaganda, and provided entertainment. In these narratives, Lewis argues, an allusion to rape or attempted rape was necessary in order to justify showing or describing nudity (which was generally prohibited) in nineteenth-century representations. Lewis argues, nevertheless, that nude women in "the state of bondage, which was supposed to legitimate nudity by separating it from sensuality, actually *increased* the image's power to titillate by adding intimations of sexual dominance and sadism" (70). Lewis argues that these narratives produced a link between violence and sex, often in the character of the hero who would save the white woman just in time, do violence to her Native American captors, and then marry the former captive, achieving the thwarted sexuality the represented captors implicitly desired. Here, rather than justifying and enacting colonial war, rape justified violent masculine sexual and racist spectatorial pleasure.

In relation to U.S. slavery, Anthony S. Parent Jr. and Susan Brown Wallace (1993) argue that rape, the threat of rape, and even the forced observation (by African Americans) of slave owners' rape of African American women functioned as forms of social control, particularly as it shaped the sexual identity of slave children.[3] While this research is based on oral history testimony from ex-slaves, both Peter W. Bardaglio (1994) and Diane Miller Sommerville (1995) examine abolitionists' (e.g., Sarah Grimké) use of narratives about the rape of African American women by white men to argue against slavery, regardless of the fact that antebellum courts did not define the rape of an African American woman as illegal. Several other scholars argue that, in contradistinction to the abolitionists, southern U.S. courts used legal cases involving African American men as accused rapists during the later decades of slavery as evidence that (male) African Americans were actually treated fairly under the law, regardless of their status as slaves. Despite the fact that laws were different depending

on the race of both the rapist and the victim, these courts claimed that the fact that the accused African American men had the legal protection of a court of law in which they were presumed innocent until proven guilty illustrated that they were not discriminated against as slaves.[4]

During slavery rape narratives might either condemn or justify slavery; after slavery rape emerged again as a key narrative through which to understand race relations in the United States. Many scholars point out that while the myth of the African American rapist was used after the Civil War to justify lynching, that same myth did not operate during slavery when bondage, rather than lynching, maintained racial hierarchies.[5] Angela Y. Davis (1981a) argues that the "myth of the black rapist" not only was meant to justify lynching of African American men, but simultaneously served to cloak continued violations of African American women by white men. Davis criticizes this myth (as well as some 1970s white feminist scholars) for depending on and perpetuating images of the violent African American man as rapist, the virginal white woman as rape victim, the benevolent white man as savior, and the oversexed African American woman as harlot.[6] Davis argues that this model of rape has functioned historically to define African American women as unrapable and African American men as out of control, thus justifying continued discrimination against African Americans.[7] Robyn Wiegman (1993) further argues that newspapers would document the violence of lynching in graphic detail, "extend[ing] the function of lynching as a mode of surveillance by reiterating its performative qualities" (230) and producing a forum for the expression of social anger and horror regarding African American bodies.

Narratives about postslavery rape also were sometimes invoked to call for a return to slavery. For example, Sommerville argues that at the turn of the twentieth century some racist discourse romanticized slavery by arguing that African American men did not start to rape white women until *after* slavery, once they were ostensibly "free" to become a sexual threat to white women. Martha Hodes (1993) points out that this discourse operated in the courts as well, citing a case in which a judge claimed that rape of white women by African American men occurred more often during Reconstruction than during slavery, although he offered no substantiating evidence. In these various examples, racialized narratives about the absence of rape in the past naturalize racialized narratives about the (supposed) presence of rape in the contemporary moment.

Whether in the form of legal documents, literature, or folklore, these admittedly brief examples hint at the versatility and ubiquity of rape narratives, illustrating how they have, among other things, operated historically to define the masculine familial subject; to structure women's relationship to love, family, and the law; to define property; to transform the structure of the novel; to justify and perpetuate U.S. colonialism; to define the nation; to produce masculine spectatorial pleasure predicated on illicit (violent) sexuality and culturally sanctioned racism; to perpetuate and justify slavery; to resist slavery; and to perpetuate racism. Operating in literature, law, the courts, social activism, family and plantation life, newspapers, paintings, and war, rape narratives help organize, understand, and even arguably produce the social world; they help structure social understandings of complex phenomena such as gender, race, class, and nation. Additionally, they help inscribe a way of looking, the conditions of watching, and the attitudes and structures of feeling one might have about rape, women, and people of color. I turn now to an examination of how 1970s and 1980s feminist antirape rhetoric and activism drew on, contributed to, and responded to the social functions of rape.[8]

Feminism and the Rape Reform Movement

In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist activism against rape and for rape law reform radically redefined rape. A few key texts and events that received widespread attention and helped to make at least some feminist understandings of rape common knowledge during this time include the New York Radical Feminists' 1971 "Speak-out" on rape, which defined talking openly about rape as part of politicized consciousness raising and drew attention to rape as a widespread problem (Rosen 2000, 182); Joanne Little's highly publicized trial for killing her rapist, a guard at the jail in which she was incarcerated;[9] Susan Brownmiller's 1975 book *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (a best-seller offered through several book clubs, including the Book-of-the-Month Club), which defined rape as a form of patriarchal control of women through, for example, marriage and war and redefined rape in a (then) radical way as violence, not sex; Diana E. H. Russell's 1982 book *Rape in Marriage,* which drew attention to the existence of and problem of rape in the context of marriage; and Robin Warshaw's 1988 *Ms.* magazine–sponsored report on acquaintance rape, titled *I Never Called It Rape,* which acknowledged women's experi-

ence of, but lack of vocabulary to describe and social support to protest, rape by men they knew and often trusted.

As Lisa M. Cuklanz (2000) argues, this large body of feminist sociological, psychological, and legal work on rape offered various explanations of the "causes and purposes of rape, . . . but they nonetheless expressed remarkable unity in their assertions both on how rape had traditionally been viewed and on how this traditional view should be rejected in favor of a feminist understanding" (9). In her summary Cuklanz notes a number of traditional assumptions to which this work refers: that women who report rape often lie; that rape only takes place between people who do not know each other; that women who dress or behave in particular ways are "responsible for their own attacks"; that all rapists are "abnormal, depraved, or marginal men"; that women who are raped are placed on trial and forced to prove their "moral purity" through discussions of their previous sexual activities; and that African American men are more likely to rape than are white men (10).

In response, feminist scholars and activists articulated "counterformulation[s]" (9) that argued (and usually used statistics as support) that false accusations are no more common for rape than for other violent crimes; that rape most often takes place between people who know each other, either acquaintances, "friends, dates, partners, or spouses"; that the idea of an individual being responsible for or causing someone else's violent attack on her/him is incomprehensible in any context other than traditional patriarchal conceptions of rape; that most men who rape appear "normal in other ways" and are not especially "depraved"; that the sexual history of a woman who has been raped is irrelevant to a particular accusation and that even if a woman has given her consent to a man in the past she has not given up her right to withhold consent at some point in the future; and that intraracial rape is by far the most common form of rape and that, further, white men are more likely to rape both white women and African American women than are African American men likely to rape white women (Cuklanz 2000, 10).[10]

Some of these counterformulations have become so commonplace, they have produced well-known phrases that literally change language. For example, the concepts of *acquaintance rape, date rape,* and *marital rape* refer to the fact that rape can take place between people who have a variety of types of prior relationships. *Rape shield laws* now protect women in court against defense lawyers who attempt to ask questions about their sexual history. Davis's (1981a) phrase *the myth of the Black*

rapist articulates a double meaning of myth: it points out the falsity of white assumptions that African American men rape more often than white men and rape white women in particular, and it identifies a cultural narrative used to structure racial relations and maintain racist social and legal practices against African American men (who are more often brought to trial, convicted, and given maximum sentences for rape) and African American women (who are less likely to be believed when they report rape).[11] Additional legal changes that feminists have advocated for include the protection of *anonymity* for a woman who makes a charge of rape, both in the press and in the courtroom. Overall, much feminist antirape discourse defines rape trials as *second rapes* or *re-rapes* of women who feel that they—rather than the men who raped them—are on trial and who experience the lawyers' questions not only as assaultive but, particularly when those questions address their sexual past and the actual rape itself, as *sexually* assaultive.[12] Feminists also introduced the term *rape culture*[13] to describe a culture in which sexual violence is a normalized phenomenon, in which male-dominant environments (such as sports, war, and the military) encourage and sometimes depend on violence against women,[14] in which the male gaze and women as objects-to-be-looked-at[15] contribute to a culture that accepts rape, and in which rape is one experience along a continuum of sexual violence that women confront on a daily basis.[16] Antirape activists also often replace the term "rape victim" with "*rape survivor*" to emphasize women's agency in response to their victimization and to address the complexity of women's *post*-rape experiences.[17]

Rape crisis centers and rape crisis counseling are additional forms of feminist antirape work. These nonprofit organizations (among other things) provide anonymous telephone counseling for women who have been raped; help women understand common post-rape experiences, such as a constant feeling of being dirty and wanting to shower, uncomfortableness with sex or even physical touch, a sense of being responsible for the attack, or guilt over accusing a loved one; accompany women to the hospital to provide emotional support and material resources (such as a ride home or a pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt to replace the clothes the police will keep as evidence); accompany women to court as a source of emotional support and to counsel women on courtroom strategies from a feminist perspective; testify as experts in court; consult with local police; work in tandem with the police to help encourage women to report rape and to take steps to preserve evidence (e.g., not showering

after a rape, understanding the legal need for a hospital examination that involves a "rape kit"); and provide or support self-defense classes[18] that encourage women to claim their bodies as their own and to defend those bodies against assault.[19]

Many scholars and activists have challenged rape crisis centers that emphasize the strategies I list in the above paragraph because of their lack of awareness of class, race, and cultural differences at all levels—the act of rape, the experience of rape, post-rape experiences, interaction with the police and courts, and experience of counseling (Crenshaw 1991)—and because of their "hierarchical, service-providing structure" (Bhattacharjee 1997, 30) that focuses on "individualism" (33) and "belief in the legal system" (37) rather than on "collective action" (34). Some of these activists have been involved in or report on rape crisis and domestic violence centers that specifically address the needs of women of color and/or low-income women. These centers, primarily located in urban areas, provide multilingual services, work with the police and hospitals to acknowledge women's varying cultural experiences, address economic needs for travel and survival, and provide counseling that is geared toward specific issues within, for example, African American, Asian American, Latina, and South Asian immigrant populations. These centers also often struggle, however, to raise and maintain funding. This difficulty occurs in part because major funding agencies often do not recognize that a multilingual counselor, for example, might be more important than a legal advocate for an immigrant Latina who, in general, is less likely to report a rape to legal authorities than is an English-speaking nonimmigrant white woman and less likely to see her case make it to court even if she does choose to report it.[20]

As both a feminist activist against rape and a feminist media critic of representations of rape, I understand the feminist activism and theory I have just briefly detailed from two perspectives.[21] First, I see this activism as an intervention, as part of a continuing political movement that has produced important changes that have benefited—in significant ways—women and others who face rape.[22] While I remain critical of some of these formulations of rape (for example, those that implicitly hold the person who has experienced rape responsible for taking action against rape, those that use horror stories to frighten women, those that tout self-defense as the answer to all rape but only address stranger rape models, and those that neglect racially and culturally specific details that affect *all* aspects of how a person will experience rape), I am committed to femi-

nist activism that addresses intersections of gender, race, and class in the process of redefining what rape is and of changing legal, court, community, and family practices. Second, I also see this feminist redefinition of rape as another example of rape's versatility, its availability as a social narrative through which to articulate anxieties, to debate, and to negotiate various other social issues, in this case feminism. In other words, I acknowledge an important history of feminist activism against rape, while I also pay attention to how representations of and narratives about rape in that context function to help define feminism, as well as the related issues of gender and race, in popular culture. Throughout this book, the former perspective functions implicitly, driving my choice of examples, my critical perspective, and the arguments I make; however, the latter perspective emerges much more explicitly as it shapes my critical approach to fictional representations of rape in film and television and, as I discuss in the next section, their relationship to postfeminism.

Why Rape and Postfeminism?

By the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, some of the feminist concepts I discuss in the previous section had some success at infiltrating mainstream popular culture, although often in truncated and altered forms. These discourses marked a partial acceptance of some feminist arguments about rape: they acknowledged rape as a social problem and accepted the need for reform of rape law, court practices, and social and familial attitudes toward rape, but they also negotiated and "resisted" (Cuklanz 1996, 12) other aspects of feminist arguments.[23] This negotiated acceptance also coincided with cultural discourses that defined the 1980s (and later the 1990s) as a "postfeminist era," one in which, as I discuss in more detail in chapter 2, feminism had supposedly arrived, successfully made changes that gave women "free choice" and "equality" with men, and as a result was no longer needed as an activist movement. With so many representations of successful women in the mainstream media —collectively forming a seductive and alluring image of success—logically, one might want to assume that historical, activist feminism had achieved sufficient social change to belay the need for further activism. Paradoxically, as I discuss in more detail in chapter 3, the popular acceptance of some feminist antirape discourses *contributed to* a cultural representation of feminism as "already successful" and thus no longer

necessary: rape narratives helped support postfeminism, which in turn implied that feminist activism was no longer necessary.

Concomitantly, postfeminist discourses defined both feminism and rape in particular ways, affecting social understandings of both in the process. For example, the central figure of postfeminist discourses is a white, heterosexual, middle-class woman. Whether she is a professional or a homemaker, a mother or a (hetero)sexually active and expressive twentysomething single woman, postfeminist discourses define the feminism that made her choices possible as focused entirely on a deracialized (but implicitly white) desire for "sameness" with men, particularly in terms of economic success and (hetero)sexual freedom. When these postfeminist discourses intersect with rape narratives, they inevitably limit social understandings of rape by deracializing the experience (but defining it as something that happens almost exclusively to white women), defining it as an aspect of heterosexuality while nevertheless simultaneously recuperating heterosexuality through romantic subplots, and neglecting class differences in women's experiences of rape and rape law. In short, in this book I argue that these representations of rape and these postfeminist discourses, which emerged during approximately the same time period, are co-constitutive, depending on and supporting each other while simultaneously contributing to cultural definitions of feminism that are limited in relation to race, class, and sexuality.

It is important to pause briefly to acknowledge that, despite their pervasive intersections, discourses of rape and discourses of postfeminism also exist separately from one another, intersecting with other social issues. For example, contemporary representations of rape can be understood in the context of nationalist and militarist discourses, especially in relation to Rwanda, the Gulf War, Bosnia, and Kosovo, or as Susan Jeffords (1991) puts it, in the context of the "new world order."[24] Contemporary representations of rape also can be understood in the context of discourses of criminalization and heightened fear for the self in a postmodern world in which the rule of law and the clear difference between "right" and "wrong" supposedly are breaking down.[25] Criminalization of (dark) "others" coupled with heightened fear for the (white) "self" appear in television shows such as *Cops* and *America's Most Wanted,* in legislation that requires convicted sex offenders to register in their communities upon release from prison, and in the current northern California public service campaign (which I mention above) that depicts young men serv-

ing time in prison for statutory rape and warns the (implied male) spectator that "sex with a minor is a crime."

While I occasionally address discourses about (among other things) nationalism, militarism, and criminalization in my discussion of film and television rape narratives throughout this book, particularly as they intersect with postfeminism, the links between these discourses and rape go beyond postfeminism and certainly could be (in fact, should be) studied in their own right. Similarly, postfeminism does more than provide a discourse through which rape narratives are told. Recent media depictions of battered women who kill, abortion, "fetal rights," and women's leisure, for example, all draw at least in part on postfeminist discourses.[26] Furthermore, I would point out that a large portion of postfeminist discourse defines issues of family and work in ways that *exclude* the existence of rape and sexual assault in these contexts. Again, while I occasionally refer to these postfeminist issues (and others) in this book, each needs to be (and in some cases has been) studied in more detail elsewhere.

I focus on the relationship between discourses of postfeminism and representations of rape in particular, however, for several reasons. First, this book is about representations of rape because of their ubiquity and versatility, not only in recent popular culture contexts but also in innumerable historical cultural contexts. If rape narratives can function in so many different ways in so many different contexts, as I illustrate only briefly above, this book asks what roles they play in recent popular culture in particular. Second, I use postfeminist discourses as a lens through which to understand recent film and television rape narratives because through my research I discovered that postfeminism intersects, in at least some way, with the vast majority of mainstream films and television shows from the late twentieth century that include rape or the threat of rape. Here, my goal is to understand how rape in particular is positioned in relation to pervasive postfeminist discourses. Third, and most important, I focus on the intersections of representations of rape and discourses of postfeminism because each is a dominant means through which contemporary popular culture discursively defines feminism. As Lauren Rabinovitz (1999) puts it in relation to one particular medium, "television's representation of feminism is a central, crucial means by which feminism is framed for the public" (163). In contemporary society, popular culture redeems rape by transforming it into a consumable

product that earns the sanction of (a particular type of) feminism. Thus, one way of thinking about the role of representations of rape in contemporary society is as a marketing strategy linked to the political economy, with media as a pedagogical instrument, providing a stream of imagery that creates a context for consumer desires linked to and sanctioned by postfeminist discourses' co-opted versions of feminism.

Feminist Analysis of (Postfeminist) Media Culture

This is not to say that I see postfeminist discourses, generally, or popular texts' incorporation of some feminist antirape rhetoric, more specifically, as useless or, worse, simply hurtful to feminism. Rather, my goal is to offer a feminist analysis of these discourses that articulates a perspective *different from* contemporary culture's definition of feminism while simultaneously acknowledging that the way postfeminist discourse defines feminism is now part of what feminism *is*. In other words, I am not saying that "my feminism is right and popular culture's feminism is wrong," but rather that "my feminist analysis offers a particular critical perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of popular feminism." A brief discussion of the early 1980s—in both popular culture and academic scholarship—as the particular historical moment when the social concept of postfeminism emerged will help illustrate some of the distinctions I draw here between postfeminism and my own critical approach.

Because postfeminist discourses work hegemonically to transform feminism in the service of heterosexual masculinity and a dispersed, depoliticized, and universalized white, middle-class feminine/feminist identity, they must sidestep feminist theory and activism that, by addressing the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, nation, and class, complicate and problematize a feminism (visible in popular culture) that focuses exclusively on (white) gender. Barbara Ryan (1992) illustrates and implicitly perpetuates this primary focus on gender when she argues that postfeminism began as a concept in 1982 because that was the year the (race- and class-nonspecific) Equal Rights Amendment was defeated (136, 164 n.6). In the very same year, Susan Bolotin (1982) illustrates postfeminism's single focus on (middle-class) gender when she coins the term in a *New York Times Magazine* article in the process of declaring the success of a middle-class equality feminism that ensures women's access to professional work. While these positions are contradictory from the perspective of feminism's failure

(Ryan: ERA) or success (Bolotin: professionalism), they also coalesce: both positions depend on a definition of feminism that ignores any feminism that addresses issues other than gender.

Ryan and Bolotin make persuasive arguments about the reasons for the emergence of the concept of postfeminism in the early 1980s in relation to the ERA and women's professionalism, both of which were feminist issues relatively visible in popular culture. I would suggest additionally, however, that postfeminism entered popular culture in the early 1980s because that decade was a particularly fruitful time for feminist theory that addressed gender *and* race. In a sense, then, I am suggesting that postfeminist discourses emerged as a "reaction formation" in defense of a version of feminism that had already achieved a certain amount of purchase in popular culture and against work such as Davis's *Women, Race and Class* (1981b), bell hooks's *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), and Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981/1983). While, as (for example) Davis makes clear in *Women, Race and Class*, women of color already had a long history of feminist activism and theorizing, the nearly simultaneous emergence of these three highly influential books, in particular, marks a shift in feminist publishing in the early 1980s.[27] Rosa Linda Fregoso (1999), in fact, calls *Women, Race and Class* a "foundational text for what we now call 'multicultural feminism,' 'women of colour feminisms,' 'Third World' feminisms, or racialized women as a 'political project'" (214).

Moraga and Anzaldúa and hooks report on the struggles they faced getting their feminist work on women of color published and the ambivalent relationship they had to white feminism at the time. For instance, hooks (1989a) writes,

> When I finished *Ain't I a Woman* . . . I sent it off to a number of publishers who rejected the work. Discouraged, I put the manuscript away. Then "race" became an important topic in feminist circles. It was important because white women had decided that they were ready to hear about race. When black women had been talking about race in our own way they did not deem it relevant. (153)

While hooks eventually negotiated a satisfactory relationship with the white feminist press that published her book, Moraga and Anzaldúa had to take Persephone Press to court when it ceased operation to force the press to give the editors permission to publish their book elsewhere. In 1983 Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press published a second edition of

This Bridge Called My Back. These now well-known stories mark both the emergence of more published work by feminists of color and the troubled relationship between their work and white feminism in the early 1980s. In this context, I would argue that the simultaneous emergence of postfeminist discourses is both a response to the success/defeat of the kinds of feminisms with which Ryan and Bolotin are concerned and a way to redefine feminism in order to perpetuate heterosexual whiteness as universal, despite significant shifts taking place in how feminist scholars and activists, such as Davis, hooks, Moraga, and Anzaldúa were conceiving of feminism.[28]

In contrast to the version of feminism that postfeminist discourses define, the feminism I draw on and hopefully contribute to engages a complex conglomeration of social and ideological analyses and political activism that seeks to criticize and transform the social category of gender in relation to the social categories of race, class, and sexuality. Specifically, I draw on what Ella Shohat (1998) defines as a "yoking" of feminism with "polycentric multiculturalism." Polycentric "multicultural feminism" offers a perspective that is neither willing to give up the term "feminism" (and "the critique of masculinist ideologies and the desire to undo patriarchal power regimes" it implies) nor willing to let feminism stand alone, which would implicitly disconnect an analysis of gender from the representational, material, and historical ways it intersects with race, class, and nation (2). As Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) argues, particularly (although not exclusively) in terms of sexual violence, "an analysis of what may be termed '*representational intersectionality*' would include both the ways in which these images are produced through a confluence of prevalent narratives of race and gender, as well as a recognition of how contemporary critiques of [just] racist [or just] sexist representation marginalize women of color" (1282–83, emphasis added). My point in drawing on Shohat and Crenshaw to define my critical approach is not to mandate one particular method of feminist praxis. Rather, I engage a multiperspectival approach that is shaped in part by the complexity of the subject under study—in this case film and television rape narratives. Using this perspective, I ask how postfeminist and rape discourses define, delimit, and use feminism, and to what ends. Additionally, I explore how the intersection of rape narratives with postfeminist discourses defines and delimits rape, and thus potential antirape activism.

Throughout this introduction, I have also been drawing on a poststructuralist theoretical assumption that public discourses have material effects

and that representations are as important to understanding what rape and feminism "are" as are laws, theory, activism, and experience. In order to enact this theoretical framework in the book, I examine fictional representations of rape as they trace their way through films, some television shows, and sometimes other popular media. This approach, admittedly, produces only a partial picture of what rape "is" in late-twentieth-century popular culture. Given the pervasiveness of rape representations, however, no one book could hope to provide a "complete" picture. I choose to focus on fictional film and some television narratives in a U.S. popular culture context, while simultaneously attending to their interrelationships with other types of media, most simply because film is the least discussed aspect of media culture in relation to rape within the scholarly literature. Overall, while a significant amount of research has already been conducted on the subject of rape in literature, drama, poetry, sociology, psychology, law, and rape prevention and survival, those in film studies have not paid the same kind of serious attention to rape. Furthermore, collective work on rape consistently neglects analysis of visual culture. For example, *Rape and Society* (Searles and Berger 1995), an important anthology of feminist analyses of rape that claims to be a comprehensive overview, addresses law, literature, poetry, rape prevention, and ethnographic work with rapists and women who have been raped, but it does not consider the profound impact media representations of rape have on popular culture and on consumers of popular culture. *Watching Rape* thus begins to fill a gap in both feminist and media research on rape.[29]

My approach to film and its intersections with other media emphasizes transtextual media relations (Stam et al. 1992, 206–13). My goal is not to identify the specificity of rape within particular genres (e.g., melodrama, comedy, horror), show types (e.g., soap opera, cop show, advertisement, talk show), or media (e.g., film, television, print). Because representations of rape appear indiscriminately in nearly all genres, show types, and media, a genre- or media-specific approach would not allow me to address how rape and feminism *cross* popular and local cultural texts and how they can help us understand *systems* of media and representation.[30] From this transtextual critical perspective, I examine the ubiquitous nature of rape in the context of a "media culture" in which media are interconnected through marketing, transnational conglomerate ownership, and diverse localized consumption and production practices; and in which media provide a cumulative set of discourses that saturate the cultural landscape and compete for spectators' attentions (Kellner 1995).

There has been a recent move to analyze "[media] spectacles of social and cultural conflict" (Garber et al. 1993, x) or "media events," about which John Fiske (1996) asks, "Can we separate media events from non-media events, or are all events today, or at least the ones that matter, necessarily media events?" (1). Scholars have produced whole books on spectacular events such as, for example, the Tonya Harding/Nancy Kerrigan assault in the context of figure skating competition, the television show *Twin Peaks,* the Rodney King beating and Los Angeles uprising, the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas sexual harassment/Supreme Court confirmation hearings, the U.S. war against Iraq, and the *Star Trek* franchise.[31] Such an approach to individual texts, subjects, and/or events is useful in understanding a series of complex social issues and discourses. My project in this book can best be described as one that sees media products, such as films, themselves as "events," and one that sees rape as a hypermediated "spectacle" in that context.

Depending in part on the scholarship of audience researchers of the past two decades, I take for granted that we use and respond to popular culture artifacts in complex and varied ways.[32] While I do not focus on audience responses to rape narratives, I use theoretical, critical, and analytical reflection to engage particular films in multiple ways.[33] Without assuming that all audiences will read the texts as I do, I suggest a variety of ways to understand individual examples and their relationships to other texts. As I analyze these examples, I emphasize the versatility of representation (e.g., villains are not always [or even often] men of color who wear dark clothes), and I seek out contradictions and pressure points that prevent me from resolving my readings too easily; rather, I attempt to play up media's intricacy.

In the process of engaging this complexity and the feminist critical perspective I define above, I make choices about the kinds of examples I examine and about my own representational practices. First, I define "rape narratives" broadly to include representations of rape, attempted rape, threats of rape, implied rape, and sometimes coercive sexuality. While it is crucial to make distinctions among all these types of representations of rape, it is most important to me in this book to acknowledge commonalities among various forms of sexual violence against women in general. I do not use the term "rape narratives" as a metaphor for other kinds of violations (such as "rape of . . ." discourses), but instead as a feminist tool to read rape back into texts that sometimes attempt to cover over their own use of rape, for example, to initiate narratives or to tell

stories about characters other than the women who face rape (Higgins and Silver 1991). In short, by defining rape narratives broadly my goal is to make visible and explicit myriad invisible or implicit references to rape.

Second, throughout the book I discuss and confront a feminist paradox between a desire to *end* rape and a need to *represent* (and therefore perpetuate discursive) rape in order to challenge it. In chapters 1, 3, and 6 in particular, I discuss texts that perpetuate rape discursively, even "give" rape to the spectator, in the process of arguing against rape. While there is no absolute way out of this representational conundrum, in this book I choose not to describe any rape scenes in detail. While this choice runs the risk of contributing to a long-standing "absent presence" of rape in social narratives that sidestep addressing women's experience of rape, it nonetheless helps me create a distance between myself (and hopefully my readers) and the pervasiveness of depictions of rape in our everyday lives, a distance that allows for critical and activist insights.[34] Coupled with my insistence on defining rape narratives broadly, of holding texts responsible for the sexual violence they depict yet sometimes repress, hopefully my decision to exclude detailed analyses of rape scenes does not unduly perpetuate a textual neglect of women's experiences of rape.

The Structure of the Book and a Preview of Chapters

Based on my critical skepticism about the kinds of representations of rape and feminism possible in the context of postfeminist discourses, I divide this book into two parts. The first part—chapters 1, 2, and 3—offers an overview of postfeminist discourses and of rape narratives in fictional film and television, exploring the intersections between representations of rape and social issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, nation, and feminism. The second part—chapters 4, 5, and 6—includes three case studies that offer the potential to explore (and perhaps widen) the "limits" of the social concept of postfeminism. I use "limits" here in two senses: first, to point to the kinds of *restrictions* postfeminism places on social understandings of feminism and rape and, second, to point to the fact that postfeminism is *partial*: despite its pervasiveness in popular culture since the 1980s, it does not necessarily extend to all texts. The two parts of the book, together, characterize and challenge postfeminist rape narratives. In what follows, I describe each chapter in more detail.

Chapter 1 offers a historical overview of rape in film from 1903 to 1979, using a feminist critical perspective that focuses on issues of gender, class, race, nationality, and their intersections. Despite the fact that the Hollywood Production Code forbade representations of rape in film, rape did not disappear; the strategies for representing it simply changed such that it became more implicit. Thus the chapter looks at the ubiquity of representations of both implicit and explicit rape in the *pre*-postfeminist era and argues that rape is central to cinema itself. This overview of the ways rape helps define gender, class, race, and nation as social categories offers one feminist perspective on the history of rape in film. The chapter also, however, engages a second feminist perspective, one that explores the possibility of reading rape films in ways that impose a feminist understanding of women's experiences of rape on films that may, in many other ways, deflect attention away from women's experiences and understandings of rape. In other words, the second section of the chapter asks how to read feminism into rape narratives critically. Overall, the chapter introduces two key aspects of my feminist critical approach—looking at the intersections of gender, class, race, and nation and bringing one's own feminism to bear on the examples at hand—and it offers a historical background against which to understand the focus on rape narratives in a postfeminist context in the remainder of the book.

Chapter 2 sets rape aside momentarily in order to define the term "postfeminism" in detail and to illustrate the historical and cultural context in which popular culture representations of rape since the 1980s have appeared. Drawing on previous studies of postfeminism as well as on a thorough examination of popular discourses that have used the term "postfeminism" since the early 1980s, the chapter illustrates how postfeminist discourses paradoxically both incorporate feminism into and purge feminism from popular culture, engaging in a depoliticization of feminism through both hegemonic moves. I argue that, like rape narratives, postfeminist discourses are particularly versatile. For example, they incorporate both antifeminist new traditionalism and "choiceoisie" (which Elspeth Probyn [1993] defines as having the supposed freedom to choose among particularly limited choices) around issues of work and family; and they engage a backlash against feminism and violent assaults on women while simultaneously celebrating women's right to bodily pleasures such as (hetero)sexual desire and display and active physical engagement in sports. Additionally, I point out that while women are most often at the center of postfeminist discourses, men emerge as well, either as models to be emulated or as "femi-

nists without women" (Modleski 1991) who are better informed about the history of feminism and better prepared to shape its history than are women. Despite these variations in postfeminist discourses, white, middle-class, and heterosexual concerns are central to *all* postfeminist discourses. In chapter 2, I analyze these particular foci, as well as the particularly narrow ways postfeminist discourses define feminism (e.g., as a two-way "choice" between work and family), in order to highlight the versatility, pervasiveness, and limitations of postfeminism.

Chapter 3 articulates the central argument of the book—since the early 1980s, rape and postfeminism have been co-constitutive in U.S. fictional film and television narratives—and asks what versions of feminism are produced discursively in that context. A survey of numerous films and television shows illustrates that these texts incorporate some aspects of feminist antirape logics. They do so, however, in ways that link those logics to postfeminist conceptions of white, middle-class, heterosexual women's independence and equality that depend on either a family identity or a supposedly degendered desire to engage in traditionally masculine endeavors. I also argue that graphic representations of rape, even in popular culture texts that define themselves as profeminist, can contribute to a postfeminist backlash against women and feminism if they heighten spectatorial anxiety. And I argue that, as in postfeminist discourse generally, men can again take center stage in narratives in which *they* experience rape, usurping women's role in feminism, recovering from a supposed "feminization" produced by feminism (and initially heightened by the experience of rape), or engaging in male bonding that supplants women and feminism altogether.

In many of these contexts, rape functions as the narrative event that brings out a latent feminism in the woman (or man) who experiences rape; thus the texts make rape necessary for the articulation of feminism. Furthermore, the narratives tend to develop in ways that hold women responsible for using the feminist aspects of (now reformed) rape law, and that provide men with more knowledge of rape law and feminist perspectives on rape than women have, thus positioning men as feminist educators of women. These texts do incorporate some feminist criticisms of rape and rape law—for example, that women's experiences and credibility are generally ignored but should not be and that acquaintances and friends rape more often than do strangers. In each of these examples, however, the texts transform a feminist argument into limiting postfeminist tropes that imply that feminist activism on these issues has been successful and therefore is no longer necessary.

Furthermore, overall postfeminist rape narratives demonstrate no racial specificity: women are racially undifferentiated, yet almost always white. As a result, these texts offer a whiteness that is "everything and nothing" (Dyer 1988, 45): it pervades the texts but nothing in the texts (explicitly) draws attention to it as meaningful. As a result, the feminism these postfeminist rape narratives offer is oblivious to race or racial analysis, depending instead on a universal conception of "woman" in relation to rape, but simultaneously representing her almost always through white characters who move through racially undifferentiated worlds.

My argument in chapter 3 is not that the acceptance of some feminist analysis of rape and rape law in popular culture *completely* undermines feminist logics. Instead, I argue that feminist logics and knowledges forged through resistance and activism are often incorporated in ways that primarily depoliticize feminism by suggesting that its success means activism is no longer necessary, by reducing it to a trope or stereotype that does little to shift a narrative's structure or trajectory, and by limiting it to an uncritical representation of whiteness as universal.

As chapter 3 argues, most popular culture rape narratives since the early 1980s support and depend on the social concept of postfeminism. Nevertheless, postfeminism has contradictions, and thus chapters 4, 5, and 6 examine narratives that highlight postfeminism's limitations. In these chapters I ask, What do texts do when they intersect with, but do not quite fit, postfeminist logics? What tensions do they produce? How do they help illuminate the limitations of postfeminism?

Chapter 4 focuses on a "media spectacle" that continues to resonate in popular culture: the film *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and its critical reception. I begin the second section of the book with *Thelma and Louise* most simply because it is the most discussed (in both popular culture and scholarly criticism) rape film to appear since 1980. Furthermore, in some ways it is an ideal illustration of a postfeminist text; yet, it also produces great public anxiety about women, feminism, and gendered violence (as evidenced by various popular press responses to the film) and *continues* to be a reference point for feminist criticism and various narratives that represent women as rejecting masculine society and embracing feminine community. Chapter 4 argues that the film has a feminist radical potential, particularly in relation to its representation of rape, but that the film's reception in popular culture discourses that interpret the film as conforming to a depoliticized postfeminist perspective tends to diminish that potential. I end the chapter by examining the ways various feminist

film and media critics have used and embraced the film, and I ask what roles narratives of rape and discourses of postfeminism play in these scholarly feminist uses of the film—including my own.

In chapter 5 I address postfeminism's limitations by purposefully turning my critical attention to one group of women who are generally excluded from both postfeminist discourses and mainstream fictional rape narratives: Black women.[35] Here, I ask what happens to postfeminism, rape, and their intersections in the relatively few films and television shows about rape that do include Black women. Some narratives about African Americans and rape displace their stories to a former historical era and thus avoid critique of present-day racialized gender relations. Such films invent a history and displace African American women's experiences of rape into it, without seriously considering rape as a contemporary social problem for African American women. Displacements also occur in texts that take place in the present. While Black women are sometimes highly visible in such texts, they are rarely heard, as the stories are not specifically about them. For example, in narratives in which white men rape African American women, African American men are falsely accused of rape, and Black women are raped, Black *men's* more serious traumas diminish the importance of Black women's experiences. Some of these texts are not postfeminist. In other texts, however, representations of African American women do intersect with many standard aspects of postfeminist rape narratives. In these examples, African American women most often exist next-to-but-just-outside postfeminism: the narratives are often multiple-focus, for example telling one story about an African American woman's experience of rape outside the (postfeminist) law and another about white men's education of white women to use the (postfeminist) law to end what becomes a deracialized story about rape. I end the chapter by examining three films that offer more nuanced and explicitly antiracist depictions of rape: *Rosewood* (1996), *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), and *Daughters of the Dust* (1991). I argue, however, that while these films challenge postfeminism's hegemony more fully than do the other examples I discuss in this chapter, they nonetheless marginalize African American women, centering African American men instead.

If chapters 4 and 5 examine texts that challenge—however fleetingly—both postfeminism and its whiteness, the final chapter of the book takes up texts that, at least at the level of production and consumption, exist much more marginally in relation to mainstream postfeminist popular culture: feminist rape prevention and education films and videos that are marketed to feminist classrooms, rape crisis centers, and the like. I further challenge

postfeminism in this chapter by including texts produced in the 1970s, when feminist discourses (but not yet postfeminist discourses) had emerged in popular culture. In this chapter I illustrate how films and videos from the 1970s and early 1980s move from making women aware of the prevalence of rape, to suggesting ways women can prevent rape, to educating women about self-defense techniques. After the mid-1980s, however, films and videos emphasized personal therapeutic recovery rather than addressing the need for social and legal changes in relation to rape. From the 1970s to the 1990s, films and videos also moved from depicting more rare stranger rapes to more prevalent acquaintance rapes, illustrating a shift in feminist logics about rape. Nevertheless, a contradiction emerges in these films and videos between a claim that rape is violence, not sex, and representations of nevertheless *eroticized* date circumstances in which rape is most likely to take place.

The earlier films and videos tend to be more focused on activism, empowerment, and social change than are the later films and videos. Some more recent films and videos do offer more variety, however, depicting rape in multiple ways, including discussing rape in terms of war, as an aspect of media culture generally, and through more avant-garde experimental techniques. Overall, however, I argue that while some antirape films and videos take up larger feminist perspectives such as these, more often than not these productions, through the narratives about rape they tell, augment women's vulnerability and social isolation as individuals. Moreover, like postfeminist rape narratives, the vast majority of antirape films and videos fail to explore racial themes in complex ways, ultimately placing spectators' empathy with white women and leaving women of color out of the picture. While I conclude by suggesting alternative possibilities for video- and filmmakers (and for those of us who teach film and video) that might more effectively respond to the social problem of rape, I remain relatively pessimistic, since the patterns I describe in this final chapter essentially parallel those of postfeminist discourses generally.

By developing a feminist cultural studies approach that moves among film, television, and video—and between mass-mediated and local activist texts—I hope to offer a nuanced intertextual and cross-media argument about the place of representations of rape and discourses of postfeminism in popular culture and in feminist cultural studies and activism. Additionally, by using the book's structure to examine the intersections of popular film and television and independent film and video depictions of rape both in the context of postfeminist culture and

at critical disjunctures from postfeminism, I hope to illustrate the complex interrelationships among contemporary cultural understandings of feminism, activism, and the plethora of representations of rape in our daily lives. Finally, by drawing on an antiracist polycentric multicultural feminist critical perspective that is opposed to many of postfeminist discourses' definitions of feminism, I hope to illustrate how these interrelationships in the late twentieth century contribute to racial formations, nationalism, cultural understandings of and anxieties about sexuality, and gendered categories of social identity. Overall, I hope this book will offer a significant contribution to film and television studies, feminist and antiracist theory and criticism, a variety of feminist activist projects, and thereby to women's lives.