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## **The Socio-Cultural Context of Rape. A Cross-Cultural Study<sup>1</sup>**

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This research departs from the familiar assumption that rape is an inherent tendency of male nature, and begins with the assumption that human sexual behavior, though based in a biological need, is an expression of cultural forces. The incidence, meaning, and function of rape in a cross-cultural sample of tribal societies are presented. Two general hypotheses guide the research: first, the incidence of rape varies cross-culturally; second, a high incidence of rape is embedded in a distinguishably different cultural configuration than a low incidence of rape. The data suggest that rape is part of a cultural configuration which includes interpersonal violence, male dominance, and sexual separation. Rape is interpreted as the sexual expression of these forces in societies where the harmony between men and their environment has been severely disrupted.

In her comprehensive and important analysis of rape, Susan Brownmiller says that “when men discovered that they could rape, they proceeded to do it” and that “from prehistoric time to the present rape has played a critical function” (1975, p. 14-15). The critical function to which Brownmiller refers has been “to keep all women in a constant state of intimidation, forever conscious of the knowledge that the biological tool must be held in awe for it may turn to weapon with sudden swiftness borne of harmful intent” (1975, p. 209).

Brownmiller's attribution of violence to males and victimisation to females strums a common theme in Western social commentary on the nature of human nature. Most of the popularizers of this theme present what amounts to a socio-biological view of human behavior which traces war, violence, and now rape to the violent landscape of our primitive ancestors. where, early on, the male tendency in these directions became genetically programmed in the fight for survival of the fittest. Human (viz. male) nature is conceived as an ever present struggle to

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overcome baser impulses bequeathed by “apish” ancestors. (For examples of this general theme, see Ardrey, 1966; Lorenz, 1966; Tiger, 1969.)

The research described in the present paper departs from the familiar assumption that male nature is programmed for rape, and begins with another familiar, albeit less popular, assumption that human sexual behavior, though based in a biological need “is rather a sociological and cultural force than a mere bodily relation of two individuals” (Malinowski, 1929, p. xxiii). With this assumption in mind, what follows is an examination of the socio-cultural context of sexual assault and an attempt to interpret its meaning. By understanding the meaning of rape, we can then make conjectures as to its function. Is it, as Susan Brownmiller suggests, an act that keeps all women in a constant state of intimidation, or is it an act that illuminates a larger social scenario?

This paper examines the incidence, meaning, and function of rape in tribal societies. Two general hypotheses guided the research: first, the incidence of rape varies cross-culturally; second, a high incidence of rape is embedded in a distinguishably different cultural configuration than a low incidence of rape. Using a standard cross-cultural sample of 156 tribal societies, the general objectives of the paper are:

1. to provide a descriptive profile of ‘rape prone’ and ‘rape free’ societies;
2. to present an analysis of the attitudes, motivations, and socio-cultural factors related to the incidence of rape.

#### *Description of the Evidence*

In most societies for which information on rape was available, rape is an act in which a male or a group of males sexually assaulted a woman. In a few cases, descriptions of women sexually assaulting a male or homosexual rape are reported. This study, however, was oriented exclusively to the analysis of rape committed by males against women.

The standard cross-cultural sample published by Murdock and White (1969) formed the basis for this research. This sample offers to scholars a representative sample of the world’s known and well-described societies. The complete sample consists of 186 societies, each ‘pinpointed’ to an identifiable subgroup of the society in question at a specific point in time. The time period the sample societies ranges from 1750 B.C. (Babylonians) to the late 1960’s. The societies included in the standard sample are distributed relatively equally among the following six major regions of the world: Sub-Saharan Africa, Circum-Mediterranean, East Eurasia, Insular Pacific, North America, South and Central America.

This analysis of rape was part of a larger study on the origins of sexual inequality (see Sanday, 1981). Due to the amount of missing information on the variables included in this larger study, thirty of the standard sample societies were excluded, reducing the final sample size to 156. Since many of the variables include in the larger study were pertinent to the analysis of the sociocultural context of rape, the same sample was employed here.

The information for coding the variables came from codes published in the journal *Ethnology*; library materials; and the Human Relations Area Files. The data obtained from the latter two sources were coded by graduate students in anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania using codes developed by me on one-third of the standard sample societies. When the coding was

completed, a random sample of societies was selected for checking. The percentage of items on which coders and checkers agreed averaged 88% of the 21 variables checked for each society. Disagreements were resolved either by myself or still another coder after rechecking the material.

There was a significant discrepancy between the number of societies for which information was obtained on rape for this study and that obtained by other authors employing the same sample. Broude and Greene (1976) were able to find information on the frequency of rape in only 34 of the standard sample societies, whereas for this study information was obtained for 95 of these societies. This discrepancy raises questions about the operational definitions of rape employed in the coding.

Although the codes used in the two studies were similar, my definition of 'rape prone' included cases in which men rape enemy women, rape is a ceremonial act, and rape may be more a threat used by men to control women in certain ways than an actuality. Broude and Greene appear to have excluded such incidents from their coding and to have focused only on the intra-societal incidence of uncontrolled rape. The differences in these operational definitions are apparent from the information presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
COMPARISON OF TWO CODES FOR RAPE  
Sanday Code <sup>b</sup>

Society #a	Society name	Rape Code	Type of rape <sup>e</sup>	Broude & Greene Code <sup>b</sup>
11	Kikuyu	3	Ceremonial rape	No information
19	Ashanti	1	Rape is rare or absent	No information
13	Mbuti	1	Rape is rare or absent	Agrees with Sanday Code
14	Mongo	1	Rape is rare or absent	Agrees with Sanday Code
28	Azande	3	Rape of enemy women Rape cases reported	Disagrees (Rape rare)
41	Tuareg	1	Rape is rare or absent	No information
60	Gond	1	Rape is rare or absent	No information
66	Mon gols	1	Rape is rare or absent	No information
70	Lakher	1	Rape is rare or absent	Agrees with Sanday Code
91	A run ta	3	Ceremonial rape	No information
108	Marshallese	3	Gang rape is accepted	Agrees with Sanday Code
127	Saulteaux	3	Rape used as threat	No information
143	Omaha	3	Rape used as punishment	Disagrees (Rape absent)
158	Cuna	1	Rape is rare or absent	Agrees with Sanday Code
163	Yanomamo	3	Rape of enemy women	Agrees with Sanday Code
166	Mundurucu	3	Rape used as punishment	Agrees with Sanday Code
169	Jivaro	1	Rape is rare or absent	No information
179	Shavante	3	Rape used as punishment	No information

<sup>a</sup> Refers to standard sample number listed by Murdock and White (1969).

<sup>b</sup> See Table 2 for the two rape codes.

<sup>c</sup> For each of the societies listed, the ethnographic descriptions of the incidence of rape are presented later in this paper.

A sub-sample of societies are listed in Table 1 along with the codes used in this study and the code given by Broude and Greene (1976). Broude and Greene report no information in nine societies where information on the incidence of rape was recorded in this study. The two codes agree in seven out of the remaining nine and disagree in two cases. Broude and Greene report that among the Azande rape is a rare occurrence while in this study the Azande were classified as rape prone due to the practice of raiding for wives. Broude and Greene report that rape is absent among the Omaha, whereas I found evidence from several sources that rape is present. The ethnographic descriptions which led to my rape codes for the eighteen societies listed in Table 1 can be found in the following sections profiling ‘rape prone’ and ‘rape free’ societies.

Broude and Greene (1976) find that rape is absent or rare in 59 percent of the 34 societies for which they found information on the frequency of rape (see Table 2). They say that rape is “common, not atypical” in the remaining 41 percent. In this study, forty-seven percent of the societies were classified as ‘rape free’; 35 percent were classified in an intermediate category; and 18 percent were classified as ‘rape prone’ (see Table 2). Thus both studies support the first general hypothesis of this study: sexual assault is *not* a universal characteristic of tribal societies. The incidence of rape varies cross-culturally.

### *Profiles of 'Rape Prone' Societies*

In this study a ‘rape prone’ society was defined as one in which the incidence of rape is high, rape is a ceremonial act, or rape is an act by which men punish or threaten women.

An example of a ‘rape prone’ society is offered by Robert LeVine's (1959) description of sexual offenses among the Gusii of southwestern Kenya. In the European legal system which administers justice in the District where the Gusii live, a heterosexual assault is classified as rape when a medical examination indicates that the hymen of the alleged victim was recently penetrated by the use of painful force. When medical evidence is unobtainable, the case is classified as “indecent assault.” Most cases are of the latter kind. The Gusii do not distinguish between rape and indecent assault. They use the following expressions to refer to heterosexual assault: “to fight” (a girl or woman); “to stamp on” (a girl or woman); “to spoil” (a girl or woman); “to engage in illicit intercourse.” All of these acts are considered illicit by the Gusii. LeVine uses the term rape “to mean the culturally disvalued use of coercion by a male to achieve the submission of a female to sexual intercourse” (1959, p. 965).

TABLE 2  
CROSS-CULTURAL INCIDENCE OF RAPE

Sanday Code	No. and % of Societies		Broude & Greene (1976:417) Code Frequency of Rape	No. and % of Societies	
	N	%		N	%
Incidence of Rape (RA4) —					
1. <i>Rape Free</i> . Rape is reported as rare or absent.	45	47%	1. Absent	8	24%
2. Rape is reported as present, no report of frequency or any suggestion that rape is not atypical.	33	35%	2. Rare; isolated	12	35%
3. <i>Rape Prone</i> . Rape is an accepted practice used to punish women, as part of a ceremony, or is clearly an act of moderate to high frequency carried out against own women or women of other societies	17	18%	3. Common; not atypical	14	41%
TOTAL	95	100%		34	100%

Based on court records for 1955 and 1956 LeVine estimates that the annual rate of rape is 47.2 per 100,000 population. LeVine believes that this figure grossly underestimates the Gusii rape rate. During the same period the annual rape rate in urban areas of the United States was 13.85 per 100,000 (13.1 for rural areas). Thus, the rate of Gusii rape is extraordinarily high.

Normal heterosexual intercourse between Gusii males and females is conceived as an act in which a man overcomes the resistance of a woman and causes her pain. When a bride is unable to walk after her wedding night, the groom is considered by his friends “a real man” and he is able to boast of his exploits, particularly if he has been able to make her cry. Older women contribute to the groom’s desire to hurt his new wife. These women insult the groom, saying:

“You are not strong, you can’t do anything to our daughter. When you slept with her you didn’t do it like a man. You have a small penis which can do nothing. You should grab our daughter and she should be hurt and scream—then you’re a man” (LeVine, 1959, p. 969).

The groom answers boastfully:

“I am a man! If you were to see my penis you would run away. When I grabbed her she screamed. I am not a man to be joked with. Didn’t she tell you? She cried—ask her!” (LeVine, 1959, p. 969).

Thus, as LeVine says, (1959, 971) “legitimate heterosexual encounters among the Gusii are aggressive contests, involving force and pain-inflicting behavior.” Under circumstances that are not legitimate, heterosexual encounters are classified as rape when the girl chooses to report the act.

LeVine estimates that the typical Gusii rape is committed by an unmarried young man on an unmarried female of a different clan. He distinguishes between three types of rape: rape resulting from seduction, premeditated sexual assault, and abduction (1959).

Given the hostile nature of Gusii sexuality, seduction classifies as rape when a Gusii female chooses to bring the act to the attention of the public. Premarital sex is forbidden, but this does not stop Gusii boys from trying to entice girls to intercourse. The standard pose of the Gusii girl is reluctance, which means that is difficult for the boy to interpret her attitude as being either willing or unwilling. Misunderstandings between girl and boy can be due to the eagerness of the boy and his inability to perceive the girl’s cues of genuine rejection, or to the to the girl’s failure to make the signs of refusal in unequivocal fashion. The boy may discover the girl’s unwillingness only after he has forced himself on her.

Fear of discovery may turn a willing girl into one who cries rape. If a couple engaging in intercourse out of doors is discovered, the girl may decide to save her reputation by crying out that she was being raped. Rape may also occur in cases when a girl has encouraged a young man to present her with gifts, but then denies him sexual intercourse. If the girl happens to be married, she rejects the boy’s advances because she is afraid of supernatural sanctions against adultery. Out of frustration, the boy (who may not know that the girl is married) may resort to rape and she reports the deed.

In some cases one or more boys may attack a single girl in premeditated sexual assault. The boys may beat the girl badly and tear her clothing. Sometimes the girl is dragged off to the hut

of one of them and forced into coitus. After being held for a couple of days the girl is freed. In these cases rupture of the hymen and other signs of attack are usually present.

The third type of rape occurs in the context of wife abduction. When a Gusii man is unable to present the bridewealth necessary for a normal marriage and cannot persuade a girl to elope, he may abduct a girl from a different clan. The man's friends will be enlisted to carry out the abduction. The young men are frequently rough on the girl, beating her and tearing her clothes. When she arrives at the home of the would-be lover, he attempts persuade her to remain with him until bridewealth can be raised. Her refusal is ignored and the wedding night sexual contest is performed with the clansmen helping in overcoming her resistance.

Of these three types of rape, the first and third are unlawful versions of legitimate patterns. Seduction is accepted when kept within the bounds of discretion. Abduction is an imitation of traditional wedding procedures. Abduction lacks only the legitimizing bridewealth and the consent of the bride and her parents. In both of these cases Levine says, "there is a close parallel between the criminal act and the law-abiding culture pattern to which it is related." Seduction and abduction classify as rape when the girl chooses to report the incident.

Data collected from the standard cross-cultural sample allows us to place the hostility characterizing Gusii heterosexual behavior in cross-cultural perspective. Broude and Greene (1976), who published codes for twenty sexual practices, find that male sexual advances are occasionally or typically hostile in one-quarter (26%) of the societies for which information was available. They found that males were typically forward in verbal (not physical) sexual overtures in forty percent of the societies, that females solicited or desired physical aggression in male sexual overtures in eleven percent of the societies, and that males did not make sexual overtures or were diffident or shy in twenty-three percent of the societies.

Examination of a variety of 'rape prone' societies shows that the Gusii pattern of rape is found elsewhere but that it is by no means the only pattern which can be observed. For example, in several societies the act of rape occurs to signal readiness for marriage and is a ceremonial act. Since this act signifies male domination of female genitals, its occurrence was treated as a diagnostic criterion for classification as 'rape prone.'

Among the Kikuyu of East Africa it is reported that in former times, as part of initiation, every boy was expected to perform the act of ceremonial rape called *Kuihaka muunya* (to smear oneself with salt earth) in order to prove his manhood. It was thought that until a boy had performed the act of rape he could not have lawful intercourse with a Kikuyu woman and hence could not marry. During the initiation period boys would wander the countryside in bands of up to 100 in number. The object of each band was to find a woman on whom to commit the rape. The ideal woman was one from an enemy tribe who was married. In practice it appears that the ceremonial rape consisted of nothing more than masturbatory ejaculation on the woman's body or in her presence. Immediately after the act the boy was able to throw away the paraphernalia which marked him with the status of neophyte (Lambert, 1956).

Rape marks a girl as marriageable among the Arunta of Australia. At age 14 or 15 the Arunta girl is taken out into the bush by a group of men for the vulva cutting ceremony. A designated man cuts the girl's vulva after which she is gang raped by a group of men which does not include her

future husband. When the ceremony is concluded the girl is taken to her husband and from then on no one else has the right of access to her. (Spencer & Gillen, 1927).

In other rape prone societies, rape is explicitly linked to the control of women and to male dominance. Among the Northern Sauteaux the assumption of male dominance is clearly expressed in the expectation that a man's potential sexual rights over the woman he chooses must be respected. A woman who turns a man down too abruptly insults him and invites aggression. There is a Northern Sauteaux tale about a girl who was considered too proud because she refused to marry. Accordingly, a group of medicine men lured her out into the bush where she was raped by each in turn (Hallowell, 1955). Such tales provide women with a fairly good idea of how they should behave in relation to men.

The attitude that women are "open" for sexual assault is frequently found in the societies of the Insular Pacific. For example, in the Marshall Islands one finds the belief that "every woman is like a passage." Just as every canoe is permitted to sail from the open sea into the lagoon through the passage, so every man is permitted to have intercourse with every woman (except those who are excluded on account of blood kinship). A trader, well acquainted with the language and customs of one group of Marshall Islanders, reported the following incident. One day while standing at the trading post he saw 20 young men enter the bushes, one after another. Following the same path, he discovered a young girl stretched out on the ground, rigid and unconscious. When he accused the young men of cruel treatment they replied: "It is customary here for every young man to have intercourse with every girl" (Erdland, 1914, p. 98—99).

In tropical forest societies of South America and in Highland New Guinea it is fairly frequent to find the threat of rape used to keep women from the men's houses or from viewing male sacred objects. For example, Shavante women were strictly forbidden to observe male sacred ceremonies. Women caught peeking are threatened with man handling, rape, and disfigurement (Maybury-Lewis, 1967).

Perhaps the best known example of rape used to keep women away from male ritual objects is found in the description of the Mundurucu, a society well known to anthropologists due to the work of Robert and Yolanda Murphy. The Mundurucu believe that there was a time when women ruled and sex roles were reversed with the exception that women could not hunt. During that time, it is said, women were the sexual aggressors and men were sexually submissive and did women's work. Women controlled the "sacred trumpets" (the symbols of power) and the men's houses. The trumpets are believed to contain the spirits of the ancestors who demand ritual offering of meat. Since women did not hunt and could not make these offerings, men were able to take the trumpets from them, thereby establishing male dominance. The trumpets are secured in special chambers within the men's houses and no woman can see them under penalty of gang rape. Such a threat is necessary because men believe that women will attempt to seize from the men the power they once had. Gang rape is also the means by which men punish sexually "wanton" women (Murphy & Murphy, 1974).

Another expression of male sexual aggressiveness, which is classified as rape in this study, is the practice of sexually assaulting enemy women during warfare. The Yanomamo, described by Napoleon Chagnon and Marvin Harris, are infamous for their brutality toward women. The Yanomamo, according to Harris (1977), "practice an especially brutal form of male supremacy involving polygyny, frequent wife beating, and gang rape of captured enemy women." The



Yanomamo, Harris says, “regard fights over women as the primary causes of their wars” (1977, p. 69). Groups raid each other for wives in an area where marriageable women are in short supply due to the practice of female infanticide. The number of marriageable women is also affected by the desire on the part of successful warriors to have several wives to mark their superior status as “fierce men.” A shortage of women for wives also motivates Azande (Africa) warfare. Enemy women were taken by Azande soldiers as wives. Evans-Pritchard calls these women “slaves of war” and says that they were “not regarded very differently from ordinary wives, their main disability being that they had no family or close kin to turn to in times of trouble” (1971, p. 251). The absence of close kin, of course, made these women more subservient and dependent on their husbands.

Another source on the Azande discusses how the act of rape when committed against an Azande woman is treated. If the woman is not married, this source reports, the act is not treated as seriously. If the woman is married, the rapist can be put to death by the husband. If the rapist is allowed to live, he may be judged guilty of adultery and asked to pay the chief 20 knives (the commonly used currency in marriage exchanges) and deliver a wife to the wronged husband. This source indicates that the rape of a woman is not permitted but the punishments are established, suggesting that rape is a frequent occurrence (Lagae, 1926).

Among some American Indian buffalo hunters, it is not uncommon to read that rape is used as a means to punish adultery. There is a practice among the Cheyenne of the Great Plains known as “to put a woman on the prairie.” This means that the outraged husband of an adulterous woman invites all the unmarried members of his military society to feast on the prairie where they each rape the woman (Hoebel, 1960). Among the Omaha, a woman with no immediate kin who commits adultery may be gang raped and abandoned by her husband (Dorsey, 1884). Mead reports that the Omaha considered a “bad woman” fair game for any man. No discipline, no set of standards, other than to be cautious of an avenging father or brother and to obey the rule of exogamy, Mead says, kept young men from regarding rape as a great adventure. Young Omaha men, members of the Antler society, would prey upon divorced women or women considered loose (Mead, 1932).

Summarizing, a rape prone society, as defined here, is one in which sexual assault by men of women is either culturally allowable or largely overlooked. Several themes interlink the above descriptions. In all, men are posed as social group against women. Entry into the adult male or female group is marked in some cases by rituals that include rape. In other cases, rape preserves the ceremonial integrity of the male group and signifies its status vis-a-vis women. The theme of women as property is suggested when the aggrieved husband is compensated for the rape of his wife by another man, or when an adulterous woman is gang raped by her husband and his unmarried compatriots. In these latter cases, the theme of the dominant male group is joined with a system of economic exchange in which men act as exchange agents and women comprise the medium of exchange. This is not to say that rape exists in all societies in which there is ceremonial induction into manhood, male secret societies, or compensation for adultery. For further illumination of the cultural context of rape we can turn to an examination of rape free societies.

### *Profiles of "Rape Free" Societies*

Rape free societies are defined as those where the act of rape is either infrequent or does not occur. Forty-seven percent of the societies for which information on the incidence or presence of rape was available (see Table 2) were classified in the rape free category. Societies were classified



in this category on the basis of the following kinds of statements found in the sources used for the sample societies.

Among the Taureg of the Sahara, for example, it is said that “rape does not exist, and when a woman refuses a man, he never insists nor will he show himself jealous of a more successful comrade” (Blanguernon, 1955, p. 13/1). Among the Pygmies of the Ituri forest in Africa, while a boy may rip off a girl’s outer bark cloth, if he can catch her he may never have intercourse with her without her permission. Turnbull (1965), an anthropologist who lived for some time among the Pygmies and became closely identified with them, reports that he knew of no cases of rape. Among the Jivaro of South America rape is not recognized as such, and informants could recall no case of a woman violently resisting sexual intercourse. They say that a man would never commit such an act if the woman resisted, because she would tell her family and they would punish him. Among the Nkundo Mongo of Africa it is said that rape in the sense of the word - that is, the abuse of a woman by the use of violence - is most unusual. If a woman does not consent, the angry seducer leaves her, often insulting her to the best of his ability. Rape is also unheard of among the Lakhers, and in several villages the anthropologist was told that there had never been a case of rape.

Other examples of statements leading to the classification of rape free are listed as follows:

Cuna (South America), “Homosexuality is rare, as is rape. Both... are regarded as sins, punishable by God” (Stout, 1947, p. 39).

Khalka Mongols (Outer Mongolia), “I put this question to several well-informed Mongols: - what punishment is here imposed for rape? ... one well-educated lama said frankly: “We have no crimes of this nature here. Our women never resist,” (Maiskii, 1921, p. 98).

Gond (India), “It is considered very wrong to force a girl to act against her will. Such cases of ghotul-rape are not common... If then a boy forces a girl against her will, and the others hear of it, he is fined” (Elwin, 47, p, 056).

The above quotes may obscure the actual incidence of rape. Such quotes, leading to the classification of societies as ‘rape free’, achieve greater validity when placed within the context of other information describing heterosexual interaction.

There is considerable difference in the character of heterosexual interaction in societies classified as ‘rape prone’ when compared with those classified as ‘rape free’. In ‘rape free’ societies women are treated with considerable respect, and prestige is attached to female reproductive and productive roles. Interpersonal violence is minimized, and a people’s attitude regarding the natural environment is one of reverence rather than one of exploitation. Turnbull’s description of the Mbuti Pygmies, of the Ituri forest in Africa, provides a prototypical profile of a ‘rape free’ society (1965).

Violence between the sexes, or between anybody, is virtually absent among the net hunting Mbuti Pygmies when they are in their forest environment. The Mbuti attitude toward the forest is reflective of their attitude toward each other. The forest is addressed as “father,” “mother,” “lover,” and “friend.” The Mbuti say that forest is everything - the provider of food, shelter, warmth, clothing, and affection. Each person and animal is endowed with some spiritual power which “derives from a single source whose physical manifestation is the forest itself.” The ease of the Mbuti relationship to their environment is reflected in the relationship between the sexes. There is little division of labor by sex. The hunt is frequently a joint effort. A man is not ashamed to pick

mushrooms and nuts if he finds them: or to wash and clean a baby. In general, leadership is minimal and there is no attempt to control, or to dominate, either the geographical or human environment. Decision-making is by common consent; men and women have equal say because hunting and gathering are both important to the economy. The forest is the only recognized authority of last resort. In decision making, diversity of opinion may be expressed, but prolonged disagreement is considered to be “noise” and offensive to the forest. If husband and wife disagree, the whole camp may act to mute their antagonism, lest the disagreement become too disruptive to the social unit (see Turnbull, 1965).

The essential details of Turnbull’s idyllic description of the Mbuti are repeated in other ‘rape free’ societies. The one outstanding feature of these societies is the ceremonial importance of women and the respect accorded the contribution women make to social continuity, a respect which places men and women in relatively balanced power spheres. This respect is clearly present among the Mbuti and in more complex ‘rape free’ societies.

In the West African kingdom of Ashanti, for example, it is -believed that only women can contribute to future generations. Ashanti women say:

I am the mother of the man. ... I alone can transmit the blood to a king. ... If my sex die in the clan then that very clan becomes extinct, for be there one, or one thousand male members left, not one can transmit the blood, and the life of the clan becomes measured on this earth by the span of a man’s life (Rattray, 1923, p. 79).

The importance of the feminine attributes of growth and reproduction are found in Ashanti religion and ritual. Priestesses participate with priests in all major rituals. The Ashanti creation story emphasizes the complementarity and inseparability of male and female. The main female deity, the Earth Goddess, is believed to be the receptacle of past and future generations as well as the source of food and water (Rattray, 1923, 1927). The sacred linkage of earth-female-blood makes the act of rape incongruous in Ashanti culture. Only one incident of rape is reported by the main ethnographer of the Ashanti. In this case the man involved was condemned to death (Rattray, 1927, p. 21 1).

In sum, rape free societies are characterized by sexual equality and the notion that the sexes are complementary. Though the sexes may not perform the same duties or have the same rights or privileges, each is indispensable to the activities of the other (see Sanday, 1981 for examples of sexual equality). The key to understanding the relative absence of rape in rape free as opposed to rape prone societies is the importance, which in some cases is sacred, attached to the contribution women make to social continuity. As might be expected, and as will be demonstrated below, interpersonal violence is uncommon in rape free societies. It is not that men are necessarily prone to rape; rather, where interpersonal violence is a way of life, violence frequently achieves sexual expression.

### *Approaches to the Etiology of Rape*

Three general approaches characterize studies of the etiology of rape. One approach focuses on the broader sociocultural milieu, another turns to individual characteristics. The first looks at how rapists act out the broader social script, the second emphasizes variables like the character of parental-child interaction. A third approach, which may focus on either individual or social factors, is distinguishable by the assumption that male sexual repression will inevitably erupt

in the form of sexual violence. These approaches, reviewed briefly in this section, guided the empirical analysis of the socio-cultural context of rape in tribal societies.

Based on his study of the Gusii, LeVine (1959) that four factors will be associated with the incidence cross-culturally:

1. severe formal restrictions on the nonmarital sexual relations of females;
2. moderately strong sexual inhibitions on the part of females;
3. economic or other barriers to marriage that prolong the bachelorhood of some males into their late twenties;
4. the absence of physical segregation of the sexes.

The implicit assumption here is that males who are denied sexual access to women, will obtain access by force unless men are separated from women. Such an assumption depicts men as creatures who cannot control their sexual impulses, and women as the unfortunate victims.

Le Vine's profile of the Gusii suggests that broader social characteristics are related to the incidence of rape. For example, there is the fact that marriage among the Gusii occurs almost always between feuding clans. The Gusii have a proverb which states "Those whom we marry are those whom we fight" (1959, p. 966). The close correspondence between the Gusii heterosexual relationship and intergroup hostilities suggests the hypothesis that the nature of intergroup relations is correlated with the nature of the heterosexual relationship and the incidence of rape.

The broader approach to the etiology of rape is contained in Susan Brownmiller's contention that rape is the means by which men keep women in a state of fear. This contention is certainly justified in societies where men use rape as a threat to keep women from viewing their sacred objects (the symbol of power) or rape is used to punish women. In societies like the Mundurucu, the ideology of male dominance is upheld by threatening women with rape. Just as the quality of intergroup relations among the Gusii is reflected in heterosexual relations, one could suggest that the quality of interpersonal relations is reflected in the incidence of rape. In societies where males are trained to be dominant and interpersonal relations are marked by outbreaks of violence, one can predict that females may become the victims in the playing out of the male ideology of power and control.

A broader socio-cultural approach is also found in the work of Wolfgang & Ferracuti (1967) and Amir (1971). Wolfgang & Ferracuti present the concept of the subculture of violence which is formed of those from the lower classes and the disenfranchised. The prime value is the use of physical aggression as a demonstration of masculinity and toughness. In his study of rape, Amir placed the rapist "squarely within the subculture of violence" (Brownmiller 1975, p. 181). Rape statistics in Philadelphia showed that in 43% of the cases examined, rapists operated in pairs or groups. The rapists tended to be in the 15-19 age bracket, the majority were not married, and 90% belonged to the lower socioeconomic class and lived in inner city neighborhoods where there was also a high degree of crime against the person. In addition, 71% of the rapes were planned. In general, the profile presented by Amir is reminiscent of the pattern of rape found among the Kikuyu, where a band of boys belonging to a guild roamed the country side in search of a woman to gang rape as a means of proving their manhood and as a prelude to marriage. Brownmiller summarizes Amir's study with the following observations:

Like assault, rape is an act of physical damage to another person, and like robbery it is also an act of acquiring property: the intent is to “have” the female body in the acquisitory meaning of the term. A woman is perceived by the rapist both as hated person and desired property. Hostility against her and possession of her may be simultaneous motivations, and the hatred for her is expressed in the same act that is the attempt to “take” her against her will. In one violent crime, rape is an act against person and property.

The importance of the work of Wolfgang and Ferracuti, Amir, and Brownmiller’s observations lies in demonstrating that rape is linked with an overall pattern of violence and that part of this pattern includes the concept of woman as property. From the short descriptions of rape in some of the societies presented above, it is clear rape is likely to occur in what I would call, to borrow from Wolfgang, cultures of violence. Rape prone societies, as noted, are likely to include payment to the wronged husband, indicating that the concept of women as property also exists. This concept is not new to anthropology. It has been heavily stressed in the work of Levi-Strauss who perceives tribal women as objects in an elaborate exchange system between men.

The second type of approach to the understanding of rape focuses on the socialization process and psychoanalytic variables. This approach is reflected in the following quote from the conclusions of David Abrahamsen who conducted a Rorschach study on the wives of eight convicted rapists in 1954. Abrahamsen (1960, p. 165) says:

The conclusions reached were that the wives of the sex offenders on the surface behaved toward men in a submissive and masochistic way but latently denied their femininity and showed an aggressive masculine orientation; they unconsciously invited sexual aggression, only to respond to it with coolness and rejection. They stimulated their husbands into attempts to prove themselves, attempts which necessarily ended in frustration and increased their husbands’ own doubts about their masculinity. In doing so, the wives unknowingly continued the type of relationship the offender had had with his mother. There can be no doubt that the sexual frustration which the wives caused is one of the factors motivating rape, which might be tentatively described as a displaced attempt to force a seductive but rejecting mother into submission.

Brownmiller (1975, p. 179) includes this quote in her analysis of policeblotter rapists and her reaction to it is rather interesting. She rejects Abrahamsen’s conclusions because they place the burden of guilt not on the rapist but on his mother and wife. The fact of the matter is that dominance cannot exist without passivity, as sadism cannot exist without masochism. What makes men sadistic and women masochistic, or men dominant and women passive, must be studied as part of an overall syndrome. Abrahamsen’s conclusions certainly apply to Gusii males and females. With respect to the way in which Gusii wives invite sexual aggression from their husbands consider the following description of various aspects of Gusii nuptials:

... the groom in his finery returns to the bride’s family where he is stopped by a crowd of women who deprecate his physical appearance. Once he is in the house of the bride’s mother and a sacrifice has been performed by the marriage priest, the women begin again, accusing the groom of impotence on the wedding night and claiming that his penis is too small to be effective. ... When the reluctant bride arrives at the groom’s house, the matter of first importance is the wedding night sexual performance. ... The

bride is determined to put her new husband's sexual competence to the most severe test possible. She may take magical measures which are believed to result in his failure in intercourse. ... The bride usually refuses to get onto the bed; if she did not resist the groom's advances she would be thought sexually promiscuous. At this point some of the young men may forcibly disrobe her and put her on the bed. ... As he proceeds toward sexual intercourse she continues to resist and he must force her into position. Ordinarily she performs the practice known as *ogotega*, allowing him between her thighs but keeping the vaginal muscles so tense that penetration is impossible. ... Brides are said to take pride in the length of time they can hold off their mates (LeVine, 1959, pp. 967—969).

The relations between parents and children among the Gusii also fit Abrahamsen's conclusions concerning the etiology of rape. The son has a close and dependent relationship with his mother. The father is aloof from all his children, but especially his daughters. The father's main function is to punish which means that for the Gusii girl, her early connection with men is one of avoidance and fear. On the other hand, the relationship of the Gusii boy with his mother is characterized by dependence and seduction.

Studies of the etiology of rape suggest several hypotheses that can be tested cross-culturally. These hypotheses are not opposed; they are stated at different explanatory levels. One set phrases the explanation in socio-cultural terms, the other in psycho-cultural terms. Still another, only touched on above, suggests that male sexuality is inherently explosive unless it achieves heterosexual outlet. This latter assumption, implicit in LeVine's hypotheses mentioned above, also draws on the notion, most recently expressed in the work of Stoller (1979), that sexual excitement is generated by the desire, overt or hidden, to harm another. If the latter were the case, we would be led to believe that rape would exist in all societies. The argument presented here, however, suggests that rape is an enactment not of human nature, but of socio-cultural forces. Thus, the prevalence of rape should be associated with the expressions of these forces. Some of these expressions and their correlation with the incidence of rape are examined in the next section.

### *Socio-Cultural Correlates of Rape*

Four general hypotheses are suggested by the work of LeVine, Brownmiller, Abrahamsen, Wolfgang and Amir. These hypotheses are:

1. Sexual repression is related to the incidence of rape;
2. intergroup and interpersonal violence is enacted in male sexual violence;
3. the character of parent-child relations is enacted in male sexual violence;
4. rape is an expression of a social ideology of male dominance.

These hypotheses were tested by collecting data on: variables relating to childrearing; behavior indicating sexual repression; interpersonal and intergroup violence; sexual separation; glorification of the male role and an undervaluation of the female role.

The relevant variables are listed in Table 3 along with the correlation of each with the incidence of rape (see Table 4 for variable codes). The correlations presented in Table 3 support all but the first of the general hypotheses listed above. There is no significant correlation between variables measuring sexual repression and the incidence of rape. Admittedly, however, sexual

repression is very difficult to measure. The variables presented in Table 3 may not, in fact, be related to sexual abstinence. The variables are: length of the post-partum sex taboo (a variable which indicates how long the mother abstains from sexual intercourse after the birth of a child); attitude toward (a variable which ranges between the disapproval and approval of premarital sex); age at marriage for males; and the number of taboos reflecting male avoidance of female sexuality.

TABLE 3  
CORRELATES OF RAPE

<b>Variables Related to Sexual Repression<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Correlation with Incidence of Rape (RA4)<sup>b</sup></b>
1. Length of the post-partum sex taboo (Inf 10)	NS
2. Attitude toward pre-marital sex (Psex)	NS
3. Age at marriage for males (Agem)	NS
4. No. of taboos reflecting male avoidance of female sexuality (All)	NS
<b>Variables Related to intergroup and Interpersonal Violence</b>	
5. Raiding other groups for wives (Wie)	$r = -.29$ (N = 83, $p = .004$ )
6. Degree of Interpersonal violence (Viol)	$r = .47$ (N = 90, $p = .000$ )
7. Ideology of Male Toughness (Macho)	$r = -.42$ (N = 73, $p = .000$ )
8. War	$r = .21$ (N = 86, $p = .03$ )
<b>Variables Related Childrearing</b>	
9. Character of father-daughter relationships (Fada)	$r = -.20$ (N = 65, $p = .06$ )
10. Proximity of father in care of infants (Inf 23)	$r = -.16$ (N = 83, $p = .08$ )
11. Character of mother-son relationships (Moso)	NS
<b>Variables Related to Ideology of Male Dominance</b>	
12. Female power and authority (Stat)	$r = -.22$ (N = 83, $p = .03$ )
13. Female political decision making (H05)	$r = -.33$ (N = 88, $p = .00$ )
14. Attitude toward women as citizens (H08)	$r = -.28$ (N = 84, $p = .005$ )
15. Presence of special places for men (Mho)	$r = -.26$ (N = 71, $p = .01$ )
16. Presence of special places for women (Fho)	$r = -.17$ (N = 70, $p = .08$ )

<sup>a</sup> Codes for variables are presented in Table 4.

<sup>b</sup> Code presented in Table 2. Correlation coefficient is Pearson  $r$ .

The correlations presented in Table 3 support the hypothesis that intergroup and interpersonal violence is enacted in sexual violence against females. Raiding other groups for wives is significantly associated with the incidence of rape. The intensity of interpersonal violence in a society is also positively correlated with the incidence of rape, as is the presence of an ideology which encourages men to be tough and aggressive. Finally, when warfare is reported as being frequent or endemic (as opposed to absent or occasional) rape is more likely to be present.

The character of relations between parents and children is not strongly associated with the incidence of rape. When the character of the father-daughter relationship is primarily indifferent, aloof, cold and stern, rape is more likely to be present. The same is true when fathers are distant from the care of infants. However, there is no relationship between the nature of the mother-son tie (as measured in this study) and the incidence of rape.

TABLE 4  
VARIABLE CODES FOR CORRELATIONS LISTED IN TABLE 3

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1. Inf 10:1 = intercourse after birth — 7 = intercourse after more than 2 yrs.
  2. Psex: 1 = premarital sex expected — 9 = 6 strongly disapproved.
  3. Agem: 1 = men marry around puberty — 3 = 25 yrs. or older.
  4. All: 0 = no taboos reflecting male avoidance of intercourse — 3 = 3 taboos.
  5. Wie: 1 = Wives taken from hostile groups — 2 = practice absent.
  6. Viol: 1 = interpersonal violence mild or absent — 3 = strong.
  7. Macho: 1 = ideology of male toughness present — 2 = absent.
  8. War: 1 = war reported or absent or occasional — 2 = frequent or endemic.
  9. Fada: 1 = fathers affectionate with daughters — 2 = aloof, cold.
  10. Inf 23: 1 = no close proximity between fathers and infants — 5 = regular, close proximity.
  11. Moso: 1 = mothers affectionate with sons — 2 = aloof, cold.
  12. Stat: 1 = no female political or economic power — 6 = females have political and economic power. \*
  13. H05: 0 = females have no influence – public decision making — 1 = females have influence.
  14. H08: 1 = males express contempt for women or citizens — 4 = women are respected as citizens.
  15. Mho: places where males congregate alone are present — 2 = absent.
  16. Fho:1 = places where females congregate alone are present — 2 = absent.
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\*This variable forms a Guttman Scale. See Sanday, (1981) for scale properties.

There is considerable evidence supporting the notion that rape is an expression of a social ideology of male dominance. Female power and authority is lower in rape prone societies. Women do not participate in public decision making in these societies and males express contempt for women as decision makers. In addition, there is greater sexual separation in rape prone societies as indicated by the presence of structures or places where the sexes congregate in single sex groups.

The correlates of rape presented in Table 3 strongly suggest that rape is the playing out of a socio-cultural script in which the expression of personhood for males is directed by, among other things, interpersonal violence and an ideology of toughness. If we see the sexual act as the ultimate emotional expression of the self, then it comes as no surprise that male sexuality is phrased in physically aggressive terms when other expressions of self are phrased in these terms. This explanation does not rule out the importance of the relationship between parents and children, husbands and wives. Raising a violent son requires certain behavior patterns in parents, behaviors that husbands may subsequently act out as adult males. Sexual repression does not explain the correlations presented in Table 3. Rape is not an instinct triggered by celibacy, enforced for whatever reason. Contrary to what some social scientists assume, men are not animals whose sexual behavior is programmed by instinct. Men are human beings whose sexuality is biologically based and culturally encoded.



## Conclusion

Rape in tribal societies is part of a cultural configuration that includes interpersonal violence, male dominance, and sexual separation. In such societies, as the Murphys (1974, p. 197) say about the Mundurucu: "men ... use the penis to dominate their women." The question remains as to what motivates the rape prone cultural configuration. Considerable evidence (see Sanday, 1981) suggests that this configuration evolves in societies faced with depleting food resources, migration, or other factors contributing to a dependence on male destructive capacities as opposed to female fertility.

In tribal societies women are often equated with fertility and growth, men with aggression and destruction. More often than not, the characteristics associated with maleness and femaleness are equally valued. When people perceive an imbalance between the food supply and population needs, or when populations are in competition for diminishing resources, the male role is accorded greater prestige. Females are perceived as objects to be controlled as men struggle to retain or to gain control of their environment. Behaviors and attitudes prevail that separate the sexes and force men into a posture of proving their manhood. Sexual violence is one of the ways in which men remind themselves that they are superior. As such, rape is part of a broader struggle for control in the face of difficult circumstances. Where men are in harmony with their environment, rape is usually absent.

The insights garnered from the cross-cultural study of rape in tribal societies bear on the understanding and treatment of rape in our own. Ours is a heterogeneous society in which more men than we like to think feel that they do not have mastery over their destiny and who learn from the script provided by nightly television that violence is a way of achieving the material all Americans expect. It is important to understand that violence is socially and not biologically programmed. Rape is not an integral part of male nature, but the means by which men programmed for violence express their sexual selves. Men who are conditioned to respect the female virtues of growth and the sacredness of life, do not violate women. It is significant that in societies where nature is held sacred, rape occurs only rarely. The incidence of rape in our society will be reduced to the extent that boys grow to respect women and the qualities so often associated with femaleness in other societies - namely, nurturance, growth, and nature. Women can contribute to the socialization of boys by making these respected qualities in their struggle for equal rights.

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