

GOOD GUYS DON'T RAPE:

Gender, Domination, and Mobilizing Rape

C. J. PASCOE

JOCELYN A. HOLLANDER

University of Oregon, USA

When the University of Oregon Ducks football team defeated the Florida State University (FSU) Seminoles at the Rose Bowl in early 2015, the content of their post-game revelry may have surprised some viewers. In celebrating their victory, several Oregon players were filmed singing “No Means No!” to the tune of the “War Chant”¹ regularly sung by FSU fans. The song was presumably directed at a particular FSU player, quarterback Jameis Winston, who had been accused of (though not charged with or convicted of) raping a female student.

Some commentaries on this incident lauded it as a moment in which young men were collectively and publicly reprimanding another man accused of sexual violence by using a long-time feminist slogan: “no means no.”² Certainly, on first read this appears to be *exactly* the sort of phenomenon antirape activists have been waiting for: normatively masculine men shaming other men for sexually assaulting women. It seemed to call into question assumptions about the central role of sexual assault in enforcing gender inequality.

We propose an alternate interpretation of this moment, however. What if the chanting football players were using the accusations against Winston

AUTHORS' NOTE: *The authors would like to thank Kemi Balogun, Tristan Bridges, Sarah Diefendorf, Aaron Gullickson, Patricia Gwartney, Jill Harrison, Matt Norton, Jianbinn Shao, and Jessica Vasquez-Tokos, the editorial team at Gender & Society, for their comments on earlier iterations of this article, as well as Andrea Herrera for her research assistance. Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to C.J. Pascoe, University of Oregon, 736 Prince Lucien Campbell, Eugene, OR 97403-1291; e-mail: cpascoe@uoregon.edu.*

GENDER & SOCIETY, Vol. 30 No. 1, February 2016 67–79

DOI: 10.1177/0891243215612707

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not (or not only) to decry the practice of rape but to publicly shame their opponent in a way that specifically preserved or even enhanced their own gendered status as masculine? That is, perhaps they used the chant as an opportunity to celebrate their own dominance in two ways—over the losing team *and* over Winston himself. What if the point of the chant was not to make a statement about sexual assault but to position their opponent as a *failed man*—a man who needed to use force to secure sexual access to a woman’s body? A *real* man, the chant implies, would be so sexually desirable as to render force unnecessary. A *real* man—like, presumably, the chanters themselves—would also be able to control his own sexual and violent urges such that they would not overwhelm him or others (Pascoe and Bridges 2015).

Reading the post-game revelry from this perspective brings masculinity to the fore in the task of theorizing rape and other forms of sexual violence. Of course, men and masculinity have long been central to feminist theorizing about gender and sexual violence. We suggest, however, that the ways scholarship and activism have tended to address men—as *those who perpetrate sexual violence against women* and *as those who must be taught to not rape*—may elide some of the complicated ways in which sexual violence and masculinity are intertwined. What is needed, and what we begin in this article, is a further interrogation into the changing relationship between masculinity and sexual violence in an era in which men both engage in and speak out against sexual violence.

We argue that both of these practices—participating in *and* publicly opposing sexual assault—may serve as resources that enable young men to solve the “identity dilemmas” (Wilkins 2009) posed by changing and conflicting expectations of gendered selves by drawing on cultural resources that affirm expectations of normative masculinity. Even though it may appear that some deployments of such resources support while other enactments challenge gender inequalities, Wilkins argues that both may actually achieve similar ends; that is, both may support meaning-making systems that invest in gendered inequalities (Wilkins 2009). We suggest that contemporary relationships between masculinity and rape may be a concrete example of “hybrid masculinities,” using new kinds of masculinity resources to “fortify existing social and symbolic boundaries in ways that often work to conceal systems of power and inequality in historically new ways” (Bridges and Pascoe 2014, 246). Thus, young men can simultaneously position themselves as “good guys” who don’t rape while symbolically engaging with sexual assault to signal the dominance that is constitutive of Western masculinity at this historical moment.

We call this approach “mobilizing rape.” Rape, in this sense, may be symbolically utilized in a variety of ways to reinforce the contemporary ordering of gender relations, a specific form of what Patricia Yancey Martin calls “mobilizing masculinity” (Martin 2001). While sexual assault has been defined as a situation in which “one or more persons impose a sexual interaction upon another unwilling person” (Cahill 2001, 15), through the concept of “mobilizing rape” we suggest that sexual assault is not simply an individual incident but a wide-ranging constellation of behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and talk that work to produce and reproduce gendered dominance in everyday interaction. We conceive of mobilizing rape as a way of doing gender (Fenstermaker and West 2002; West and Zimmerman 1987): as an interactional accomplishment that includes not only engaging in activities legally defined as rape but also engaging in other forms of sexual assault and nonconsensual sexual interaction, talking about rape and sexual assault, making jokes about it, laughing at imagery about it, labeling oneself or others as rapists, blaming sexual assault survivors for their own victimization, or otherwise symbolically deploying the idea of rape.

From a “mobilizing rape” perspective, practices, discourses, and symbols associated with sexual violence and assault may be deployed in the service of masculine dominance³ at interactional, discursive, structural, symbolic, and global levels. As other scholars have pointed out, dominance is a hallmark of contemporary Western masculinity (Connell 1995; Jaggar 1983; Mackinnon 1989; Pascoe 2007; Peirce 1995). Indeed, sexual assault has long been theorized as a form of masculinized dominance over women’s bodies (Cahill 2001; Dworkin 1991; Jeffreys 1998; Mackinnon 1989). However, as Raewyn Connell argues, gender inequality is sustained by men’s dominance *over other men*, as well as men’s dominance over women (Connell 1995). As such, we suggest that these hierarchical relations between men are in part constituted by processes of “mobilizing rape.” These hierarchical relations can be established or supported by the rape of (other men’s) women, by the rape, real or symbolic, of other men themselves—and, we suggest, by claims of *not* raping. In other words, mobilizing sexual assault as a masculinity resource allows men to do the dominance work not only over women, but also over other men, that comprises masculinity at this historical moment, even as rape itself becomes increasingly framed as socially undesirable.

RAPE CULTURE

Feminist scholars have pointed out that heterosexual relationships take place in the context of a “rape culture” (Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth

1993) in which rape is normalized and sexual dominance is rendered “sexy” (Jeffreys 1998, 75). As Pascoe (2007) argues in her research on young men in high school, heterosexual violence (symbolic or actual) plays a central role in crafting a masculine identity. From sexualized “horseplay” in school hallways (such as a situation in which a boy jabbed a girl in the crotch with a drumstick while yelling “GET RAPED! GET RAPED!”), to flirtatious cross sex touching (as when one boy wraps his arms around a girl’s neck while another punches her lightly in the stomach as she laughs and squeals), to descriptions of sex that sound more violent than sexy (“I did her so hard I ripped her walls”), this research echoes the feminist claim that rape is “the defining paradigm of sexuality” (Dworkin 1991, 62). Sexual violence, rape, and threats of rape are deeply integrated into the fabric of young people’s lives such that it is a *normative* rather than an unusual part of their emotional and physical relationships (Hlavka 2014; Pascoe 2007; Phillips 2000). These forms of symbolic sexual violence are central to constitutions of normatively masculine and feminine identities.

Precisely because “normal” heterosexual relationships take place in a “rape culture,” the last 30 years have seen very public struggles over where, exactly, the border between rape and non-rape lies, ranging from controversies over Mary Koss’s (1988) strategy of measuring rape behaviorally in the late 1980s, to the gradual criminalization of marital rape, to more recent debates over “incapacitated rape” (i.e., sex when one party is drunk, drugged, or otherwise unable to consent). Many of these struggles have eventually led to the acceptance of a broader understanding of rape. Nonetheless, there remains a wide zone of experience—between clear examples of bodily violation, on the one hand, and “enthusiastic consent” on the other—where the relationship of an experience to rape remains contested. For example, what if consent is achieved not through violence but coercion—for example, through explicit or implicit threats to the relationship or to one’s job or children? What if consent is achieved through simple but relentless persistence? What if there is no active consent, but also no resistance? Because of this definitional blurriness, a range of behaviors that fall between the categories of rape and not-rape are available to enact male dominance while still allowing men to preserve their identity as non-rapists, and perhaps even allowing them to shame other men for being rapists. This definitional murkiness allows for the mobilization of rape as a symbol with no clear referent, such that men can engage in sexual assault and simultaneously distance themselves from it discursively in ways that not only reinforce dominance over women but, impor-

tantly, also over other men. Even active disavowals of rape may reaffirm normative understandings of masculinity as dominance over other men, thus rendering some moments of seeming resistance congruent with rape culture, rather than in opposition to it.

MOBILIZING RAPE

The depathologizing of rape that followed from conceptualizing rape as a culture, not (only) as a behavior, presents identity dilemmas for men. In a rape culture, sexual assault is not caused by a few deviant or depraved bad guys; “normal” men can be rapists, and rape is part of the very culture in which we live and forge romantic relationships. In a rape culture where rape is increasingly stigmatized and where any man is a potential rapist, how can a man distance himself from rape while still doing the dominance work demanded by cultural expectations of normative masculinity? Men are accountable to both these notions (Hollander 2013) and must find a way of navigating between them.

Jay, one of Pascoe’s high school-aged respondents,⁴ illustrates this dilemma. He angrily shared a story about how he had (according to him, wrongly) been charged and found guilty of sexual assault. One of his classmates accused him of rape, saying he “put a gun to her head and shit.” Jay emphatically insisted that he was innocent, and that he was sentenced to wear an ankle bracelet under “house arrest” because she lied during the trial. While livid about being accused of rape, he later seemingly endorsed rape in conversations with his friends as they talked about a girl they agreed was “hella ugly” and “a bitch” but who “has titties.” At the end of this conversation, Jay threatened to “take her out to the street races and leave her there. Leave her there so she can get raped.” His friends responded with laughter. While Jay was angry at being found guilty of a rape he claimed he did not commit, he endorsed setting up a situation such that other men could inflict sexual violence on a young woman he found distasteful. In other words, Jay and his friends see sexual dominance over women as unproblematic, even if violating legal codes of rape is.

To be considered sufficiently masculine, one must demonstrate dominance over women and other men, but available avenues of sexual dominance are being redefined and curtailed. Mobilizing rape helps resolve this type of “masculinity dilemma” (Wilkins 2009). Consider the example with which we opened this paper: the post-game celebration during which

victorious football players chanted “No means no!” at an opposing player accused of rape. In a context of growing opposition to sexual violence, rape can be used symbolically as a tool to emasculate other men. Rape, in this sense, is something that other, “bad,” perhaps “less masculine” men do. Men can simultaneously draw upon discourses of rape to establish their masculinity and distance themselves from the actual practice of rape. Yet, who these “bad” men are is not neutral. As we discuss at greater length below, it is men of color who disproportionately bear the burden of being labeled as rapists.

This form of distancing is visible throughout the culture. A conversation with one of Pascoe’s respondents is particularly illuminating in this regard. Chad, an extremely popular football player, described his sexual history as the following:

When I was growin’ up I started having sex in the 8th grade. . . . The majority of the girls in 8th and 9th grade were just stupid. We already knew what we were doing. They didn’t know what they were doing you know? . . . Like say, comin’ over to our house like past 12. What else do you do past 12? Say we had a bottle of alcohol or something. I’m not saying we forced it upon them. I’m sayin’. . . . (Pascoe 2007)

While the incident Chad describes—plying underage women with alcohol in order to have sex with them—is one that many would agree would constitute rape, he self-consciously distances himself from rape (“I’m not saying we forced it upon them”). Indeed, he went on to share that his friends, “Kevin Goldsmith and uh, Calvin Johnson, they got charged with rape,” while claiming that, in contrast, he never had to force a girl to have sex: “I’ll never (be in) that predicament, you know. I’ve never had hard time, or had to you know, alter their thinking.” The sort of sexual assault Kevin Goldsmith and Calvin Johnson participated in is something that *other, less masculine* guys do. By distancing himself from this practice, Chad confirms his own claim to masculine dominance—a claim that is stronger because he obtained sex without physical force.

Chad emphasizes his own sexual virility to distance himself from sexual assault while confirming his masculinity: he is desirable enough that he has no need to use force to obtain access to girls’ bodies. This is not the only way to mobilize rape in the service of masculine dominance, however. Some of Chad’s religious peers used similar language in the service of refraining from, rather than engaging in, sex. As Sean said, “There will be some guys that they’ll go up to a girl, you know? ‘Hey, girl, come here.’ And they will keep on bugging them. They’ll try to grab and touch

them and stuff like this. They're just letting all their, they're acting on emotions pretty much." Sean casts himself as more mature than other boys because of his sexual restraint, drawing on masculine discourses of self-control (Wilkins 2009) and maturity (Mora 2012). When asked if he felt less masculine because he planned not to have sex until he was married, another religious young man at River High said, "No. If anything, more. Because you can resist. You don't have to give in to it." Both these young men position themselves as *more* masculine, *more* in control than other young men *because* of their ability to control their bodily impulses. Their comments echo what both Amy Wilkins (2009) and Sarah Diefendorf (2015) have found in their research on young Christian men who abstain from sex: that this restraint was itself cast as a form of dominance over other men. Their self-control, in other words, trumps the lack of control exhibited by other, libido-driven young men.

Some organized anti-violence work can also be read through the lens of "mobilizing rape." The *My Strength Is Not for Hurting* campaign, for example, encourages men to use their (presumed) strength for good (Masters 2010; Murphy 2009)—not challenging the underlying assumption that men are strong and women are vulnerable (Hollander 2001). Men's not raping is thus a chivalrous choice, a courtesy extended to a subordinate rather than the respect due to an equal. At the Ohio State University, the Rape Education and Prevention program posted signs near urinals that told men, "In your hands you hold the power to stop rape" (Gold and Villari 2000). In other words, the thing that presumably makes one a man, one's penis, also gives men the ability to end sexual violence against women. Additionally, participants in men's *Walk a Mile in Her Shoes* anti-violence marches, as Tristan Bridges' research demonstrates, mock femininity even while advocating an end to gendered violence (Bridges 2010). While opposing violence, these campaigns are founded on assumptions of men's greater strength and power and thus underscore the subordinate status of women. They "mobilize rape" by opposing rape in ways that work to reinforce, rather than challenge, underlying gender inequalities.

In these ways, then, *not* sexually assaulting may also do dominance work. Men can assert dominance both over women and over other men, who are constructed as ruled by emotions, unable to exercise masculine self-control, or not masculine enough to have young women simply fall over themselves with sexual desire. Even formal movement campaigns against sexual violence may perpetuate male dominance by constructing men as physically dominant even while encouraging men not to exercise

that dominance. Mobilizing rape, in this way, allows young men to exercise masculinized dominance over other men, even while adhering to other cultural changes, such as the increasing stigmatization of rape.

GOOD GUYS DON'T RAPE

Massive cultural changes have had to take place for members of a winning football team to publicly shame an accused rapist. While sexual assault remains widespread, being identified as a rapist has come to be seen, at least in some contexts, as unmasculine. However, this change coexists with the fact that dominance, especially sexual dominance, continues to be a central component of Western masculinity. As such, the changes surrounding rape need to be understood in the context of gender inequality that is perhaps more flexible, durable, and tenacious than is popularly assumed. Feminist theorists depathologized rape through the notion of rape culture, reconceptualizing it as something *any* man, not just pathological monsters, could commit. When men distance themselves from rape, they repathologize rape as something a *bad* man does, not something that informs all gendered relationships between men and women. This move depends on an understanding of rape as a narrowly defined category of behavior and experience. Rape, in this view, is a violent act of sexual intercourse committed by force and clearly resisted by the woman. The stereotype of the frightening stranger jumping out of a dark alley or from behind a car in a parking garage is perhaps the paradigmatic example of this kind of sexual assault (Estrich 1987); current assertions about a small group of serial rapists being responsible for sexual assaults on college campuses are a more subtle variant (Swartout et al. 2015). In other words, narrow definitions of rape allow for the mobilization of rape (and the label of rapist) such that it is seamlessly integrated into contemporary definitions of masculinity. With this constrained understanding of rape as background, everyday behaviors of sexual coercion and dominance (over men or women) can be framed as “not rape.”

With this analysis, we advocate placing masculinity at the center of theorizing rape in a cultural context in which the meaning of rape and sexual assault are contested and shifting. Rape can be mobilized to various ends, all of which support the contemporary ordering of gender and race inequality. The acts of engaging in *and* resisting engaging in sexual assault, while seemingly distant from each other, can both work in the service of masculinized dominance. Mobilizing rape through *not* engaging in sexual assault,

either by defining oneself as not a rapist or by actively opposing rape and rapists, can also be a form of masculinized dominance.

Using the concept of “mobilizing rape” to think seriously about hierarchical relations between men moves theorizing about rape in two directions. First, it raises questions about *who* symbolizes the rapist in contemporary discussions about rape. When some men absolve themselves of the identity of rapist, who becomes the imagined rapist? Racism and sexual violence are deeply intertwined, as demonstrated by white men’s sexual dominance over black women, as well as the representation of black men as the embodiment of sexual violence (Collins 2005; Davis 1983; McGuire 2011; Nagel 2000). As other scholars have argued, the specter of rape is largely transferred to poor men and men of color, symbolically purifying white, middle-class, or educated men of this sort of undesirable behavior (Collins 2005; Davis 1983; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1994; McGuire 2011; Messner 1993).

Second, the concept of mobilizing rape calls attention to actual or symbolic sexual domination of other men, phenomena often obscured by the heterosexual focus of research on sexual assault (Abdullah-Khan 2008; Lees 1997). Consider, for example, the wartime cartoons collected by folklorist Alan Dundes (1991) that depict multiple variations of Saddam Hussein being anally penetrated by a SCUD missile, which symbolically represented American military might at the time. These cartoons positioned a (male) America as militarily and culturally dominant through symbolizing male-male rape. Analyzing male-male rape indicates that “like the rape of women, sexual violence against men is thought to be an expression of power and control where sexuality is used as a weapon to dominate, humiliate, and degrade” (Lundrigan and Mueller-Johnson 2013, 768). Being penetrated feminizes men, rendering them as less than masculine, perhaps as symbolic women, and rendering the perpetrator as dominant, that is, masculine.

The concept of mobilizing rape thus explores nuances of rape culture in which young men who might engage in sexualized dominance “play,” such as punching a girl in the stomach “for fun,” might also put down other young men who see fit to sexually assault young women. That is, the same young men can both engage in rape culture and attempt to distance themselves from it, all the while using rape as a “masculinity resource” in a way that undergirds gendered inequality by setting up hierarchical relations between men and women and men and men. As such, changing rape culture involves more than teaching men not to rape or rendering sexual dominance unsexy or unmasculine; it involves rethinking

ing gendered dominance *intersectionally* such that attempts to combat sexual assault do not reinscribe gendered, raced, sexualized, and classed inequalities in more subtle ways. At first glance this may seem like a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” situation, where men reinforce gender inequality both by engaging in sexual assault and by *not* engaging in those same behaviors. We believe, however, that there are ways to oppose sexual assault that do not reinscribe gender inequality or dominate other men. A burgeoning body of literature on “allies” suggests ways that individuals may work for social justice while not investing in the current ordering of inequalities (see, for instance, Grzanka, Adler, and Blazer 2015; and Mathers, Sumerau, and Ueno 2015). Other violence prevention strategies, such as campaigns founded on mutual respect (e.g., Project Respect, <http://vsac.ca/prevention/>) or efforts to empower women through self-defense training (Hollander 2004), also resist sexual assault without relying on assumptions of men’s physical superiority. When confronting issues of sexual assault, these approaches suggest that rather than simply making small adjustments in contemporary definitions of masculinity regarding *who* is dominated (for instance, women who can’t help but be sexually drawn to a young man because of his virility or other young men who can’t control their own bodily desires), we must think about what gendered messages are being deployed when condemning it. When we attend to the way in which we provide avenues to oppose rape, we must combat normative masculinity as a mode of domination, rather than relying on tactics that render opposing gendered sexual violence part of that very system of domination.

NOTES

1. Both the chant and the “tomahawk chop” arm movements that accompany it are deeply racist imaginings of Seminole practices and culture.

2. See, for instance, <http://www.bustle.com/articles/56478-oregon-football-players-chant-no-means-no-to-mock-jameis-winstons-rape-exoneration>.

3. While at this point in history Western masculinity is characterized by dominance, masculinity is not limited to the male body (see Halberstam 1998; Kazyak 2012; Pascoe 2007). Women do dominance work as well, but at this historical moment the relationship between femininity and dominance is complicated and less tightly bound than masculinity and dominance. Dominance work doesn’t characterize normative femininity in the way it characterizes normative masculinity.

4. The names of Pascoe’s respondents and school have been changed.

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C.J. Pascoe is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon. She is the author of Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School and coeditor of Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity, and Change. Her research focuses on gendered and sexual inequalities among young people.

Jocelyn Hollander is Professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon. She is the coauthor of Gendered Situations, Gendered Selves: A Gender Lens on Social Psychology (Rowman & Littlefield, 2nd edition, 2011). She has written extensively on women's resistance to violence and the effectiveness of self-defense training, as well as on the construction and accomplishment of gender.