

The discourse of (re)exploitation: female victims in the legal system

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Introduction

This chapter is concerned with police-victim interviews in cases of rape. It aims to uncover some of the ways in which gender normative ideologies are manifested through discursive practices, and how skewed representations of gendered violence as consensual encounters are constructed and resisted through talk. Low conviction rates for rape have long been at the centre of political and scholarly attempts to address the issues of victim-blaming and rape-supportive culture. Within the current adversarial criminal court system in England and Wales, there are only two possible verdicts: ‘guilty’ or ‘not guilty’, and this has been cast by many as lying at the root of the problem. An accused attacker not proven ‘beyond a reasonable doubt’ to have committed the offence receives a ‘not guilty’ verdict, thus casting suspicion on the victim herself as being a liarⁱ - there is no option, as there is in Scotland for example, for a ‘not proven’ verdict. It is easy to see why the legal system has often been accused of working against the interests of women.

The fact that some 90% of rapes are committed by someone known to the victim means that often the only issue over which there is disagreement is that of consent. In their interviews with suspects and victims investigators must establish their ‘points to prove’ for the offence in question – namely, for the suspect to be prosecuted for ‘rape’ according to the Sexual Offences Act (SOA) 2003, that:

- (a) he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person
 - (B) with his penis,
 - (b) B does not consent to the penetration,
- and
- (c) A does not reasonably believe that B consents. (Sexual Offences Act 2003, s. 1 (1))

This throws up the issue of what consent is – the SOA 2003 s. 74 defines it thus: ‘a

ⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/11/acquitted-rape-accuser-lying-prosecute>

person consents if he (sic) agrees by choice, and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice', and as set out in Grant and Spaul (2015), it is most appropriately conceived of as a communicative act, albeit sometimes a non-verbal one.

Police interviews are traditionally characterised as displaying an asymmetrical power relationship (see Fairclough, 1989), with differential rights and obligations imposed upon the participants and particular constraints imposed upon their contributions (see Drew and Heritage, 1992; Thornborrow, 2002). Furthermore, they are goal oriented, which is to say that one participant – in this case the interviewing officer – is focussed on achieving some institutionally prescribed goal, of which the less powerful participant, the interviewee, is not necessarily aware. For police interviewers, this is the 'points to prove' as described above - establishing specific and particular details 'on the record' that collectively point to a particular offence as having taken place (see Haworth, 2015). Relatedly, police interviewers, who know they are not just interacting with the victim but also collecting evidence for a potential future trial, are also cognizant of the potential subsequent 'overhearing audiences' (Heritage, 1985; Heydon, 2005), such as their colleagues, the Crown Prosecution Service, and, ultimately, a jury. While the naïve interviewee positions herself as one of two participants in a dialogue, and orients to the interviewer as the sole audience for her utterances, many of the latter's contributions can be heard to orient to the future listeners (see Haworth, 2013). Interviewers often invoke a 'participation framework' (Goffman, 1981) in which they are merely the animator of a message for which the police institution is the principal, while their audience role is institutionally ambiguous, torn between being a primary recipient for the talk and a neutral elicitor on behalf of future audiences (see Haworth, 2013; MacLeod, 2019).

Sexual violence in the justice system

Since at least as far back as Estrich's (1987) book 'Real Rape', there has been substantial interest in the ways in which sexual violence is discursively conceptualised within the legal system. Estrich's pioneering work demonstrated that, in order to be considered rape and treated as such by the justice system, incidents needed to fulfil certain criteria. Occasions of acquaintance rape, in which a known man attacks a woman, which account for by far the majority of rapes, do not usually attract the same level of vigorous prosecution as stranger rapes. In contrast to attacks by strangers, those carried out by acquaintances are likely to be viewed as the outcome of a misunderstanding, or of poor communication on the victim's

part – at any rate, the question more often than not comes down to consent, as discussed earlier. As Ehrlich (2007) points out, the discourses surrounding these types of case shape societal and legal understandings of what makes for a ‘good’ complaint, i.e. one which is likely to be taken seriously. Tiersma (2007) echoes this sentiment, arguing for a legal (re)definition of rape that accounts just as well for acquaintance rape situations as it does for attacks by strangers. As Tiersma depressingly concludes, however, the most important improvements will not come simply from legal reform, but only if we ‘learn to reform ourselves’ (2007:101).

The discursive complexities of the police interview noted in the introduction are further compounded when the content concerns sexual violence. Our collective attitudes have been described as ‘rape supportive’, which is to say that in discussions of rape – whether in the media, online, even in legal contexts – rapists are often exonerated and their behaviour normalised, while victims attract blame and are often cast as at least in part responsible for the attack, and as regulators of their attackers’ behaviour (see Anderson and Doherty, 2008). Rebuttals of accusations of sexual assault are underpinned by cultural assumptions about gender and sex (Burt and Estep, 1981), with heterosexual norms supporting, or providing a ‘cultural scaffold’ for rape (Gavey, 2005). Many past studies have suggested that the police hold even more negative views of rape victims than do other professionals (e.g. Lee & Cheung, 1991, in Anderson & Doherty, 2008) with victims often facing judgement and/or disbelief at the hands of the police. As Gregory & Lees point out, ‘the police stand accused of employing harsh methods of interrogation on women reporting such attacks, on the assumption that they might be making false allegations’ (1999:4). As Lea (2007) points out, ‘perceptions of the act of rape, the perpetrators of this crime and the victims thereof are not best understood by seeing those perceptions as individual, private interpretations or attitudes...The attributions people make...are constructed by, and constructive of, the ideological context they inhabit’ (p. 497). Put another way, people’s attitudes towards sexual violence are shaped by ideologies pervasive throughout society, rather than being independently constructed viewpoints. As we shall see throughout this chapter, however, the onus is largely placed on individual women to avoid situations in which they might find themselves victims of rape, rather than on addressing the ills of a society that produces rapists, or on rapists themselves not to rape.

Negative societal responses to victims of sexual violence have been shown to seriously undermine victims’ post-rape recovery, and this ‘secondary victimisation’ (Williams, 1984 in Anderson and Doherty, 2008), realised either through self-blame (see

MacLeod, 2016) or through interactions in institutional settings such as the police interview, show the pervasive nature of socio-cultural support for rape, “structurally integrated at all levels of society” (Anderson and Doherty, 2008: 10). As evidenced by, among others, Gregory and Lees (1999), such patterns manifest themselves as low reporting rates, high attrition rates, and low conviction rates, as discussed earlier.

Ehrlich’s (2007) analysis of a civil trial demonstrate how the sense-making resources available to complainants of sexual violence are restricted by their cultural context, allowing only for representation of incidents of sexual aggression in the language of consensual sexual encounters. This finding echoes that of Coates, Bavelas and Gibson (1994), who reported judges in acquaintance rape cases using ill-chosen terms to describe the violence, such as the defendant ‘offering’ his penis to the complainant’s mouth.

Coates & Wade (2004) examined a corpus of sexual assault trial judgements, and identified several categories of excuse that are routinely given for offenders’ behaviour, including drug and alcohol abuse, psychopathology, and loss of control, among others. Explaining the actions of perpetrators of sexual violence in this way, they note, conceals violence and mitigates perpetrators’ responsibility, as well as blaming or pathologising victims. In light of the respective expectations of the genders in terms of how their sexuality ‘should’ be realised, an alleged perpetrator’s behaviour is often treated as unproblematic, in that his actions are construed as part of ‘normal’ heterosexual behaviour (Anderson & Doherty, 2008).

The data

The data drawn on here are a set of police interviews with rape complainants conducted in England. As a matter of routine these interviews are video-recorded, and these video recordings were transcribed by the author as part of a wider project examining discursive patterns of police interview interaction (MacLeod, 2010).

Constraints on victims’ narrations

The excusing and justification of sexual violence has been explored at length in the accounts of convicted sex offenders. Auburn and Lea (2003) for example demonstrate that offenders construct a moral identity for themselves through talk, mitigating their culpability and managing blame and responsibility for their offences.

The production of these ‘defence components’ by witnesses in Court when they

anticipate some form of blame allocation may result from their answer to an examining lawyer's question has also been discussed (Atkinson & Drew, 1979). The concept of victim responsibility is a well-established one in terms of research into perceptions of rape (Lea, 2007). Thus, it follows that even in the accounts of those reporting rape, we might expect there to be evidence of the speaker's attempts to 'excuse' or 'justify' their own behaviour, in relation to culturally defined norms. Indeed, in the specific context of the police interview, MacLeod (2016) shows how interviewees (IEs) reporting rape rely on prevalent discourses around sexual violence to account for their behaviour in relation to the attack, often entirely unprompted by the interviewer (IR) – for example, providing reasons for why they waited in a particular area, such as 'I thought I'd be safe there', without this information being explicitly pursued by the IR. This chapter shifts the focus from interviewees accounting for their own behaviour to looking in more general terms at how the events in question are represented in their talk. I aim to elucidate the relationship between these representations and culturally pervasive sexist discourses around sexual violence.

As we might expect of the asymmetrical context of the police interview, it is often the IR's contributions that constrain the response of the IE. In the following extract, for example, the IR's question in line 8 is arguably blame-implicative. The parties have been discussing the IE's health problems. The 'he' referred to in line 10 is a family member of the IE, who she reports as having gone on to rape her.

Extract 1

1		IR:	e:rm what kind of (.) effect does that h- have on you healthwise? (1)
		IE:	I get drunk very easily (.5) takes me about two or three days to (.5) pick myself up I've been out and had a good drink ·shih (4)
5		IE:	I tend to drink coke after about eleven. ·shih (.)
	→	IR:	so why didn't you go on the coke this time?
10	→	IE:	cos he was persistent: "ave a drink, ave a drink (.) ave a drink". ·shih
	→	IE:	(2) and I thought well what harm can it do it's my [family member] it's like family. ·shih

The IR's negative WH- question on line 8 implies some degree of surprise or conflict with the proposition on the part of the interviewer (Ehrlich, 2001) – i.e., that

‘go[ing] on the coke’ would be the *expected* course of action, given that drinking alcohol leads her to ‘get drunk very easily’, thereby reducing her ability to protect herself. The so-prefacing of this question is also significant – as Johnson (2002) demonstrates, so-prefacing is often used by police IRs to evaluate and label the previous answer. Combined with the question function, this constitutes a challenge to the appropriateness of the reported behaviour. Thus, the IE is forced to provide an explanation for her behaviour on the night in question. How she does so is also highly revealing of cultural assumptions about sexual violence. On line 10 she relies firstly on the suspect’s insistence that she ‘ave a drink’ to justify her continuing to drink alcohol. In the absence of a take-up from the IR in the two-second gap after the TRP the IE self-selects, continuing with her justification for taking the decision to drink more alcohol by referring to her familial relationship with the man in question. It is worth questioning here what assumptions feed into her emphasis on this familial relationship. Cultural understandings of rape and responsibility dictate that women should avoid putting themselves in vulnerable situations around men, such as being too intoxicated to withhold sexual consent – the implication in the extract is that if the man in question is a relative, the risk of rape is mitigated.

The IE displays a reliance on particular assumptions – namely that drinking a lot of alcohol puts one in a vulnerable position, but that members of one’s family are to be trusted when one is in a vulnerable position – distinct, presumably, from less intimate acquaintances and strangers. This interpretation is supported by the question she reports having asked herself in line 12 ‘what harm can it do’, suggesting that while drinking large amounts of alcohol in the company of another man might be easily interpretable as dangerous behaviour, in the company of her family member it is ‘common sense’ to assume that she would be safe.

Although, as in Extract 1, we might expect excuses and justifications in the sequential position following a potentially blame-allocating turn, it has been demonstrated that in fact participants often anticipate that a question or sequence of questions are *leading to* blame allocation (Atkinson & Drew, 1979). On inspection of the data it becomes apparent that the interviewees display these patterns, pre-empting potential blame attribution by producing qualifying defences for the reported behaviours. These occasions are discussed in depth in MacLeod (2016), so I concern myself here with interactional moments in which interviewees appear to be constrained in the ways they characterise their experiences in more general terms.

Grice’s (1975) maxim of relevance becomes significant here, since we must assume

some connection between the information provided in IEs' responses and the events she is being asked to describe. Thus, implicature is a key aspect of the ongoing process of negotiation between IR and IE to tell the story, and the drawing of inference usually relies to some extent on culturally derived expectations. When an IE provides a description of events in line with these culturally derived expectations, she simultaneously displays a familiarity with, and in some cases acceptance of, dominant assumptions about rape. This is arguably 'power by consent' in action: with the dominant assumptions presented as 'natural' and 'commonsensical' according to accepted standards – in this case patriarchal ones - it follows that the victims themselves also accept these attitudes.

For example in Extract 2 below, taken from a different case, the interactants have been discussing a conversation the IE had with a male friend in a nightclub shortly prior to being attacked. The friend had been told that if he left the nightclub to walk her to a taxi then he would be required to pay for re-entry. The extract begins with the IR asking about who may have overheard the conversation.

Extract 2

1	IR:	right okay •hh was there anybody <u>stood</u> in the lobby hearing that conversation that you can remember
5	IE:	hmm hmm no (.6) not that I can remember (.5)
	IR:	no
	IE:	just <u>bouncers</u> probably=
10	IR:	=there's <u>nobody</u> : hanging about
	IE:	no- <u>probably</u> but (.2) ((coughs)) (.) I can't remember

The extract shows both participants displaying an understanding of 'bouncers' (i.e., doormen at a nightclub) as being a category of person not included under the IR's description 'anybody'. Evidently the IE has understood the implicature of the IR's question on lines 1-2 to be that 'anybody' refers to *anybody who may have posed a threat*, and her response is to answer in the negative, with the additional information on line 8 that in fact there were people there, but they were 'just' bouncers. This understanding is confirmed by the IR on line 10, and reiterated by the IE on line 12.

This is a culturally-rooted assumption that has been observed since the earliest feminist scholarship on rape. Sexual violence serves to ‘maintain the status quo...women have some level of consciousness about the fear of sexual assault [and] this serves to restrict and constrain their behaviours’ (Griffin, 1971 cited in Ward, 1995: 22). It forces women to look to the ‘trustworthy’ ‘non-raping’ men in their lives for protection: ‘all the sane men must protect ‘their’ women from the few insane ones, and women without men must watch out’ (Russell, 1975:260). The construction of rapists as outside recognisable categories of person such as ‘bouncer’ functions to perpetuate the myth that rape is a crime committed by a small minority of men who exist outside the boundaries of normality (see Clark, 1992). The shared understanding is thus highly ideologically charged, perpetuating this aspect of rape mythology and serving the interests of the dominant group – men.

In the following extract, another IE is describing what happened after she awoke from sleepwalking to find herself naked in her partner’s lodger’s bed. Charlie is her partner, and Michael is the lodger.

Extract 3

1	IE:		Charlie was downstairs talking to Michael (.8) asking him what had happened. (2.2) e:rm and he was saying nothing had happened. (1.2)
		→	e:rm (.4) and I <u>asked</u> him I said 'have we had sex Michael just tell me
5		→	have y- have you had sex with me because I think we have I think
		→	you've had sex with me I can- I- it <u>feels</u> different I <u>feel</u> like- I (.) just
		→	somebody's had sex ~with me~' •HHHH (.6) and he was saying 'no no
			no hh no hh no'. hhh (.4) but I'm positive that he had (.7) absolutely
10	IR:	→	(.7) right. (.6) and (.) what makes you <u>feel</u> like you had sex is is a mental thing or a physi[cal thing]

In Extract 3 the IE formulates what has happened to her as both ‘we had sex’ once (line 3) and ‘you/somebody had sex with me’ three times (lines 4, 5 and 6). As Ehrlich (2007) points out, even when the attacker is grammatically represented as active, the predicate ‘have sex with’ ‘is not one that conjures up images of coerced or forced sex’ (2017: 132). Evidence for this, she claims, comes from the fact that it can occur in reciprocal constructions, such as the ‘we had sex’ in line 3. Note that this activeness on the part of the IE is foregrounded in the IR’s question at line 11, ‘you had sex’, even though her most recent and most frequent is the more passive ‘...had sex with me’.

Of course, not all interviewees represent events in the ways detailed above. They

do not all allow scope for themselves to be cast as active participants in the attacks. In the interview from which the extract below is taken, the IE unambiguously and repeatedly states that this was an action that was inflicted upon her. Importantly, the event being described is rape by a stranger – the IE is reporting having been dragged into an alleyway after a night out.

Extract 4

1		IE:	he pulled my skirt <u>down</u> (2.9) pulled my underwear to one side (.5)
	→		undone his trousers (1.5) penetrated me (2.3) and he turn- turned me
			over so I was facing- I had my face to the wall? (1.9) and at that point I
			just (.7) found the courage to (.6) just run.
5			(.9)
	→	IR:	so th- the first time that he penetrated you (1) whereabouts did he
			penetrate?

As can be seen in Extract 4, on lines 6 and 7 the IR endorses the IE’s line 2 description of the act as ‘[he] penetrated [me]’. Such a representation does not allow for readings of the act as reciprocal or consensual in the way that the patterns observed in Extract 3 do. Arguably, the same restrictions are not exerted on the discursive resources available to this IE, owing to the fact that her experiences are more closely aligned with that of the ‘stranger rape’, which as we have seen, is dealt with more straightforwardly as ‘real rape’ than those involving an acquaintance.

Explicitly resisting implications

There are occasions when victims of non-stranger rapes can be heard explicitly resisting normalised ideologies around sexual violence. Extract 5 shows the IR referring back to the IE’s account of the night in question, when she had woken to find the offender penetrating her while she and her partner slept.

Extract 5

1		IR:	you said you were saying (1) don't hurt me or don't let him hurt me (.4) what
			made you think (.6) that he was gonna hurt you ((or that he was hurting))
	→	IE:	cos he was having sex with me and I didn't want to.
5			(11)
	→	IE:	and that is hurting me.
			(.4)

10	→	IR:	yeah. mm (.5) •hhh I just wanted to get the: (.7) the way you were thinking and obviously that is hurting you [but]
		IE:	[that] is hurting me [I wouldn't]=
		IR:	[I was]
15	→	IE:	=let him do that to me.
		IR:	I was (1.4) just exploring whether there'd been any <u>physical</u> threat [or]
20		IE:	[no.]
		IR:	or anything like that.
25		IE:	no. (2.4)
		IE:	it was only me that hit him. (.5)
		IE:	he didn't hit me back.

The IR produces a stretch of reported speech attributed to the IE, to the effect that she had, on waking to discover the suspect engaging in intercourse with her, attempted to wake her partner by ‘saying don’t hurt me or don’t let him hurt me’. The IR’s particularising question on lines 1-2, ‘what made you think...’ suggests that the IE’s reasons for reaching the conclusion ‘he was gonna hurt [me]’ are not immediately obvious. The premise of the question appears even more anomalous when we consider that the IE has already provided the information that during this time, the suspect was engaging in intercourse with her without her consent. The IR has displayed an assumption that forced penetration is somehow distinct from ‘hurting’ someone. The IE challenges this assumption quite convincingly on line 4 stating (again) ‘cos he was having sex with me and I didn’t want to’, displaying a view diametrically opposed to the IR’s. Syntactically and semantically complete, with falling intonation, the IE’s turn is over, and she offers the floor back to the IR. However, an eleven-second gap follows, without so much as a receipt token or hesitation marker from the IR. As well as indicating that he does not deem the IE’s response to be sufficient, this failure by the IR to take the floor forces the IE to self- select. She categorically describes non-consensual sex as a form of ‘hurting’ and on line 9 the IR displays acknowledgement of this response, before attempting to backtrack somewhat – using the hedge ‘just’, he downplays the significance of the conflict, and attempts to justify his original question by explaining what his intention was, ‘I just wanted to get the way you were thinking’. He indicates that he is in

agreement with the IE's categorisation, 'obviously that is hurting you', and then on lines 10-15 the IE, in an overtly challenging move considering her relatively powerless position, talks over him, once more reiterating that 'that is hurting me, I wouldn't let him do that to me'. She successfully completes the turn despite an attempt from the IR to reclaim the floor with further justification for his question (line 13). He attempts again on line 17, this time successfully, but still revealing the same assumption – that forced intercourse is somehow separate from 'any physical threat' (line 18). The emphatic stress on 'physical' further supports that this is 'new' information (Brazil, 1992), somehow different from what has gone before, and functions to contrast 'physical' with other types of 'threat'. The IE, perhaps unsurprisingly, finally acquiesces to this definition, responding in the negative in lines 19 and 23, and elaborating in lines 25-27, now supporting the IR's framing of 'physical threat' as including only actions such as 'hit' and apparently *not* including forced penetration of the vagina.

Another example of competing assumptions is apparent in Extract 6. The participants have been discussing the attack itself and, despite having just been told about her actions of trying to push the offender off, the IR enquires about the actions the IE took to indicate the attack was unwanted.

Extract 6

1	IR:	°right° (1.8) and (.8) whilst all this (.5) was happening (1.3) you said you had your hands on his chest (.8) was there anything else that you did (1) that you felt (.8) woul- °dunno what I'm trying to say here° (3.8) y- you're saying that- you obviously reported this to the police that you didn't want this to happen.
5	IE:	(1) ((shaking head)) ((°unclear°))
10	IR:	okay (1) how do you think that h- th- that you portrayed that to him?
	IE:	(2.8) e:rm (3.9) °don't know° (1.6) a l- when um- a lot of people (1) take advantage that I wear a short skirt when I go out that I'm- (.5) I'm (.) easy? (1.7) but I've never (1.7) I've never given anybody the come-on.

According to the Sexual Offences Act 2003 s. 1 (1) c, not only must the victim not consent to the penetration, but it must be established that the perpetrator did not reasonably believe that the victim consented. This is somewhat at odds with our understanding of

consent as a communicative act – that its expression brings it into being, and therefore that lack of communication of consent equals lack of consent.

In extract 6 the IR's question about the IE's resistance during the attack proves problematic for the IR to construct, as flagged by the noticeably quieter aside in line 3. The content of the aside suggests that the IR is attempting to avoid betraying an expectation of more resistance – an expectation he nevertheless does eventually betray. He changes tack, and uses a reflexive statement in lines 4-5, 'you obviously reported this to the police that you didn't want this to happen' which is produced as a basis for the question that follows on line 9, 'how do you think that...you portrayed that to him?'. This question implies firstly that it would conventionally be expected for a woman in this position to give some more indication that she did not want intercourse; and secondly, that there are set ways of portraying an unwillingness to have intercourse (including having one's hands on his chest, as is evident from the first attempt at formulating the question on line 3, 'was there anything *else*').

Of further interest is the emphatic stress on 'him', suggesting that, while the IR understands the meaning of the reported action of trying to push him away, the attacker himself cannot necessarily be expected to have interpreted this in the same way. The gap, filler and pause before the IE's non-committal reply on line 13 could be an indication that these assumptions do not correspond with her own, or that she is having trouble understanding exactly what kind of answer the IR expects. She finally gives a more detailed answer, and once again we see an IE finding it necessary to justify her behaviour on lines 17-18, 'I've never given anyone the come-on'. In effect, she is forced into denying the opposite behaviour from where the sequence started. For the IE, not having given 'the come-on' is evidence enough for her lack of consent. From the IR's line of questioning on the other hand, it appears that he subscribes to a viewpoint whereby the IE would be expected to take some kind of affirmative action to communicate her lack of consent – rather, as we might expect given the communicative nature of consent, that in fact we would expect its presence, not its absence, to be explicitly signalled.

Concluding remarks

The extracts discussed in this chapter have given an insight into two seemingly opposing processes. On the one hand, some interactions demonstrate victims themselves articulating events in ways that downplay their violent nature. These patterns have been described

elsewhere as being the ‘result of the absence of a well-developed sense-making framework...for the conceptualisation and description of non-stranger rape’ (Ehrlich, 2007: 135). On the other, some show women resisting the implications of these same patterns. Thus, as well as experiencing constraints imposed by the patriarchal backdrop of their complaints, they can be seen to be taking up a more agentive position, describing their experiences in terms that do not conform to what is expected of them given the interactional context and the cultural backdrop.

We have also observed a range of articulations from IRs, and these are perhaps more easily explained. We have seen interviewers sometimes mirroring victims’ narratives of victimhood, such as ‘he penetrated me’, but the data also abound with examples of interviewers mirroring or even upgrading reciprocal descriptions of rape ‘you had sex’, or themselves introducing ideologically problematic themes, ‘what made you think he was gonna hurt you?’.

Descriptions of sexual violence do tend to be mediated through a highly restricted set of discourses for describing non-stranger rape (see Ehrlich, 2007). We have seen how patriarchal constructions of gendered violence are manifested through discursive choices of IRs. However, what we are also seeing here is the agentive nature of the women, who seek to describe their experiences in ways which, though novel in terms of the context in which they are produced, nevertheless seem a better fit for conceptualising their experiences of sexual violence. In so doing, they challenge the status quo by introducing re-readings of their experiences which are contrary to conventional representations of rape.

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