Representing Rape:
A Semiotic Analysis of Rape Myths in Three Popular Films

By

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Abstract

This essay considers the representation of rape in three popular films and how these depictions may reinforce or undermine ideas surrounding rape, gender and normative sexual behaviour. Often rape myths (female sexual availability and male sexual aggression) are mobilized in conjunction with the depiction of rape, and it is through this mobilization of rape myths that explorations of normative sexual behaviour and gender are considered.

Each of the three films examined (The Accused, Boys Don't Cry and Pulp Fiction) depict a different type of rape (the gender of the victim is different in each), offering a considerable opportunity to explore issues of sexual violence and gender, especially masculinity. Significantly, these films also inadvertently comment on issues of race and class through their representation of rape.

Taken together, the three films reflect an androcentric heteronormative view of sexual behaviour and gender, where male sexual aggression toward women is possibly justifiable and gender is conceived of as binary (masculine or feminine) and fixed. A critique of these sexual codes indicates the necessity of rejecting the binary conceptions of sex, gender and sexual behaviour in favour of more fluid conceptualizations. In this instance sex, gender and sexual behaviour would be understood as a range of behaviours and identities rather than as an either/or alternative and thus be inclusive and not exclusive of a wider range of identities, desires and expressions.
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I. Understanding Mythical Realities:

The impact and influence of the media on the perceptions and prevalent assumptions of viewers and consumers have been studied for the last several decades (Altenloh, 2001[1950]; McQuail 1997; Mayer, 1946; Storey 1998). By contrast, my more modest thesis is concerned with how the utilization of particular rape myths in the representation of rape in film helps to articulate a specific understanding of rape and of normative sexual behaviour. While academic discussions which treat rape and film separately are extensive, there are few studies which examine specifically how rape myths are mobilized to create a specific knowledge of rape in particular, and of male and female sexuality in general (Bufkin and Eschholz, 2000; Projansky, 2001). This research project will explore how rape myths function through film by examining and comparing the representation of rape in three popular films: *The Accused* (1988), *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994). Since the focussed and selective character of these examples does not lend itself to an exhaustive analysis of rape in film, my aim can only be to offer an exploratory and preliminary investigation of the subject.

I have chosen to explore the representation of rape in film, rather than other forms of visual and verbal representations, as a way of showing how popular rape myths are used to depict social realities in fictionalized contexts. My aim is to explore how these “mythical realities” may inform and complicate our understanding of rape. As Christian Metz notes,

Films give us the feeling that we are witnessing an almost real spectacle... Films release a mechanism of affective and perceptual participation in the spectator (one is almost never totally bored by a movie). They spontaneously appeal to his [sic] sense of belief - never, of course entirely, but more intensely than do the other arts, and occasionally films are, even in the absolute, very convincing. They speak to us with the accents of true evidence, using the argument that “It is so” (Metz, 1974: 4).

Here Metz indicates the potential impact and appeal of film for the spectator. The medium of film is both passive and participatory, fictional yet believable. The film-spectator relationship is inherently contradictory. My thesis will focus not on this relationship, but instead on its
components and construction through a semiological analysis of film alone. In what follows, I argue that rape myths provide this “accent of true evidence” (Metz, 1974: 4) as films use the rape myths circulating in our society to create ‘realistic’ cinematic depictions of rape.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines myth as “a widespread but untrue or erroneous story or belief, a widely held misconception; a misrepresentation of the truth” (OED online, 2003). As Simone de Beauvoir (1989 [1952]: 143) notes, “It is always difficult to describe a myth; it cannot be grasped or encompassed; it haunts the human consciousness without ever appearing before it in fixed form.” The point is that myth is not always perceived as myth because it appears to be true. Roland Barthes defines myth as a system of communication which can be transmitted through both written texts and visual representations (Barthes, 1973: 111). While Barthes tends to emphasize photographs in his analysis of myth, his ideas for examining how other visual media incorporate myth are applicable to my focus on film, as I will discuss further in the methodology section below.

Theresa de Lauretis (1987) describes film as a social technology (general), that is, as a cinematic apparatus (specific). Like Foucault’s concept of the technology of sex, where discourses of power and knowledge are established, elaborated and “implemented through pedagogy, medicine, demography and economics,” and thereby create a specific understanding of “sex” through the production of social relations (de Lauretis, 1987: 12), the cinematic apparatus likewise functions as a technology of gender. De Lauretis is concerned with “not only how the presentation of gender is constructed [...] but also how it becomes absorbed subjectively by each individual whom that technology addresses” (12). I mention this issue of spectatorship and the transmission of ideology as it affirms the conception of film as a social construct. As well, film production requires not only technology and know how, but the collective efforts of many people, including producers, writers, directors and actors. Graeme
Turner (1993) argues that “Film is a social practice for its makers and its audience; in its narratives and meanings we can locate evidence of the ways in which our culture makes sense of itself” (3). Film is a reflective process between its producers and viewers. Although I shall not examine actual perceptions and reactions of viewers in this thesis, it is this conception of film as a mode of social interaction, specifically its production, that allows for an exploration of the representation of rape and rape myth in film and of the connections to our understanding of normative sexual behaviour in our society.

A. Rape Myth in Film: An Overview

Rape myths and their representation in the films I have selected will be examined as a system of communication, or as a form of discourse and as text. Michel Foucault explored the regulation of sex through public discourses in an effort to help us understand a certain new form of modern knowledge regarding sex emerging in the western world (Foucault, 1978: 92). My thesis will follow his direction of research by exploring discourses surrounding rape as it is presented in film. Many feminist writers (including Haskell 1975, Cuklanz 1996, Kaplan 1983 and de Lauretis 1984) acknowledge the influential power of the media, particularly film, while Simone de Beauvior acknowledges “cinema as key carrier of cultural myths”: “It is through these myths-found in religions, traditions, language, tales, songs, movies, argues de Beauvior in The Second Sex (1949), that we not only interpret but also experience our material existences as men and women” (Thornham, 1999: 93). Additionally, the treatment of film as a visual and verbal text to be ‘read’ and analyzed will be achieved with the use of a semiotic method that draws specifically from Barthes’ (1973) treatment of myth in visual representations and Dorothy Smith’s (1990) analysis of ideologies in written texts. I am interested in how meaning, in this instance ideas concerning normative sexual behaviour, are produced through the use of rape myths.
Current research in film with respect to rape is limited to a handful of studies, including Adelman (1989), Bufkin and Eschholz (2000), Projansky (2001), and Wilson (1988). Generally, these studies are interested in how the representation of rape may influence audience perception of rape, thus drawing on the older tradition of film studies noted above. The rates of consumption and the fiscal success of the movies and the movie industry are referred to as evidence of the popularity, attraction and influence of certain films on large numbers of people. Jana Bufkin and Sarah Eschholz (2000) and Wayne Wilson (1988) conclude that cinematic depictions of rape distort the reality of rape by showing the least common type but at the same time reaffirm the myths surrounding rape. Sarah Projansky (2001) offers a comprehensive analysis of rape in film and television in the post-1980’s to explore how these depictions intersect with ideas about post-feminism, concluding that rape narratives and postfeminist discourses work to define feminism in “particularly limited ways in terms of gender, race, class and sexuality” (231). By contrast, rather than speculate on or study the influence of particular films on individual beliefs and attitudes, my thesis will draw from the two distinct literatures of rape and film to consider the representation of rape on the screen and the extent to which this relates to some prevalent understandings of rape.

i. Literature on Rape:

The many academic and popular studies concerning rape project this type of violence as ubiquitous in western society. Feminist researchers in particular have contributed significantly to the depth of our understanding of this problem, specifically in redefining rape as violence, not sex (Projansky, 2001: 7). Ann J. Cahill (2001) offers a succinct overview of feminist researchers’ work on rape by acknowledging two distinct approaches: rape as violence or rape as specifically sexual violence. Some feminists argue that rape is an act of violence used to intimidate and punish women in an effort to continue and maintain the dominance of patriarchy
(Brownmiller, 1975; Clark and Lewis, 1977; Griffin, 1979). Other researchers, like Catharine
MacKinnon (1997 [1989]), focus their analysis of rape on the sexual dimensions of this
violence. MacKinnon considers the compulsory nature of heterosexuality coupled with male
dominance in our society, as blurring the line between even “normal” heterosexual sex and
rape. Similarly, Susan Bordo (1993: 117) considers the extent to which rape can be seen as a
socially constructed method of punishment for a woman’s independent sexual expression and
control of her body. Given that, for the most part, women are the victims of rape, Cahill, like
the majority of feminist researchers, excludes male victims of rape from her analysis.

Considering the exclusion of male-male rape from feminist analysis allows for a clear
image of rape’s role in the enforcement of an androcentric and misogynistic culture, but fails to
explain effectively why men, regardless of sexual identity, would rape other men within such a
culture. The rape of men by other men is effectively invisible in our society, as evidenced by
the paucity of research on the subject. As Michael Scarce (1997: 12-14) notes, approximately
20 studies have been conducted since the 1970’s on male-male rape in the United States and in
the United Kingdom. These studies are concerned mainly with describing the characteristics of
the event, instead of its social-political importance. Significantly, the stigma, shame and fear
associated with being raped contributes to the silences surrounding the crime for both male-
female and male-male rape victims, perpetrators and witnesses. While feminist research has, to
a certain degree, lessened the stigma of rape by critiquing rape myths, the popular perception
that the victim wanted the sexual encounter persists.

There are a variety of rape myths which function to create an environment hostile to
rape victims (Burt, 1980; Cuklanz, 1996; Rhode, 1995). Research on rape acknowledges the
significant impact these myths have on our understanding of rape. For example, often rape is
viewed primarily as a sexual act and not as an act of violence (Groth, 1979; Hills, 1987; May
The perceptions that men are aggressive and women are sexually provocative and submissive are central to the rape myths I will illustrate with these films. If rape is sex, then it is easier to understand how a man could be motivated by lust and how a woman could entice him with her appearance. Generally, the most prominent myths may be listed in terms of the following common expressions: 'only bad girls get raped', 'a healthy woman can resist rape if she really wants to', 'women ask for it by leading a man on', 'women cry rape', and 'the man is just expressing an uncontrollable natural urge' (Burt, 1980; Groth, 1979; Hills, 1987; Ussher, 1997; Wilson, 1988). But rape myths are also internally contradictory. A female victim who does not conform to the 'bad girl' characterization disrupts the myth of rape as provoked by a woman's sexual seduction. This negates the idea that the rapist is expressing a natural urge because the victims are unwilling, or are too young or too old to be considered attractive sexually. Therefore, the myth that all rapists are perverted, insane or that men are innately aggressive is deployed to explain rape solely or primarily as an act of violence.

Scarce (1997) notes similar myths with respect to male-male rape. Generally, the myths are victim-focused and entwined with society's perception of masculinity: 'the male victim should be able to resist the assault', 'if the victim is homosexual then he wanted the sex', 'if the victim is heterosexual then the rape places his sexuality in question'. These myths create the enduring silences surrounding male-male rape because they question the victim's adherence to society's masculine ideal.

It feeds into our collective denial, a refusal to recognize that men are not the ultimate providers and protectors of themselves and others... for men have traditionally been expected to defend their own boundaries and limits while maintaining control, especially sexual control, of their own bodies.

(Scarce, 1997: 9)

This is an important point because the occurrence of male-male rape seems to contradict the
dominant rape myths of male-female rape: that men rape because of uncontrollable sexual desire stimulated by the woman's appearance and dress. From a heterocentric perspective male sexual desire for a man is at least unexpected, if not impossible; according to prevailing rape myths, male-male sexual violence is constructed as highly implausible and so all the more shocking.

Despite the occurrence of male-male rape and long-standing feminist scholarship that has worked to discredit these perceptions (Brownmiller, 1975; Clark and Lewis, 1977; Griffith, 1979), rape myths that construct stereotypes of sexually seductive females being preyed upon by innately sexually aggressive males persist and are endorsed. Recently, for example, Randy Thornhill and Craig T. Palmer (2000) have argued for this sexualized understanding of rape. They maintain that rape is "a natural biological phenomenon that is a product of the human evolutionary heritage," and therefore it is primarily not an issue of power and control over another human being (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000). Men rape because they wish to continue the evolutionary process by producing offspring; here rape is a kind of sexual strategy. The man responds sexually to the woman because it is an evolutionarily programmed response. He cannot help it. While Thornhill and Palmer maintain that rape and violence against women are unacceptable, their work contributes to the deluge of myths already perpetuated by the media. These myths create a basis for the justification of rape as natural, if not inevitable. In this thesis I examine how these processes of myth formation are represented in film.

ii. Literature on Film:

Early sociological forays into film were concerned mainly with film as a social phenomenon and its impact on the social culture of the viewer (Altenloh, 2001[1950]; Mayer, 1946). The high attendance rates of films compared to theatre and music halls, for example, led to the first investigations of the influence of film. J.P. Mayer (1946: 17) estimates that during
the 1940's close to 50% of the population in Britain attended 1 or 2 films per week. As well, he argues that “feature films exert the most powerful influence in our lives, an influence which in all probability is stronger than that wielded by press and radio.” Mayer developed a method for surveying viewers to support his argument concerning the influence of film on audience perspective. Today few people question the impact of film; however, its influence is acknowledged within the wider scope of social and cultural influences. Film narratives offer multiple interpretations, so it is impossible to assess whether or not a film has a significantly consistent impact or any impact at all on viewers. As well, a viewer’s experiences, and not necessarily the content of the film, will influence the viewers’ interpretation of the events depicted on the screen (Wolff, 1993: 97). Therefore, it is impossible to assess adequately the impact of a film on a viewer’s attitudes and beliefs on a specific subject because film is not the only source of social-cultural information; hence my focus is on how rape myths are used in film to produce and represent specific ideas about rape and normative sexual behaviour.

In contrast to a focus on audience response and influence, more recently feminist researchers have been concerned with the representation of women in film and the apparent exclusion of women from creating film. Marjorie Rosen’s Popcorn Venus (1973) attempts to rectify the popular misconception that women did not participate in the creation of films, and like Molly Haskell’s From Reverence to Rape (1973), considers the gradual deterioration of female images and characterizations in film, from strong, complex, independent characterizations to weak stereotypical representations. These specific concerns led to a distinctly feminist interpretation of films. How films produce meaning by reflecting androcentric heteronormative stereotypes are central to feminist analysis and critique, and thus to my own.

My interest in the representation of rape in film and how this potentially limits the full
expression of sexual desire in our society necessitates a feminist critique. Specifically, feminist sociology examines the basic features of social life and human experience from a perspective that acknowledges the importance of gendered social relations and the organization of power in society. Although I am not examining the experience of rape itself, the analytical task of exploring the production of meaning and how this produced meaning excludes or limits sexual expression is a distinctly feminist endeavor.

For example, Laura Mulvey (1988) argues that a woman in film is always constituted as a subject of the male (heterosexual) spectator’s gaze. For Mulvey, film is a construct of an androcentric society. It is not just the interaction of the film-makers, actors and audiences that create meaning, but also the structure of the scene and the images within it that enforce or challenge androcentric representations of women. Unfortunately, she does not consider the possibility of other ‘types’ of looking. Mulvey ignores the possibility of an alternative sexuality and/or gender for the subject of the gaze and the viewer. As Linda Williams notes, “the concept of a singular, dominating voyeuristic male spectator-subject is in as much need of revision as that other stereotype: the spectator as passive subject as a pure absorber of dominant ideology” (1995: 4). However, Mulvey’s emphasis on gender and her consideration of the spectator-screen relationship, or more precisely, the construction of “the gaze” through cinematic representation, constitutes a significant advance in feminist film theory that will be important in my own approach to the selected films.

Specifically, Mulvey’s (1988) emphasis on the conditions of screening and the narrative conventions of film provide my analysis with the foundation necessary to examine how the audience is situated with respect to what happens on the screen. As a result, the viewer may be led to expect entertainment and fantasy but at the same time to identify in a realistic way with the situations and characters portrayed in the film. The conventions of film are often designed
to ensure 'suspension of disbelief'; that is, the scene depicted must seem real. Films are constructed to create the illusion of reality and at the same time are presented as entertainment. Mulvey (1988) argues that the intention of these constructions is often to “give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world” (60). The viewer must believe the narrative and identify with the characters and the situation in order to be affected or entertained. For filmmakers to facilitate this relationship the film often subscribes to the narrative conventions and themes prevalent in the larger society, including, as I will show, the utilization of rape myths.

B. Lights, Camera, Action: Toward A Methodology

My interest in the production of meaning and in the process of sense making (or signification) in film is explored primarily through a method of semiotic analysis. Semiology is the study of signs and is conceptually derived from the discipline of linguistics, but not limited to the system of language. A film’s visual images and verbal utterances may be treated as ‘text’ and read as a system of signs. Unlike early feminist film analysis (Haskell, 1973; Rosen, 1973) which employed a comprehensive survey methodology to illuminate the produced meanings of film, my analysis will focus on and intensely examine the signifiers that constitute rape scenes in three films. Metz (1976) argues that the shot of a scene in a film (i.e. the smallest unit of meaning in the film) is analogous to a word in a text and each shot signifies a notion or concept. Metz’s thesis considers how each component of a shot may draw from two established code systems: cinematic and non-cinematic. His work offers a useful framework for the analysis of film that I will build on and modify for my purposes.

Metz (1985: 165) notes that the first step in film analysis is to choose the type of film for analysis, for example narrative, documentary and so on. For this research project I have chosen three narrative films: The Accused (1988), Boys Don’t Cry (1999) and Pulp Fiction
(1994). Narrative characterizes the style of most mainstream films, including those produced independently and by Hollywood. All three films that I have chosen were critically acclaimed and successful financially, a possible indication of how they reflect or seductively challenge cherished values and beliefs that are prevalent in our culture.

In order to examine the use of rape myths in film, and how these myths contribute to our understanding of sexual behaviour, I have chosen these films because they each contain a graphic depiction of rape. Rather than simply accept the conclusions of Wilson (1988) and Bufkin and Eschholz (2000) that films deceptively represent rape and encourage the acceptance of myths with this distortion, I wish to move beyond the mere identification and description of rape myths in film to explore how these representations produce meaning about normative sexual behaviour. Unlike other studies which select “popular” films based on their financial success in a given year (Bufkin and Eschholz, 2000), or their availability (Wilson, 1988), or which provide a survey of all representations of rape in a specific time period (Projansky, 2001), my film selection will illustrate the replication and variability of rape myths. Thus, I have chosen the three films under study because each meets the following criteria: they depict a rape scene and are well known, successful films, in terms of critical acclaim, box office sales or widespread distribution. The films in my study are all North American films which adhere to these criteria. Most importantly, however, I determined that the gender of the rape victim had to be different for each film. The difference in the gender of the victims highlights the inherent contradictions of rape myths and offers an opportunity to speculate (however tentatively) on the function of rape myth in our heteronormative society.

Each film depicts a different type of rape scene. The Accused presents a male-female gang rape based on a real event and Pulp Fiction shows a male-male rape in an obviously fictional context. Boys Don’t Cry has been selected because it depicts the rape of a
transgendered man. In each film the rape scene may be differentiated on the basis of the
gender of the victim: female, male and transgendered female-to-male. As well The Accused
and Boys Don’t Cry are based on real events, and while this is not a criterion of my selection
process, it does suggest the connections between films, the producers, the viewers and our
social world. I wish to discuss what these myths tell us about normative sexual behaviour not
only for women, but also for men. For this reason the films could not be selected randomly, or
within a specific year, as it is necessary for this project to compare the rape of women and men.

My examination of these films combines three methodological techniques. A semiotic
analysis of the visual components of the scenes in each film will be conducted using Barthes’
method in Mythologies. The textual aspects of the rape scenes in these films will be formatted
and assessed based on Smith’s (1990) methodology in her essay “K is Mentally Ill”. As well,
Smith’s identification of the device she calls a “contrast structure” (33) highlights the
importance of context in establishing the meaning of the text. For my purposes the
consideration of the narrative context enables me to assess the production of rape myths in
these films by examining the transformation of the cinematic image and verbal text from
primary signification to secondary signification. Finally, Metz (1974) offers a format for
cinematic decoding. Together these techniques offer a unique and nuanced method for
assessing the mobilization of rape myth in film.

Using Barthes’ method in Mythologies (1973), I will examine the mobilization of rape
myths as presented visually in film. In his programmatic essay “Myth Today” Barthes analyses
a photograph from the cover of the popular magazine Paris-Match. His analysis begins with a
description of the primary signification (or denotation) conveyed at a glance from the image
itself (a young black man in uniform saluting the French flag) and then he analyses the image’s
secondary signification, based on its assumed context (the relationship between France and
Algeria). Finally, he examines its mythical or ideological connotation in "an effort to make explicit what too often remains implicit," in this case, a certain positive perspective concerning French imperialism (Storey, 1998: 82). However, film presents a distinct set of difficulties because of the very nature of the form. A scene from a film is not merely a snapshot in time but part of a series of events, actions, and emotions communicated in countless ways through cinematic techniques, the skills of the actors, the scripting of the dialogue and the construction of the set.

Metz's analysis of narrative film attempts to construct a "set of cinematic rules" which articulate the meaning of a cinematic text by considering the relationship and interplay between cinematic codes which are distinctive to this medium (editing, framing, sound, lighting etc...) and non-cinematic codes which draw from the world of everyday life (dress, gesture, dialogue, characterization and facial expression) (Lapsey, 1988: 42). For the most part, my analysis will emphasize the non-cinematic codes presented in the scenes of each film, but will also incorporate an analysis of cinematic codes.

Dorothy Smith's (1990) essay "K Is Mentally Ill" from her Texts, Facts and Femininity illustrates a formatting technique that I will use to organize the data from each film. As I do not have copies of the screenplays for The Accused and Boys Don't Cry, it is necessary for me to create a "copy" of the script from my own observations and careful transcriptions of these scenes, which includes cinematic and non-cinematic codes. This visual and verbal information will be organized as prose and each line will be numbered for reference purposes. This standardized format allows for the detailed assessment and assembly of each scene, as well as for manageable comparisons between the films.

My initial analysis of each scene will proceed as follows. First, I will situate the scene within the larger context of the film narrative by summarizing the story. It is necessary to
describe the characters and their presence in the scene in order to situate the scene within the continuity of the narrative, which thus provides insights into the motivations and actions of the characters (what Barthes calls ‘secondary signification’). Secondly, I will describe the scene itself at the denotative level by noting the actions of the actors, dialogue, costumes, the set and framing (and thus how the perspective of the audience is implicitly situated with respect to the events depicted on the screen). I include the cinematic code of framing because at certain points the shift from what the audience sees to what the rape victim sees is essential to how rape myths are reflected or undermined by the cinematic apparatus. As noted above, in order to manage and address a mass of details I will organize the data line by line. Recurring cinematic representations will be assessed in terms of how the primary signification is transformed at the level of secondary signification (based on narrative context), and then again at the level of connotation in ways that reinforce or undermine the rape myths depicted explicitly or implicitly in the scenes.

Throughout my analysis, I have been concerned that my translation of the visual sign into the textual may end up as an exercise that simply names instances that illustrate or subvert rape myths. To circumvent this problem wherever possible I will incorporate descriptions of the scenes from other sources, such as academic and mainstream reviews. I am confident that this material will deepen my exploration of the means by which the “ideas and practices which defend [and I will add: subvert] the prevailing structure of power” are produced and circulated by promoting specific values and interests of androcentric heteronormativity (Storey, 1998: 83).

Finally, by way of conclusion, I will compare and contrast the rape scenes of each film. My focus will be on the rape myths mobilized in each scene and their relationship to the gender of the victim. I am confident that this relationship, coupled with the details analyzed in each
rape scene, will effectively illustrate how rape myths in film construct a specific understanding of rape and normative sexual behaviour.

My interest in this subject began with *Pulp Fiction*. I noticed that the rape scene in this film was completely different from other rape scenes I had previously viewed. Initial work on this project had considered comparisons with other films: *The Accused, Leaving Las Vegas* and *Deliverance*. This earlier research considered the difference between the representations of male-male rape and male-female rape with respect to victim characterization and behaviour and the outcome of the rape. Generally, the women were characterized as sluts who “asked for it” and the male rapists remained unpunished, unless they raped a man, then they were killed. These observations led to a broader consideration of rape in film through a more intensive focus on a few carefully selected scenes in order to understand how films produce specific meanings of rape through their use of rape myths.

My first step was to consider a number of different films each of which contained a rape scene. I wished to use films that were well known and, as much as possible, representative of cinematic depictions of rape. I located other films with rape scenes in Video Hound’s *Golden Movie Retriever 2004* (Craddock, 2003: 990). This movie guide cross-references films by title, category, actor, director, writer, cinematographer and composer. The category index lists a variety of subject areas including genre descriptions (ie. war), themes (ie. baseball), the ridiculous (ie. monster moms, eyeballs and disease of the week) and, of course, rape. Initially this was an extremely useful source of information; however, I realized that the list did not include such films as *Pulp Fiction* or *Shawshank Redemption* which depict male-male rape, possibly because rape was not the thematic focus of these films. In all, I watched and made brief notes on 27 films each of which contained at least one rape scene. Of these films, 20 depicted male-female rape, 4 showed male-male rape (*American Me*, 1992; *Deliverance*, 1972;
Pulp Fiction, 1994 and Shawshank Redemption, 1994), and showed female-male rape (Disclosure, 1994) and Jaded (1996) depicted female-female rape. Sudden Impact (1983) can be included in two categories as it shows a number of men and women raping two other women. Boys Don’t Cry (1999) is the only film which depicts the rape of a transgendered person. While many of these films are well known, only 4 received critical recognition in the form of Academy Awards (The Accused, Boys Don’t Cry, Dead Man Walking and Pulp Fiction). For my purposes each film must depict a different type of rape scene, that is, the gender of the victim must be different in each case. Conveniently, these 4 films depict different types of rape scenes, with the only the repetition being the representation of male-female rape in both The Accused and Dead Man Walking. I have chosen to exclude Dead Man Walking from further analysis because the central focus of this film is the relationship between Sister Helen Prejean (Susan Sarandon) and the convict Poncelet (Sean Penn), whereas The Accused focuses on the rape and its aftermath and has been considered by some critics as a paradigmatic rape film. Once these final selections were made I constructed detailed notes on each of the three films.

I began with The Accused. First, I made general notes on the plot and actors. Then I watched the film again and made notes on scene, setting, dialogue and characters. After making detailed notes on the film I then checked my ‘script’ against the film during another viewing to ensure that I did not overlook significant details. After creating a complete ‘script’ I was able to focus specifically on the rape scene. Again I returned to the film and my ‘script’, checking my initial observations, adding more detail and noting what is seen (Italics) and what is heard (bold). These additional details and clarifications were necessary to ensure a thorough assessment of the scene. Finally, I formatted my observations with Smith (1990) as my model by numbering each line for reference. My observations and notes proceeded in much the same
way for *Boys Don’t Cry*, that is, by beginning broadly and then narrowing my focus. For *Pulp Fiction*, since copies of the screenplay are readily available, I simply used the script as my detailed account of the film and checked the script against the film and added details or removed directorial notes where necessary. Finally, now using Barthes as guide, I constructed a chart demonstrating the production of myth in each film as a semiological chain that follows the ‘script’ of each film.

Barthes describes myth as a second order semiological system. He represents the semiological chain in the form of a chart (1973: 115). My adaptation of his chart, along with additional information from John O’Neill’s *Critical Conventions* (1992: 75) and John Storey’s *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (1998: 82) is shown in Figure 1. The sign (meaning) and the SIGNIFIER (form) are the same but understood at the level of experience and at the level of semiotic analysis respectively. Returning to Barthes’ example in “Myth Today,” the photograph of the uniformed black man saluting the French flag is the sign (at the level of denotative meaning). However, at the level of semiotic analysis, the visual SIGNIFIER (form or secondary signification) represents the supposed loyalty of French colonial subjects to the French empire (Barthes, 1973: 116). This SIGNIFIER (form) combines both meaning and form to project the SIGNIFIED (mythical or ideological concept) of French imperiality. At this level (secondary signification) the concept of French imperiality includes the “general history of France, to its colonial adventures, to its present difficulties etc...” (Barthes, 1973: 119). As Barthes notes, “... what is invested in the concept is less reality than a certain knowledge of reality” (1973: 119), hence, the potential for numerous and varied interpretations. The black man saluting the French flag may be considered a symbol, an ideological alibi or the actual presence of French imperiality. In a similar way, with respect to rape and rape myths, an understanding of rape may be mediated by various experiences and media representations of
rape. Rape myths circulate within their own production, where the viewers’ understanding of rape may be the rape myths themselves. So rape myths are in various ways emptied of meaning and filled with “a certain knowledge of reality” (Barthes, 1973: 119), at times with the myth itself.

Figure 1. The Semiological Chain in Film

II. Scenes of Sexual Violence
A. The Accused: Where Men Rape:

*The Accused* is a narrative film that is loosely based on the Big Dan’s rape case in New Bedford, Massachusetts (Cuklanz, 1998: 469). In the Big Dan’s case a woman entered the bar to purchase cigarettes and was subsequently gang-raped on the bar’s pool table. During the trial the media focused on the ethnicity (Portuguese) of the defendants and the victim, constructing the rape as a problem specific to their community. *The Accused* removed this element of the story and instead racialized all the characters in the film as white to tell the story of the rape of
Sarah Tobias, played by Jodie Foster, and its aftermath. This “whitewash” may have been a marketing ploy in an attempt to increase the mainstream appeal of the film. Released in 1988, this film won rave reviews and an Academy Award for the strength and complexity of Foster’s portrayal of Sarah. The interest in this film focused not simply on the dramatic presentation of the rape scene and its realistic nature, but also on its consideration of the responsibility of bystanders who watched and encouraged the rape (Ebert, 1988). The rapists Danny (Woody Brown), Bob Joiner (Steve Antin) and Kurt (Kim Kondrashoff) agree to a lesser charge of assault and receive a minimal jail sentence. It is Deputy District Attorney Kathryn Murphy’s (Kelly McGillis) pursuit of the witnesses to the rape that ensures that the rapists serve time for the crime of rape. She charges three men, Cliff “Scorpion” Albrect (Leo Rossi), Matt Haines (Andrew Kavadas) and Stu Holloway (Tom McBeath) with criminal solicitation because they encouraged the rape and kept it going.

i. Summary:

The film begins by showing The Mill, the bar where Sarah is raped. Time-lapse filming shows vehicles arriving at The Mill and vehicles periodically passing by on the road; it is not a busy street. The Mill is the dominant focus of the opening scene and the road is the subsidiary focal point. We (the audience) are unaware that the rape is occurring during this time. A man runs out of The Mill to a phone booth across the street and we hear his 911 call. Almost immediately following his exit from The Mill, a woman runs out, screaming. She stands in the road and flags down a truck. The man terminates his 911 call. The first clear view of Sarah occurs during her hospital exam. The film follows the aftermath of the assault including the medical exam, Sarah’s police statement, arrests of the rapists, and the deal made by Sarah’s attorney, Kathryn Murphy (Kelly McGillis).
Kathryn is unable to pass this case off to one of her colleagues, so she somewhat reluctantly makes a deal with the defendants to ensure that they at least serve time in jail despite her own belief that Sarah was, in fact, raped. The rape case is unwinnable in Kathryn's estimation despite the physical evidence and Sarah's identification of the rapists. Sarah's suspect (that is, seductive) clothing, behaviour, her alcohol and drug use, and the location of the rape lead Kathryn to make a deal. Unfortunately, this deal removes the violent and involuntary element of the crime so that it now appears that Sarah was not raped, but that she consented to sex and put on a show. Sarah confronts Kathryn at her home, and after Sarah is involved in an altercation with one of the witnesses to the rape, Kathryn realizes her obligation to Sarah. Kathryn realizes that because she did not prosecute the rapists for rape that she has affirmed that the rape did not happen. She did not consider the effect the deal would have on Sarah or on the witnesses to the rape: that they would continue to believe that Sarah consented and that they were justified in their behaviour.

Kathryn decides to prosecute the witnesses to the rape for criminal solicitation because they encouraged the rape and kept it going. In court, Sarah tells the story of her rape, but because (as Kathryn Murphy explained to her earlier) her behaviour and appearance constructs her as a "rotten character", she is therefore a "rotten witness" and consequently requires confirmation of her "version" of the rape to be believed. Ken Joyce, a witness to the rape and a friend of one of the rapists, confirms her testimony and it is at this point that we (the audience) finally see the events of that evening and Sarah's rape. Ken Joyce functions as a quasi-omniscient narrator: he is apparently aware of everything that is said and done even if he is not present in the scene. Of course this is impossible, but it serves to emphasize the importance of Ken's testimony (in the court case) and of his perspective on the rape as depicted in the film.
ii. Primary Signification (Denotation): The Rape Scene

Ken Joyce’s court testimony recounts what he saw in The Mill the night Sarah Tobias was raped. He did not participate in, nor encourage the assault. He calls 911 to report the rape, but later is reluctant to testify because his friend, Bob Joiner, is one of the rapists. Ken tells why he and his friend Bob were at The Mill that night and what happened when Sarah arrived. Sarah has previously testified that she had had a fight with her boyfriend and so she went to The Mill to talk to her friend Sally who works there. Although Sarah has previously testified about the rape it is only through Ken Joyce’s testimony that the rape is depicted visually.

The text of the testimony is included here along with notations indicating perspective and setting, as in <courtroom>, <flashback>, <voice over>. I have summarized some parts of the text and these sections are contained within [...]. I have also noted the difference between what is heard (Bold) and what is seen (Italics). Each line of text is numbered for reference:

<courtroom>

1. Kathryn Murphy: Your Honour, the people call Kenneth Joyce.
2. [ Ken walks from the back of the courtroom to take the witness stand. He is sworn in, states his name for the record and sits down.]
3. Kathryn Murphy: Were you in The Mill on the night of the events involving Sarah Tobias?
6. Ken: Well it was late and me and my friend Bob had been to the game and then afterwards he took me to this bar he sometimes goes to, The Mill.
7. <voice over, we see The Mill> Sarah walks in the door of The Mill, lights a cigarette and looks around.
8. She is trying to find her friend Sally, a waitress that works in the bar. The Mill is busy and noisy. Music is playing, TVs are on and people are talking. Sarah walks down the steps and toward the bar. Cliff “Scorpion” Albrect enters immediately after Sarah. He looks her up and down, then moves over to the bar to buy a drink. Sarah continues walking down the bar, past Danny, who is also looking at her.
9. <courtroom> Ken: We had been there for awhile when this girl walked in. She was really sexy.
10. <The Mill> Sarah walks in the door of The Mill, lights a cigarette and looks around.
11. She is trying to find her friend Sally, a waitress that works in the bar. The Mill is busy and noisy. Music is playing, TVs are on and people are talking. Sarah walks down the steps and toward the bar. Cliff “Scorpion” Albrect enters immediately after Sarah. He looks her up and down, then moves over to the bar to buy a drink. Sarah continues walking down the bar, past Danny, who is also looking at her.
12. Ken: She was sitting behind us at the table talking to her friend. While this guy, Danny, he was sitting at the end of the bar; he saw her come in too and he sent the bartender over with some drinks.
21. Sally and Sarah are sitting at a booth; several empty beer glasses are sitting on the table.
22. Sally is talking about her children. Bob walks by smiling at Sarah. She smiles back.
23. Conversation stops while this occurs.
24. Sarah: He's cute. Who's he?
26. Sarah: I should take him home and fuck his brains out right in front of Larry.
27. Sally: Yah right. {laughing}
28. Sarah stands up to take off her jacket. She is wearing a loose fitting tank top (the straps slide off her shoulders) and she is not wearing a bra. She looks over to the bar. Danny is watching her. She smiles at him and sits back down. Ken and Bob are sitting at a booth behind Sarah.
30. Ken: {laughs}
31. Danny is sitting at the bar. He calls Jesse the bartender over and orders some drinks for Sarah and Sally.
32. Jesse: Here you go ladies, compliments of the gentleman at the end of the bar.
33-60. [Sally and Sarah look over and see Danny sitting at the bar. Bob who is still watching Sarah turns around to follow her gaze. Sarah smiles at Danny and nods her head in acknowledgment. Bob observes their exchange and then Danny walks over, past Bob and Ken to sit at the booth with Sarah and Sally. Bob seems disappointed. Sarah, Sally and Danny begin talking and continue drinking. Danny's friend, Angela comes to the table to tell Danny that it is his turn at pinball. He invites Sarah to join him. She agrees. Sally returns to work as Danny guides Sarah to the pinball machine by placing his hand on her lower back.]

61. Ken: Then she got up and followed him into the game room. And pretty soon they were playing pinball with Bob and getting really wasted.
62. <The Mill>
63- 76. [Sarah is playing pinball, while Danny and Bob watch – much laughing, teasing about pinball playing abililty. Angela seems to be annoyed by Sarah’s behaviour. It is Bob’s turn at the game so Sarah moves toward Bob who is standing at the side of the pinball machine. As she passes him he touches her ass, and she tells him to ‘knock it off’. Danny joins her beside the pinball machine to smoke a joint with her. Bob tells Angela to put some music on. Ken is beside the jukebox playing a video game, he sees Angela buying some music and he looks back toward the pinball machine. He sees Bob watching Sarah and Danny smoking up. Danny begins kissing Sarah.]
77. Danny: Come on let's get out of here.
78. Sarah: No. No. {the music begins} Oh I love this song. {she starts to dance}
79-84. [All the men in the room start to watch Sarah. Angela leaves telling Jesse that she doesn’t like the show. Sarah continues dancing; everyone in the game room is watching her. She motions for Danny to join her. The men watching, including Ken, start to laugh. Sarah and Danny are dancing closely and he starts to kiss her. Cliff “Scorpion” Albrect sees them and moves closer to watch.
86. Danny {he is holding her tightly, dancing and continuing to kiss her} I'll pay you whatever they pay you.
89. *Danny keeps kissing her, laughing.*
90. Sarah: *This isn’t funny man, I’ve got to go.*
91. All the men in the room are watching them. *Danny keeps kissing her and restraining her.*
92. Cliff: {begins encouragement} *Come on.*
93-96. *Sarah’s skirt is pulled up to her waist and her underwear is showing. Danny motions Bob away from the pinball machine. Bob moves to stand beside Matthew Haines and Stu Holloway. Ken is no longer smiling. Danny lifts Sarah up onto the pinball machine, continues kissing her, the hoots and yelling begin.*
97. Sarah: *Wait a minute. Wait a minute.*
98. Danny pushes her down on the machine and pulls her shirt down. He kisses her breasts.
99. Crowd: *Whoo! Go Danny!*  
100. Cliff Albrect: *One to one my man, stick ‘em.*
102. Sarah: {struggling to push Danny off/away} *No. No. No.*
103. Danny is holding her by the throat and kissing her. The men are yelling encouragement, ‘*come on, go for it*’. *Danny puts his hand on her mouth and again on her throat.*
104. Crowd: *He’s going to fuck her right...Danny’s going to fuck her right there.*
105-113. [<Perspective shifts to Sarah: she sees the men watching, but not helping her.> Cliff stands on a table to get a better view, and tells Danny “all right, you’re The man.” <perspective shift back to Ken> Danny calls for Kurt to hold Sarah’s hands, so he can undo his pants and rip off her underwear. He keeps his hand on her throat. <Sarah looks around, sees people watching but not helping her.> <perspective shifts back to Ken> Danny is inside her. Sarah is trying to scream, but Danny’s hand is back over her mouth. Shot of Ken’s face, horrified by what is happening.]

In films that depict male-female rape the perpetuation of rape myths is usually very apparent. Generally, these films present the rape victim as doing something that she should not be doing prior to the rape. For example, in *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995), Sera, a prostitute, is negotiating with her clients, who then beat and gang rape her when she will not do as they ask. *Showgirls* (1995) is another film where a woman expresses her sexual desire by participating in a one-night stand only to be beaten and gang raped by the man’s bodyguards and friends. In *The Accused*, Sarah Tobias is drunk in a bar and flirting with the soon-to-be rapist, Danny (lines 69-77). This behaviour combined with her low-class drug-user characterization contributes to the perception that she asked for and deserved to be raped. Her actions and appearance, labelled signified in Figure 2 below, indicate her desire and desirability. The signified is her sexual desire and desirability, as acknowledged by herself and the men in the bar. The signifier and the
signified combine to establish the sign/SIGNIFIER: Sarah is viewed as a low-class bimbo and as a whore: *I'll pay you whatever they pay you* (lines 86-87). At the level of myth (secondary signification) the sign and the SIGNIFIER create a new level of meaning at the SIGNIFIED level. Here, a seductive woman who is perceived as sexually desirable is considered sexually available and she is available for sex because she expresses desire. At the level of the SIGN (signification) all women who dress and behave in a particular way are available for sex and want to be raped. Sarah’s highly sexualized behaviour implies that she wanted sex, that she led the rapists on and as a consequence they were unable to control themselves sexually.

Figure 2. The Myth of Women’s Sexual Availability
The myth of uncontrollable male sexual aggression is mobilized simultaneously with the myth of female sexual availability depicted in Figure 2. In *The Accused* signifieds such as the bar itself which signifies a male environment, the men looking lasciviously at Sarah (lines 15-17; 81; 92-96; 102-103), Danny and Bob touching and restraining Sarah (lines 59-60; 70; 76; 82-104), indicate this male authority and aggression. These actions occur in a male dominated environment that Sarah infiltrates. The men in the Mill almost immediately assert their power and control over this environment by their pursuit of Sarah. This male control manifests itself at the SIGNIFIED level of the myth (secondary signification) of *male sexual aggression* as evidenced by Danny’s assault on Sarah and the subsequent encouragement of the rape by the patrons in the bar: *Whoo! Go Danny!* (line 99) and *come on go for it* (101). Sarah attempts to stop Danny but he responds with further aggression and the other men that are watching begin to encourage his behaviour. Sarah looks around for help but the men just stand and watch. They shout encouragement to Danny by telling him: *make her moan, she’s loving it* (line 114). Soon they are encouraging each other to take Danny’s place raping her: *Frat boy. Go ahead get in there, come on move* (line 124). As displayed in Figure 3 below, the resulting SIGN is the myth that men cannot control their sexual impulses and that they cannot control themselves because the woman has presented herself as sexually available. Her protests are irrelevant and according to this myth her “no” must be interpreted as a “yes” since her provocative behaviour and appearance implies her consent.
Figure 3. The Myth of Male Sexual Aggression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Signifier</th>
<th>2. Signified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cinematic image/ verbal text</td>
<td>Male power and control: The Mill, a bar with mainly male patrons, men looking at Sarah (line 15-17) Danny buys drinks and approaches (line 36-43)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Narrative Context**

**III. SIGN**

(signification)

The depiction of Kurt’s participation in the rape momentarily disrupts the myth of male sexual aggression. Kurt appears more than willing to restrain Sarah while Danny and Bob rape her, but he is more than a little hesitant to rape her himself. Consequently, Cliff questions Kurt’s sexual ability and identity while Stu and Matt “encourage” Kurt to stand up for himself.

Cliff: **Hey Kurt watch the kid, you might learn something.**
Kurt: **Hey, shut the fuck up asshole.**
Cliff: **Whoa... listen to needledick.**
Stu: **Hey Kurt come on.**
Cliff: **Listen to the faggot. Are you a faggot?**
Matt: **Are you going to let him talk to you like that?**

Kurt’s masculinity has been diminished in the eyes of his peers and he is encouraged to assert his masculinity by adhering to the myth of male sexual aggression. The terms used by Cliff and
Matt signify a “failure of masculinity, a failure of living up to a gendered standard of behaviour” (Hopkins, 1998: 160). R.W. Connell (1995: 67) notes that the modern definition of masculinity “assumes that one’s behaviour results from the type of person one is.” Men are supposed to be interested in the sexual conquest of women and are unmasculine (not men) if they are not interested. In this social environment, the only “logical” reason for Kurt to refuse to rape Sarah is if he is gay. Although this “encouragement” seems to be all in “fun” the threat to Kurt’s masculinity is serious enough that he pushes Bob away so he can begin raping Sarah. He alters his behaviour to prove his masculinity. This action supports the myth of the sexually aggressive male, specifically the necessity of behaving in a certain way to be considered masculine.

*The Accused* depicts a complex representation of male-female rape, which demonstrates both the reinforcement and subtle undermining of two rape myths: female sexual availability and male sexual aggression. Often these myths are mobilized together. This construct, to a certain extent, reinforces the heteronormative understanding of appropriate male sexual behaviour and limits to the expressions of female sexual desire. Conversely *Pulp Fiction* portrays a male-male rape which extensively subverts the myth of male sexual aggression because it excludes the representation of female sexual availability, as the victim is male. This exclusion is significant as its omission undermines the validity of the myth of male sexual aggression. In an androcentric heteronormative society male sexual aggression must be directed toward an adult female. The presence of a woman justifies and affirms that particular male behaviour and because the object of male desire in *Pulp Fiction* is male the rapists’ aggression is depicted as extreme and sadistic.
B. *Pulp Fiction: Where Men Are Raped*

*Pulp Fiction* garnered mass press attention when it debuted in 1994. Acclaimed for its clever script and dialogue, but equally criticized for its excessive use of violence, *Pulp Fiction* became one of the biggest box office hits for that year. This film won numerous awards for the script, acting and directing including an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay and best film at the Cannes Film Festival. What makes *Pulp Fiction* such an interesting and fascinating film is that it is unlike anything else. Roger Ebert, when he saw the film at Cannes, realized “...it was either one of the year’s best films, or one of the worst” (Ebert, 1994: online) but it was definitely not boring. Other critics described it as “brilliant and brutal, funny and exhilarating, jaw-droppingly cruel and disarmingly sweet” (Howe, 1994: online) or noted that “The experience overall is like laughing down a gun barrel, a little bit tiring, a lot sick and maybe far too perverse for the less jaded moviegoers” (Kempley, 1994: online). *Pulp Fiction* is an exciting movie, but clearly not for everyone.

i. Summary:

Following the conventions of the genre alluded to in the title, *Pulp Fiction* is composed of three distinct but interconnected narrative streams. The characters in this film, variously described as oafish knee-breakers, gangsters, palookas and molls (Howe, 1994; Kempley, 1994), “inhabit a world of crime and intrigue, triple-crosses and loud desperation” (Ebert 1994). Thematically the film centres on issues of loyalty and redemption: what a person owes himself and what he owes another man. The main storyline, titled “Jules, Vincent, Jimmie and the Wolf,” shows Vincent Vega (played by John Travolta) and Jules Winnfield (Samuel L. Jackson) on an errand for their boss Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames). Two other stories or sub-plots, titled “The Gold Watch” and “Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace’s Wife,” are woven into the story of Vincent and Jules. The meshing of the story lines is achieved with the
disruption of the timeline. The opening scene of the film shows Honey Bunny (Amanda Plummer) and Pumpkin (Tim Roth) planning a robbery in a diner. As they begin the hold-up with Honey Bunny telling the people in the diner and by implication, the audience, not to move or “I’ll kill every last one of you motherfuckers!”, the movie begins. This scene is split in half and we do not see the outcome of the robbery until the end of the film. It is in this final scene that Jules achieves redemption by managing to retrieve his wallet from the robbers without killing anyone. The rape scene in this film appears at the halfway point in the film; however according to a sequential time-line it would actually have been the last scene in the film. It therefore is supposed to be a fitting ending for a film about redemption, as Butch Coolidge (Bruce Willis) redeems himself by helping his enemy and riding off into the sunset with his girlfriend on a chopper-motorcycle named Grace.

ii. Primary Signification (Denotation): The Rape Scene

The “Gold Watch” story line in Pulp Fiction includes the depiction of the rape of Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames) by two minor characters named Zed and Maynard. The rape of a man by another man in a film is quite rare compared with the ubiquitous representations of male-female rape, as evidenced by Projansky’s (2001) research. Some of the more well known examples (aside from Deliverance, 1972) occur in the prison context, as in Shawshank Redemption (1994) and American Me (1992). Pulp Fiction utilizes these standard tropes, in an indirect way, in its representation of male-male rape. The events preceding the rape of Marsellus establish his relationship with Butch Coolidge (Bruce Willis) and the importance of Butch’s gold watch. Butch is a boxer, who should have retired long ago, but he agrees to throw his last fight for mob boss Marsellus for a substantial sum of money. However, Butch double-crosses Marsellus and wins the fight by killing the other boxer. Butch wins a great deal of money by betting on himself to win and later, while in the process of leaving town, realizes that
he must return to his apartment to retrieve his gold watch (a family heirloom) that his girlfriend, Fabienne (Maria de Medeiros), forgot to pack. Unfortunately Marsellus is looking for Butch and has sent Vincent Vega (John Travolta) to his apartment to wait for him. Butch manages to retrieve his watch, kill Vincent, and in leaving he sees Marsellus returning to his apartment with coffee for Vincent. Butch promptly runs over Marsellus with his car. Marsellus survives and tries to shoot Butch who runs away. Butch enters a pawnshop in an attempt to ambush Marsellus, but instead Maynard surprises them.

The relevant scenes from Tarantino’s published screenplay (1994: 99-108) are reproduced below; however, elements of the script not shown in the film have been removed for reasons of clarity and simplicity and are indicated by ellipses in brackets. My observations are enclosed < > and as with the text from The Accused, I have noted the difference between what is heard (Bold) and what is seen (Italics). The account of this scene is somewhat longer than The Accused because of Tarantino’s elaborate stage direction. Each line of the text is numbered for reference.

INTERIOR. MASON-DIXON PAWNSHOP – DAY

1. Maynard, a hillbilly-lookin' boy, stands behind the counter of his pawnshop when, all of a sudden, chaos in the form of Butch RACES into his world. (...) <Maynard is wearing a plaid shirt. He has a beard and wears his hair in a ponytail. The pawnshop is empty except for Maynard and has a huge confederate flag on the wall, surrounded by lots of other junk.>
2. MAYNARD: Can I help you wit' somethin'?
3. BUTCH: Shut the fuck up!
4. Butch quickly takes measure of the situation, grabs Maynard's bottle off the counter, empties it and then stands next to the door.
5. MAYNARD: Can I help you wit' somethin'?
6. BUTCH: Shut the fuck up!
7. Butch quickly takes measure of the situation, grabs Maynard's bottle off the counter, empties it and then stands next to the door.
8. MAYNARD: Now you just wait one goddamn minute – Now what the fuck are you up to. Before Maynard can finish his threat, Marsellus CHARGES in. He doesn't get past the doorway because Butch LANDS his fist in Marsellus' face. The gangster's feet go out from under him and the big man, drops his gun and FALLS FLAT on his back. Butch POUNCES on the fallen body, PUNCHING him twice more in the face.
9. BUTCH: Come here motherfucker. Feel that sting Big Boy. That's pride fucking with ya see.
10. MARSELLUS: I'm gonna kill you. Butch punches him again.
11. BUTCH: Ya somebody's gonna get killed. (...) <He reaches for the gun that Marsellus
17. *dropped*> Somebody’s gonna get their motherfucking head blown off. Butch then places the barrel of the .45 between his eyes, PULLS back the hammer and places his open hand behind the gun to shield the splatter.

20. MAYNARD: (Off Screen) --- hold it right there, godammit!


23. BUTCH: This ain’t any of your business mister —

24. MAYNARD: -- I’m makin’ it my business! Now toss the weapon!

25. BUTCH: You don’t understand man...

26. MAYNARD: Toss the weapon. Butch drops the gun on the floor.

27. MAYNARD: Take you foot off the nigger. Put your hands behind your head.

28. Approach the counter. Right now.

29. BUTCH: This motherfucker is trying to kill me. <kicks Marsellus as he walks toward the counter>

31-40. MAYNARD: Shut up. Keep coming. Butch slowly gets up and moves to the counter. As soon as he gets there, Maynard HAULS OFF, HITTING him hard in the face with the butt of the shotgun, knocking Butch down and out. After Butch goes down, Maynard calmly lays the shotgun on the counter and moves to the telephone. Marsellus Wallace, from his position on the floor, groggily watches the pawnshop owner dial a number. Maynard waits on the line while the other end rings. Then it picks up.


42. Marsellus passes out. FADE TO BLACK.

43. FADE UP: INT. PAWNSHOP BACK ROOM — DAY

44. TWO SHOT—Butch and Marsellus are tied up in two separate chairs in the basement of the pawnshop. In their mouths are two S&M style ball gags (a belt goes around their heads and a little red ball sticks in their mouths). Both men are unconscious. Maynard steps in with a fire extinguisher and SPRAYS both guys until they’re wide-awake and wet as otters.

45. The two prisoners look up at their captor. Maynard stands in front of them, fire extinguisher in one hand, shotgun in the other, and Marsellus’ .45 sticking in his belt.

46. MAYNARD: Nobody kills anybody in my place of business except me or Zed.

47. A BUZZER buzzes.

48. MAYNARD: That’s Zed.

49. Without saying another word, Maynard climbs up the stairs (...) that lead to the pawnshop.

50. WE HEAR Maynard let Zed inside the store. Butch and Marsellus look around the room.

51. The basement of the pawnshop has been converted into a dungeon. After taking in their predicament, Butch and Marsellus look at each other, all traces of hostility gone, replaced by a terror they both share at what they’ve gotten themselves into. Maynard and ZED come down the stairs.> Zed is an even more intense version of Maynard, if such a thing is possible.<Zed has blonde hair in a mullet style and he is dressed in a police officer’s uniform.> The two hillbillys are obviously brothers. Where Maynard is a vicious pitbull, Zed is a deadly cobra.

52. ZED: (to Maynard: Off Screen) You said you waited for me?

53. MAYNARD: I did.

54. ZED: Then how come they’re all beat up?

55. MAYNARD: They did that to each other man. They was fightin’ when they came in. This one right here (points at Butch), he was gonna shoot that one (pointing at Marsellus).
68. Zed walks in and stands in front of the two captives. He inspects them for a long time.
69. ZED: (to Butch) You were gonna shoot him boy?
70. Butch makes no reply.
71-75. <Zed asks Maynard if Grace (motorcycle) will be okay parked in front of the store, and then he tells Maynard to “bring out the gimp”>
76. MAYNARD: I think The Gimp’s asleep.
77. ZED: Well, I guess you’ll just have to wake’em up now, won’t you?
78. (...) <Maynard walks behind Marsellus and Butch toward a closed door. He unlocks it and walks in. The room contains a large wooden box. Maynard unlocks the box and opens the lid.> Then lifts up a second lid made of metal bars, like a prison door.
80. lid.> Then lifts up a second lid made of metal bars, like a prison door.
81-89. MAYNARD: Get up. <A person dressed all in black rises out of the box.> The Gimp is a man they keep dressed from head to toe in black leather bondage gear. There are zippers, buckles and studs here and there on the body. On his head is a black leather mask with two eyeholes and a zipper (closed) for a mouth. <Maynard takes the leash and walks out of the room back toward Zed, Butch and Marsellus.> Zed takes the chair, sits it in front of the two prisoners, then lowers into it. Maynard hands the Gimp’s leash to Zed, then backs away.
90. ZED: (to the Gimp) Get down. Maynard hangs back while Zed appraises the two men.
91. MAYNARD: Which one of them you want to do first.
92-103. ZED: I ain’t fer sure yet. (...) <Zed does a silent “Ennie, meany, miney, moe…” just his mouth mouthing the words and his finger going back and forth between the two, finally settling on Marsellus.> Looks like its you big boy. Marsellus tries to protest through his gag. shush (to Marsellus) Zed stands up and says. Wanna do it here?
104. MAYNARD: Naw, drag big boy to Russell’s old room.
105. ZED: Sounds good to me. Zed grabs Marsellus’ chair and DRAGS him into Russell’s old room. Russell, no doubt, was some other poor bastard that had the misfortune of stumbling into the Mason-Dixon pawnshop. Whatever happened to Russell is known only to Maynard and Zed because his old room, is empty except for The Gimp’s box. As Marsellus is dragged away, he locks eyes with Butch before he disappears behind the door of Russell’s old room.
111. MAYNARD: (to the Gimp) Up. The gimp rises. Maynard ties The Gimp’s leash to a hook on the ceiling.
113. MAYNARD: Keep an eye on this one.
114. The Gimp bows its head: “yes.” Maynard disappears into Russell’s old room. There must be a stereo in there because suddenly music fills the air. Butch looks at The Gimp. The Gimp giggles from underneath the mask as if this were the funniest moment in the history of comedy. From behind the door we hear music and struggling. Butch pauses, listens to the voices. Then, in panic, hurriedly struggles to get free. The Gimp is laughing wildly.
119. The ropes are on too tight and Butch can’t break free. Butch stops struggling and lifts up on his arms. Then, quite easily, the padded chair back slides up and off as if it were never connected by a bolt. The Gimp sees this and its eyes widen. The Gimp flails wildly, trying to get the leash off the hook. He tries to yell, but all that comes out are excited gurgles and grunts. Butch is out of his chair, quickly dispensing a punch to the Gimp’s face. The punch knocks the Gimp out, making him fall to his knees, thus hanging himself by the leash attached to the hook. Butch removes the ball gag, then silently makes his way through the red curtains at the top of the stairs.
127. INTERIOR. PAWNSHOP – DAY
Butch sneaks to the door. On the counter is a big set of keys with a large Z connected to the ring. Grabbing them, he’s about to go out when he stops and listens to the hillbilly psychopaths having their way with Marsellus. Butch decides for the life of him, he can’t leave anybody in a situation like that. So he begins rooting around the pawnshop for a weapon to bash those hillbillies’ heads in with. He picks up a big destructive-looking hammer, then discards it: not destructive enough. Next, he tries a large Louisville slugger. Sees a chainsaw, picks it up, but then he spots what he’s been looking for, a Samurai sword. It hangs in its hand-carved wood sheath from a nail on the wall. Butch takes the sword off the wall, removing it from its sheath. It’s a magnificent piece of steel. It seems to glisten in the low-wattage light of the pawnshop. This seems made to order for the Brothers Grimm downstairs.

INTERIOR. PAWNSHOP BACK ROOM —DAY
Butch quietly sneaks down the stairs leading to the dungeon. Sodomy and the music can still be heard going strong behind the closed door that leads to Russell’s old room. <Butch silently opens the door and sees the rapists. Zed is bent over Marsellus, who is bent over a wooden horse. Maynard watches. Butch slices open Maynard’s chest, killing him and then advances toward Zed. Marsellus tells Butch to “step aside” and proceeds to blast Zed in the groin with a sawed-off shotgun.>

iii. Analysis: *Pulp Fiction*

The male-male rape in *Pulp Fiction* replicates the stereotyped cinematic representations of male rape in prison in two important ways. For example, in *Shawshank Redemption* (1994) the rapists are described as “the sisters” and inhuman. They are emasculated, feminized and dehumanized, not unlike the rapists in *Pulp Fiction*. Maynard and Zed are further described as animals: “Maynard is a vicious pitbull, Zed is a deadly cobra” (lines 60-61). Secondly, Butch and Marsellus are treated as inmates: they are physically restrained: bound to chairs, gagged and confined to the basement of the pawnshop, a substitute prison described as a dungeon (lines 44-55; Tarantino, 1994:102). Zed, dressed as a police officer (in continuation of the prison theatrics) enters the pawnshop-dungeon and immediately establishes his authority. As well this scene alludes to the film *Deliverance* by establishing the rapists as “hillbillies” (line 1). In *Deliverance*, the rapists are described as “horrifying” and “degenerate rednecks” (Dickey, 1982 [1972]: 59). In *Pulp Fiction*, the shop that Butch stumbles into is called the Mason-Dixon Pawnshop as evidenced by the huge confederate flag hanging on the wall, the screenplay
describes Zed and Maynard as animal like, as hillbillies (lines 1-5; Tarantino, 1994:102), and their southern accents, foul language and bad grammar further establish their ignorance and lack of culture.

Butch’s entry into the pawnshop begins the semiological chain. Signifiers like the Mason-Dixon flag, word choice (“nigger”) and the appearance of “the gimp” indicate a deviant, ignorant and racist ideology. The signifier and the signified create the sign (meaning) of hillbilly, and thus of deviant and sadistic tendencies. The introduction of the gimp and the prison-dungeon environment further emphasizes the characterization of Maynard and Zed as deviants and psychopaths. Since the motivation for their sexual aggression is not a woman, Maynard’s and Zed’s behaviour is constructed as animalistic and sadistic. The resulting myth (SIGN) is that men who wish to express sexual aggression toward other men are sub-human and deranged, and if they rape another man then they may even deserve to die. Unlike *The Accused* where the sexual availability and seductiveness of Sarah is used to explain the men’s sexual aggression, Maynard and Zed are simply deranged deviants and psychopathic brutes.
However, it is not just because the rapists are so deranged that the victims can be seen as “real” victims; rather, their characterization and behaviour prior to the rape ensures this perception. Butch Coolidge and Marsellus Wallace are heterosexual, hypermasculine men: Butch is a boxer and Marsellus is a gangster. Their sexual orientation indicates that they would not initiate a homosexual encounter, as well their relationship to one another prior to the rape is not at all sexualized. Butch and Marsellus are fighting in the street in an attempt to kill one another. These men are “innocent” victims as their sexual orientation and their behaviour cannot be viewed as sexually provocative, unlike the behaviour of Sarah Tobias in *The Accused*. This further complicates the message of the films. It is difficult to apply the rape myth of *sexual availability* in *Pulp Fiction* since the male victims in no way can be understood as enticing the rapists.
The rape myths mobilized in both *The Accused* and *Pulp Fiction* depend on and require specific constructions of masculinity and femininity as distinct categories of behaviour which are juxtaposed to one another. What it means to be male or female is understood as a specific grouping of certain types of behaviours and the corresponding biological characteristics. *Boys Don’t Cry*, by contrast, adds another layer of complexity to the representations of rape and the mobilization of rape myth in film. While some theorists, such as Homi Bhabha, and R.W. Connell (in Hatty, 2002: 116) reject the articulation of a stable and constant masculine gender identity, for the characters in both *Pulp Fiction* and *Boys Don’t Cry*, “masculinity is embedded in a fixed and stable gender identity” and this is main reason Brandon Teena is violently attacked.

In *Boys Don’t Cry* the rape victim, Brandon Teena, is a transgendered man who is at first perceived to be male but later brutally exposed as biologically female. Brandon’s behaviour does not correspond to his biological characteristics, suggesting to the rapists that the categories of masculine and feminine are not fixed. The rapists in this film accepted him as male and then later raped him in an attempt to construct him as female. The rape myths of *female sexual availability* and *male sexual aggression* are mobilized with mixed results, further complicating ideas of appropriate sexual behaviour since the rapists’ sexual aggression is directed not at a provocative woman, but at a biological woman behaving as a man.

C. *Boys Don’t Cry: Where Men Are Not “Men”*

*Boys Don’t Cry* (1999) was co-written and directed by independent filmmaker Kimberly Peirce and distributed by 20th Century Fox’s imprint Fox Searchlight Pictures. Initially not expected to be a major box office success, the film gained wide multi-media exposure due to numerous reviews proclaiming the film as one of the years 10 best and touting Hilary Swank’s
portrayal of Brandon Teena for an Oscar nomination, which she later won (Craddock, 2003:128; Ebert, 1999; Schwartz, 1999). Also, costar Chloe Sevigny was nominated for Best Supporting Actress and a Golden Globe Award for her portrayal of Lana, Brandon’s girlfriend. Like *The Accused*, *Boys Don’t Cry* is based on a real event, in this case, the rape and subsequent murder of Brandon Teena, a transgendered man living in Falls City, Nebraska. Brandon moved to Falls City from Lincoln, established a new life, and fell in love. Things were going well for him until his ‘friends’ discovered that he is biologically female. Roger Ebert describes this sad and important film as a “romantic tragedy- a Romeo and Juliet set in a trailer park” (1999).

**Summary:**

*Boys Don’t Cry* recounts the final month of Brandon Teena’s life in Falls City, Nebraska. Unlike *The Brandon Teena Story*, a documentary by Susan Muska and Greta Olafsdottir, Peirce’s film focuses on Brandon’s (Hilary Swank) relationship with Lana (Chloe Sevigny). Brandon is able to live as a man in Falls City and is initially accepted by Lana’s friends Candace (Alicia Goranson), Tom (Brendan Sexton III) and John (Peter Sarsgaard). He stays with Candace at first, but she becomes suspicious when she discovers that Brandon has stolen some of her cheques. At the same time the local paper publishes Brandon’s speeding ticket violation under his legal name Teena Brandon. John, who was always jealous of Brandon’s relationship with Lana, and Tom search Brandon’s personal belongings and find a dildo and information on gender reassignment surgery. John, Tom, Candace, Kate and Lana’s mother decide to discuss this information with Lana and Brandon. The confrontation quickly becomes verbally and physically aggressive. Brandon is pushed, shoved, grabbed by the throat and eventually stripped of his pants. John forces Lana to look at Brandon’s vagina. Brandon is devastated and Lana’s mother kicks Tom and John out of her house. Brandon leaves
immediately. Tom and John are waiting for Brandon outside the house. They confront him and
force him into their car. Brandon is taken to an isolated area where John and Tom beat and
repeatedly rape him. After the rape, Tom and John threaten to kill Brandon if he tells. Brandon
agrees not to, admitting “Yes, I can see how this was all my fault,” and they then take him to
Tom’s house to clean up. Brandon manages to escape out the bathroom window while he is
supposed to be showering. Tom and John realize that they may be arrested for rape; and
although the cause and effect is not entirely clear a few days later they find Brandon at
Candace’s house and murder both of them.

ii. Primary Signification (Denotation): The Rape Scene

The rape scene in Boys Don’t Cry is presented in a series of flashbacks, as in The Accused,
though here through the memory of the victim rather than that of a witness. The scene
flips back and forth between Brandon’s statement to an unsympathetic police officer and the
events of the previous evening. We see Brandon leave Lana’s house after John and Tom have
forcibly removed his clothes in the bathroom to expose his female genitals and then his
questioning by the police officer. Brandon recounts the events of the previous evening but the
officer seems most concerned with Brandon’s gender identity and the detailed specifics of both
the stripping incident and the rape: “When they poked you, where’d they try to pop it first at”. It is clear that the police officer does not believe Brandon’s story and probably does not care.
Like Brandon’s so-called friends, the police officer focuses on determining Brandon’s gender
identity.

My reconstruction of the relevant scenes are included below, beginning with the
confrontation between Brandon and Lana’s friends and family. I have briefly summarized some
sections for the sake of simplicity but have kept them in the text to ensure the flow of the
narrative. **Bold** text indicates what is heard and *Italics* indicate what is seen. My observations, shifts in perspective and flashbacks are indicated by < >.

LANA’S LIVING ROOM- LATE EVENING

1. JOHN: You’ve been spouting nothing but lies since the minute you came to town.
2. BRANDON: No. Shakes head.
3. TOM: When you rode in on your pussy whipped faggot horse.
4. JOHN: Tom. <implies restraint> Fact is, little dude, when it comes down to it you’re nothing but a god-damned liar.
5. BRANDON: No.
6. JOHN: Am I right? You know what we do to liars? He tackles Brandon down onto the couch. Ha Ha. We’re totally fucking with ya.
7. Lana sits down on a chair, while Brandon remains seated on the couch with John.
8. JOHN: Come on Tom get Brandon a beer. Tom goes to the kitchen to get a beer. John stands up and moves in front of Brandon.
9. JOHN: We’re wondering about this paper that you’re in Teena. Gives Lana and Brandon a copy of the paper.
10. BRANDON: looks at the paper-Yeah. Its our ..Its our ticket. I guess they’re pretty hungry for news here, huh.
11. JOHN: Yeah, but what I’m wondering about is the name. He sits back down beside Brandon. Tom rejoins them and sits down. Brandon. I mean Teena.
12. BRANDON: Boy... I really fucked up. I borrowed one of Candace’s cheques and I got that speeding ticket and this fake I.D. I guess I need to stay home more huh?
13. LANA’S MOM: I invite you into my home and you expose my daughter to your sickness. Did you ever think about Lana in all of this?
14. BRANDON: That’s all I’ve been thinking about.
15. JOHN: (to Lana) You know Lana if you are a lesbian you just need to tell me.
16. LANA: John I’m not....Mom...(pleading)
17. BRANDON: No stop it. Brandon stands up and moves toward Lana and stands facing Mom. Its not Lana. Its me. Lana I’m so sorry. Mom wait I can explain. We can work this out. I have this thing...I’ve been to counseling....
18. JOHN: Stands between Mom and Brandon. You fucking pervert. Are you a girl or are you not? (pause) Are you girl or are you not?
19. TOM: There’s a real easy way to solve this problem.
20. BRANDON: Fuck you!
21. TOM: What... you want to fight.
22. BRANDON: Get the fuck off me!
23. Lana pushes Tom away from Brandon. John pushes Brandon back down on the couch.
24. JOHN: I’m going to kill you.
25. LANA: She separates John and Brandon. John there isn’t going to be any killing going on OK. John do you trust me enough to let Brandon show me and then I’ll tell you? Do you trust me enough?...John?
26. JOHN: uh-huh <affirmation>
27. Lana and Brandon enter Lana’s bedroom.<Brandon begins to unbutton his pants, but Lana stops him. He tries to explain but Lana interrupts him. She decides that she will tell them what they want to hear. >
40. John, Tom, Candace, Kate and Lana’s mom enter Lana’s bedroom.
41. LANA: Mom, I seen him in the full flesh. I seen it. I know he’s a man. Problem done.
42. Let’s go to bed.
43. LANA’S MOM: (yelling at Brandon) You son of a bitch. What have you done to my baby. I wanna know the truth. What the fuck are you, you motherfucker. Tell me.
44. JOHN: (grabs Brandon by the throat) You little liar. Kate get her (Lana) out of here.
45. Let’s get to the truth little buddy.
46. <Tom and John take Brandon into the bathroom and lock the door. Tom and John struggle with Brandon to undo his pants. Brandon resists so John punches him in the face. John pulls Brandon’s pants down, but can’t bring himself to pull his underwear down. John takes Tom’s place holding Brandon’s arms and Tom checks Brandon’s vagina.>
47. TOM: Sure don’t look like no sexual identity crisis to me.
48. John opens the door to let Lana in the bathroom.
49. LANA: Leave him alone.
50. <At this point the scene switches to a dream like sequence. It shows John and Tom holding Brandon up to show Candace, Kate and Lana’s mom. But Brandon is also part of the crowd looking back at John, Tom and Brandon with Lana kneeling before Brandon. Kate and Candace move away from looking at the exposed Brandon and Brandon is left looking at himself, until he too moves away. Then the scene switches back.>
51. LANA: Leave him alone.
52. JOHN: Him?!
53. <Lana’s Mom enters the bathroom, tells John that she has called the cops and kicks him out of her house. Lana tries to comfort Brandon.>
54. BRANDON: Leave me alone.
55. LANA: You promised.

POLICE STATION:
56. Mom and Lana have taken Brandon to the police station. Lana wants to wait for Brandon.
57. LANA’S MOM: Lana, everything Teena told us was lies. Everything. Let’s go.
58. COP. I’m asking you this because if this goes to court that question is going to come up and I’m going to want an answer.
59. BRANDON. I don’t know why...
60. COP. <impatient> All right. Let’s back up. After they pulled your pants down, seen you as a girl...what did he do? Did he fondle ya any?
61. . <flashback –Brandon is leaving Lana’s house>
62. BRANDON. No.
63. <flashback- John and Tom come up behind Brandon and he turns to face them.>
64. COP. Didn’t that kinda get your attention some how? That he wouldn’t put his hand in your pants and play with you a little bit?
65. BRANDON. I don’t know what he did.
66. <flashback- Brandon tries to run back to the house, but John and Tom grab him and take him in their car>
67. COP: I can’t believe that he pulled your pants down and if you’re a female that he didn’t stick his hand in you or his finger in you.
68. BRANDON: Well he didn’t.
69. <flashback- JOHN: Get out of the car>
70. Brandon does not move, so John grabs him, pulls him out, and stands him up beside
88. the car.
89. BRANDON: John (pleading)
90. JOHN: Shut up!
91. BRANDON: Wait... John... It's me Brandon, you know me.
92. JOHN: Shut up!
93. BRANDON: Please don't hurt me.
94. JOHN: Shut up. Take off your shirt.
95. BRANDON: John...
96. JOHN: You know you brought this on yourself Teena. Tom get out of the car.
97. Tom gets out of the car and stands beside John.
98. JOHN: Take off your shirt.
99. TOM: You can make this easy or you can get the shit kicked out of you.
100. BRANDON: All right. All right. (starts to take off his shirt, then stops)
101. John punches Brandon in the face then picks him up and throws him in the backseat of the car. <The camera starts to pull back.>
102. BRANDON: Get off me, get off.
103. John punches Brandon in the face then picks him up and throws him in the backseat of the car. 
104. COP: After you had your pants off, how were you positioned in the backseat?
105. BRANDON: On my back.
106. COP: You're on your back. <flashback - see Brandon's bleeding face>
107. Brandon nods.
108. COP: Now you say you're 21 and you've never had sex before. <flashback - John ripping off Brandon's clothes> Correct.
109. BRANDON: <affirmation>
110. COP: ... spread of ya. When they poked you, <flashback - Tom watching John rape Brandon, drinking beer> where'd they try to pop it first at?
111. BRANDON: (quietly) My vagina.
112. COP: Where?
113. BRANDON: My vagina.

iii. Analysis:

The representation of Brandon Teena's rape does not seem to adhere to the "typical" rape myth. Specifically, Brandon does not behave in a sexually provocative way. Obviously, Brandon works hard to hide his female sex characteristics, by binding his breasts, keeping his hair short and dressing in a masculine manner. Brandon's behaviour is provocative only in that he transcends his proscribed sex role to live his gender identity. That Brandon is successful in his attempts to live as a man and is accepted by women in intimate relationships as a man threatens the standard conception of what it means to be male. In this sense the rape of Brandon may be considered an attempt by John and Tom to re-establish the boundaries of sex and gender, to further expose Brandon's biological identity and to assert their masculine control.
over someone they consider female. The rape, and the beating that occurs throughout, clearly emphasizes the issue of power and force over the victim and not his sexual availability. This is similar to *Pulp Fiction* where the victim’s unwillingness is emphasized by the rapists’ use of weapons and physical restraints. However, despite the establishment of force and control during the rape, the post-rape section of *Boys Don’t Cry* focuses on establishing the character of the victim, Brandon.

Character assessment is often used in an attempt to provide the context for understanding the behaviour of the individuals involved in a rape accusation. In *The Accused*, Sarah’s “rotten character” makes her less likely to be believed and it is Brandon’s deceit about his female biological identity that ensures his story is perceived by the police officer as questionable instead of plausible. The police officer is rude, abrasive and most concerned with Brandon’s behaviour and not with arresting Tom and John. Since Brandon kept his biological identity hidden, this makes him deceitful: a liar, and therefore everything he says is questionable. The police officer has difficulty understanding why Brandon would pursue romantic relationships with other women and he has a difficult time believing that a man in the presence of a naked female would not “play with you a little bit” (line 79). Brandon’s behaviour and biological identity traverse the rigid categories of gender and like the rapists, Tom and John, the police officer attempts to categorize Brandon as female. Also, the phrasing of the questions implies Brandon’s cooperation in the rape, “After you had your pants off, how were you positioned in the backseat?” (104). So while Brandon’s actions are not sexually provocative, his heterosexual masculine behaviour (pursuit of women) is incongruous with his biological identity (vagina=female) and this rejection of the heteronormative ideal is presented as the reason for the rape.
Figure 5. The Myth of Fixed Gender Identity as Reason for Rape

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<th>Language</th>
<th>Myth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Signifier</th>
<th>2. Signified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cinematic image/ verbal text</td>
<td>woman violating gender rules: liar (line 1, 5, 7, 47) male but not masculine enough: &quot;wuss&quot;, &quot;pussy&quot;, pussy whipped faggot horse (line 3) lesbian (line 23)</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>3. Sign (meaning)</th>
<th>II. SIGNIFIED</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. SIGNIFIER (form)</td>
<td>(concept)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviant sexuality: sickness (line 21)</td>
<td>What...are you (line 46) women that violate gender norms deserve punishment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Narrative Context
III. "Problem Done. Let's Go To Bed": Toward a Deconstruction of Rape Myths

Lana's statement, "Problem done. Let's go to bed" in *Boys Don't Cry* as a solution to a very complex situation is much like the functioning of rape myths in film: It is possible to see what you want to believe. For Lana the issue of Brandon's biological identity is not a problem as she chooses to believe that he is a he: Problem done. Similarly rape myths work to silence discussions about sexualities and genders by depicting androcentric heterosexual behaviour as normative even in the context of rape. Cinematic depictions of rape that ignore or punish sexual and gender behaviour that does not conform to the normative ideal reaffirm existing rape myths and gender stereotypes and consequently normative sexual behaviour. My examination of the representation of rape and rape myth in film attempts to uncover these silences by exploring their construction and mobilization respectively.

Each of the three films in this project depicts a different type of rape scene, thereby mobilizing rape myths in a variety of ways. *The Accused* shows the gang rape of a woman, *Pulp Fiction* depicts male-male rape and *Boys Don't Cry* shows the rape of a transgendered man by two men. One of the more common rape myths depicted in film is the sexual availability of the victim, who is usually female. However, when the victim of rape is male, the sexual availability myth is not represented; instead, the rapists are characterized as psychopathic deviants. Only with a comparative examination of victim and rapist characterizations and the outcomes of the rapes can we attempt to understand how rape myths function to endorse androcentric heteronormative sexual behaviour and restrict other kinds of sexual behaviour.

In *The Accused* a lot of time is spent showing Sarah as the type of woman that deserves to be raped, while the rapists are characterized as just your average type. They are for the most part working class; only Bob is a college student. This working class characterization initially works in their favour; the implication is that they are hard working men, while Sarah's
class characterization is negative: she is poor white trash. Later the working class men that encourage the rape, particularly Clifford "scorpion" Albrect, are characterized as aggressive and sexist. This type of working class characterization also occurs in Boys Don't Cry. Lisa Henderson (2001) notes that the film tends to affirm an image of working class pathology, which she describes as "a gothic, elemental portrait of a dead-end community whose citizens are rarely able to act on their own behalf and which ends indeed in deadly events" (301-302).

The working class characterizations in both these films construct a specific mythology of class much like rape myths construct certain ideas about sexual behaviour and gender. Working class characterizations are either favourable (hard-working men in The Accused) or criminally deviant (Tom and John in Boys Don't Cry). Only Sarah in The Accused moves from a deviant (drug use, low-class bimbo etc...) to a heroic characterization.

As well, all three films in their cinematic depiction of rape mobilize representations of race in specific ways. Significantly all the characters in The Accused and Boys Don't Cry are racialized white despite the presence of individuals of other ethnic and racial groups in the actual events on which the films are based. The omission of Portuguese characters from The Accused may have been to ensure a mainstream audience and wider distribution of the film. Boys Don't Cry excludes the murder of Philip Devine, an African-American friend of Lisa Lambert (Candace in the film). Apparently Peirce had no room for that subplot (Henderson, 2001: 301). Judith Halberstam (2001: 298) argues that "race is a narrative trajectory that is absolutely central to the meaning of the Brandon Teena murder" and its removal "sacrifices the hard facts of racial hatred and transphobia to a streamlined humanist romance." The whitewashed representation of race in both these films limits the possibility of an extensive and comprehensive analysis of rape as a behaviour motivated by hate and fear.
Pulp Fiction offers a slightly different representation of race. The relationships between whites and blacks seem to be an important subtext in the film. Jules (black) and Vincent (white) are friends and they work together and Jules’ friend Jimmy (white) is married to a black woman. As well Marsellus Wallace (black) is married to a white woman, Mia. Historically, Marsellus’s involvement with a white woman would have resulted in lynching. In this film he is raped by a white police officer. Zed’s police officer uniform is not described in the original screenplay and was probably changed during filming, possibly as a comment on the recent Rodney King trial and subsequent riots in Los Angeles. In this context Zed’s rape of Marsellus may be seen as just one more incident of police assault against a black man or as punishment for his relationship with a white woman. Although these interpretations are plausible within the narrative (and historical) context of this film, they are, of course, speculative.

In films where men rape men, the rapists are classified as deviant and psychotic. In Pulp Fiction the rapists are presented as sadistic homosexuals (as evidenced by the sex slave that they keep in a box in their basement). This film, and others like it, make clear that these men are deviant and dangerous and act of their own volition. In this way the male victims, though they are thugs, thieves and murderers, can be seen as ‘real’ victims and are in no way implicated in the act of rape, unlike most female victims.

It is not just because the rapists are so deranged that the male victims can be seen as “real” victims but their characterizations and behaviour prior to the rape ensures this perception. The behaviour of Butch and Marsellus prior to the rape is not at all sexualized. They are fighting in the street, in an attempt to kill one another. As well, by this point in the film, their heterosexual orientations have been firmly established, as is their hypermasculinity. These men are ‘innocent’ victims because their sexual orientation and their behaviour prior to
the rape cannot be viewed as sexually provocative or as violating gender norms, unlike the behaviour of the female victim in *The Accused* or the transgendered victim in *Boys Don't Cry*. This complicates the more typical representations of rape in film. It is difficult to view the rape as motivated by sexual provocation since male victims do not entice the rapists in any recognizable manner. In this film, rape functions as an expression of power and control and as an example of the consequences for ‘inappropriate’ sexual behaviour.

In films where men rape women this issue is not as obvious. Usually it is the woman who initially attempts to exert control, if not over the men, then over their own bodies. This is illustrated through expression of sexual desire, “I’d like to take that guy home and fuck his brains out right in front of Larry,” says Sarah to her female friend (*The Accused* line 26) and later by attempting control of the situation, “No. No. No.” (*The Accused* line 78). In *Boys Don’t Cry*, Brandon employs both strategies at the same time: by living as a man and by resisting the rape. In both films, once the woman has attempted to step outside the bounds of socially scripted behaviour they are then “put in their place” by sexual violence. In films that depict male-female rape the use of rape myths (*female sexual availability and male sexual aggression*) to construct the scenes necessarily focuses on the sexual element of the rape, thereby masking the power struggle inherent in all rape scenes, while a film like *Pulp Fiction* adheres to this overt expression of power and control. Despite these differences, both types of representations serve the same purpose, namely, to reflect and enforce an ideal of normative sexual behaviour. Women are not supposed to display sexually aggressive behaviour, and most importantly, they are not supposed to dress and live successfully as men. Rape in this instance is punishment for the victims’ inappropriate expression of female sexual desire, and in the case of *Boys Don’t Cry*, it is an attempt to reassert masculine dominance over a woman. In *Pulp Fiction* prolonged torture and death is the outcome for the rapist’s expression of homosexual desire. These films
emphasize the importance of adhering to proscribed gender roles for sexual behaviour. It seems that the active or even aggressive expression of sexual desire is limited to men, and that it is only appropriate in the heterosexual context.

_The Accused_ focuses on the woman's experience of rape and its aftermath offering a certain kind feminist perspective on rape. However, Riggs and Willoquet question the feminist portrayal of rape in this film:

Why does the film that seems to take an essentially feminist perspective on rape wind-up portraying the victim as precisely the kind of figure constructed by those who would explain rape as the result of sexual provocation by women? (1989: 216)

Cuklanz (1996) offers an explanation. It is precisely this portrayal that attempts to show that no woman deserves to be raped even if she is of questionable character and that it is possible for a woman of questionable character to be raped. _The Accused_ carefully establishes the validity of Sarah's claim of rape by showing the aftermath first. That she was raped is never in question, only the lawyer's ability to prove it in court.

Sarah Tobias is the victim and witness to her crime. Since physical evidence and identification of the rapists is not enough to establish that the assault was a non-consensual act, Sarah's story must be believable in court; she must be a credible witness and this means she must be above reproach in the eyes of the jury. Since she isn't, the rape cannot be proved without corroboration, despite the fact that this is not required legally. She needs an eyewitness to verify her testimony. With this condition taken for granted, the film is constructed in such a way as to require Ken's testimony to substantiate Sarah's story. While the film demonstrates that a woman's character and behaviour should be inconsequential to the instigation of rape, it makes very clear that the truth will not be believed unless either the victim has an impeccable character, or a credible (preferably male) witness can substantiate her account.
The depiction of rape in *The Accused* was one of, if not the first, film to illustrate rape from the perspective of the victim, in particular, by showing the audience what Sarah saw while she was being raped (line 107). The importance of this moment in the film cannot be underestimated; by shifting the perspective from the audience (or Ken’s) view of the rape to Sarah’s view brings the focus back to her instead of just on the act of rape being done to her. Instead of just seeing the rape, the audience experiences her active struggle against it. This is a significant improvement over depictions of rape which only show the rape happening to the woman (*American Commandos*, 1984; *Baise Moi*, 2000 etc...) or her apparent enjoyment (*Straw Dogs*, 1972). However, despite this significant improvement in the representation of rape, *The Accused* in some ways undermines its own feminist depiction.

*The Accused*, while based on an actual rape case falls short of an accurate depiction of a woman’s experience with the legal system. Sarah believes in and ultimately achieves justice through the legal system that initially sold her out. Two recent publications of women’s experience of rape and their pursuit for legal justice unfortunately do not confirm this outcome (Doe, 2003; Sebold, 1999). In both these situations, these women had to fight to achieve justice; a lawyer did not knock on their door and offer their services for free. Alice Sebold sought and achieved a conviction but then spent years dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, while Jane Doe put up notices in her own neighborhood to find her rapist when the police did not and would not notify other women of the threat. Cuklanz (1996) critiques the film on this basis as well.

... *The Accused* portrays the legal process as a vehicle for the vindication of female victims. This portrayal is directly contradicted by the real experiences of rape victims, especially those who, like Sarah Tobias, have “questionable” backgrounds. *The Accused* also misrepresents the reality of rape and rape trials as understood and critiqued by feminist rape law reformers. (103)
Despite this misstep in representation, *The Accused* is an important film as it critiques the rape myths of *female sexual availability* and *male sexual aggression* and creates a strong and heroic character in Sarah Tobias. The depiction of male-male rape in *Pulp Fiction* adds another dimension to the mobilization of the *male sexual aggression* myth.

The representation of male-male rape in films like *Pulp Fiction* leads to a completely different interpretation of rape. The depiction of rape in *Pulp Fiction* tends to emphasize the helplessness and unwillingness of Butch and Marsellus and the deranged nature of the rapists Maynard and Zed. Butch and Marsellus are tied-up, gagged and held at gunpoint, while Maynard and Zed are presented as degenerate, hillbilly, redneck sadists (Tarantino, 1994:108). The rapists keep another human being (the Gimp) in a box in the basement for their sexual gratification. He is portrayed as merely their pet or toy as he is leashed and dressed in leather bondage gear that covers him from head to toe. The mask allows him to see, but he is unable to speak unless his masters allow him to, as there is a zipper over the mouth opening. Zed and Maynard establish complete control over their slaves and captives with the use of restraints and weapons, further emphasizing the unwillingness and helplessness of Butch and Marsellus.

During the rape of Marsellus, Butch is able to free himself. It would have been very easy for him to escape and leave Marsellus behind with the rapists, as it is clear that Butch and Marsellus have an antagonistic relationship. Marsellus wants Butch dead for double-crossing him, and Butch is ready to kill Marsellus to save himself. However, as Butch is walking through the pawnshop door onto the street, he stops and decides, “he can’t leave anybody in a situation like that” (line 130-131; Tarantino, 1994:105). He looks around the shop for a weapon: a hammer, a baseball bat, chainsaw, and finally he selects a sword, before proceeding back down the stairs. Davis and Womack (1998) regard this decision as Butch’s moment of redemption, the moment when he discovers the humanity within himself “when confronted
with the power to decide the fate of his mortal enemy” (63). However, by this point in the film Butch has already killed three people: the boxer he fought, Vincent Vega, and the Gimp. His decision to rescue a man that wanted him dead is not presented so that Butch may be considered a good, forgiving and forgivable person, but suggests that violence between men may be understandable in certain situations but raping a man is never justifiable. Although Butch would kill Marsellus to save his own life, he now risks his life to save Marsellus from prolonged rape. He enters the room in the basement and slices Maynard across the chest and kills him, thereby disrupting the rape in progress. Butch then threatens Zed with the sword, but Marsellus tells him to step aside and proceeds to blast Zed in the groin with a sawed-off shotgun. Butch has rescued Marsellus from prolonged rape and for this reason Marsellus forgives his double-cross, telling him to leave town and to keep quiet about the rape. Butch agrees and leaves.

Revenge is the usual outcome when men are raped in film, and *Pulp Fiction* may be considered an extreme version of this common theme. In *Deliverance*, the rapists are murdered, and in *Shawshank Redemption* one of the rapists is beaten so badly that he is no longer able to walk or to eat solid food. However, in *Pulp Fiction*, as viewers we do not ever see what Marsellus does to the rapist, Zed.

MARCSELLUS: What now? Let me tell you what now. I'm gonna call a coupla hard pipe-hittin' niggers, who'll go to work on homes here with a pair of pliers and a blow torch. (to Zed) Hear me talkin' hillbilly boy?! I ain't through with you by a damn sight. I'm gonna git Medieval on your ass.

(Tarantino, 1994: 108)

We can only assume that it is even more violent than the other acts of violence in this very violent film. We are left to imagine the horror of the rapist’s torture at the hands of his victim, because it is clear that Marsellus is not simply going to kill him.

The difference in outcome of the rapes represented in *The Accused* and *Pulp Fiction* gives a possible indication of how ideas surrounding androcentric heteronormative sexual
behaviour are reflected and reinforced. The rapists in *The Accused*, as in other films (*Death Wish*, 1974; *Leaving Las Vegas*, 1995; *Showgirls*, 1995 etc...) initially and most often remain unprosecuted. While this is not a positive affirmation of *male sexual aggression*, the lack of immediate punishment signals a degree of social acceptance. In *Pulp Fiction* the rapists are physically assaulted by the victims, Butch and Marsellus, conforming to the outcomes of male-male rape depicted in other cinematic representations (*Deliverance*, 1972; *Shawshank Redemption*, 1994). In *Pulp Fiction* the response to rape is immediate violent retribution indicating a negative outcome for expressions of *male sexual aggression* (in this situation sadistic and psychopathic) toward other men. Significantly, other representations of rape which do not observe the limits of the heteronormative model (i.e. the rape of children) depict the rapists as criminally deviant, but not necessarily sadistic (*Bastard Out of Carolina*, 1996; *Eye For An Eye*, 1995). This suggests that the sadistic characterization of Zed and Maynard may serve to emphasize the ‘deviant’ nature of their sexual desire and consequently, their lack of conformity to traditional conceptions of masculinity, despite their hypermasculine appearance. The final film in this project, *Boys Don’t Cry*, also highlights issues of gender through its representation of rape and the mobilization of rape myths.

*Boys Don’t Cry* depicts two rape scenes: the physical rape of Brandon Teena by John and Tom and their symbolic rape of Brandon’s proclaimed gender identity. The ‘stripping scene’ exposes Brandon’s physical identity as female. The dichotomy of gender is emphasized in this film by the inability of at least the male characters to conceive of Brandon’s transgendered identity. However Brandon was able to live and be accepted as a man by women even without male sex organs. For this reason the symbolic rape is not enough to return Brandon to his ‘correct’ gender as he can presumably continue to live as a man (at least for his
girlfriend) without a penis. This raises questions about what it means to be a man, to be masculine. Thus, the ambiguity must be resolved by rape.

Brandon destroys the traditional format of the binary opposition of gender that men are aggressive and logical while women are passive and emotional. His acceptance by others as male without being biologically male disrupts this construction. Masculinity can no longer be defined as what is not feminine, since Brandon is male but biologically female. Brandon adheres to masculine behavioural ideals: the white knight rescuing and protecting the damsel in distress (Candace), not backing down from a threat (fighting in the bar), risk taking, bumper skiing, trying to outrun the cops. It is clear from the beginning of the film that Brandon must adhere to these masculine ideals or risk being labeled a faggot (less than a man) or a pussy (woman) and therefore, discovery.

The stripping of Brandon to “prove” his gender is a symbolic attempt by Tom and John to rectify Brandon’s disruption of the gender lines. By exposing Brandon’s female genitalia they had hoped to firmly establish Brandon’s gender by stripping away the performative (masqueraded) aspects of his male identity. In this scene the director Kimberly Peirce inserts a kind of dream-like sequence to illustrate two apparently separate identities of Brandon: Brandon standing with the others, looking back at Tom and John exposing Brandon as biologically female. This sequence is a brief moment inserted into the stripping scene and serves to underscore Brandon’s social isolation, and the separation between how Brandon sees himself and the realization that others view his biological identity (female) as his real self. Brandon remains looking at the stripped Brandon as the others move away (line 61). This illustrates Brandon’s complete isolation, and as he moves away, his rejection of his biological identity. The rape functions as a method of reinforcing this assertion of sex as fixed gender identity and to establish the male dominance of Tom and John over the female, Brandon.
Because *Boys Don’t Cry* complicates the presentation of gender, the rape myths mobilized in this film are not precise constructions. The myths of *female sexual availability* and *male sexual aggression* neither reinforce nor justify one another; instead these myths subvert and upset the reality of rape and the ambiguity of gender identity even in the attempt to maintain the cohesion of this identity. Since Brandon presents himself as male in behaviour and appearance he is not considered sexually provocative but his biological identity ensures that his behaviour will be viewed as inappropriate. According to this rape myth sex is gender and Brandon violates the social expectations of being female.

*The Accused, Boys Don’t Cry* and *Pulp Fiction*, despite being fictionalized constructs, tell us something important about our social reality. While the deconstruction of rape myths, particularly *female sexual availability* is understood theoretically, the practice of this deconstruction is often subverted as evidenced by the representations in *The Accused* and *Boys Don’t Cry*. Both films silence important elements of the “real” stories, thereby dismantling any initial gains with respect to sexual autonomy. It is not enough to say that women may have sex with whomever they choose, whenever they choose, but rather that a person may have sex with whomever they choose and that this right cannot be assumed nor coerced. While this may seem obvious, it is clear that much time has been spent on restructuring our attitudes with respect to women without considering the traditional conceptions of masculinity. While it is important for women to actively work against acts of violence (domestic assault, rape etc...), this will not be effective within the context of traditional sex and gender roles. In a society where male aggression is often rewarded and definitely accepted in certain contexts (i.e.sports), there must be concerted effort to restructure our attitudes surrounding masculinity. The rejection of binary conceptions of sex and gender in favour of a fluid-continuum construct allows for an inclusive range of sexual behaviours and gender identities. Without this new understanding of sex and
gender it will be difficult for women and transgendered individuals to maintain their safety, as evidenced by recent events in Vancouver.

In January 2004, Don Michel Bakker was arrested on five counts of sexual assault when he was seen emerging from behind some bushes in Crab Park. The screams of a female sex trade worker drew the police to the scene and after questioning her they arrested Bakker. The bag Bakker was carrying contained a video camera and tapes depicting his sexual assaults on numerous local sex trade workers. The scenes on the tape were described as “very disturbing images involving very extreme violence and degradation against a number of local sex trade workers” (Berry, 2004: A3). The police expressed dismay at the number of victims and why they did not file a complaint against Bakker. While the police speculate that the women may not have come forward because they are addicted to heroin and desperate for money, sex trade worker Tracy Smith offers another explanation.

To sex-trade workers in the Downtown Eastside, the allegations aren’t surprising. “There are men doing crazy things all the time, beating women, controlling women. They’re control freaks” said Tracy Smith, a 36-year-old prostitute who in May 2000, was physically abused and strangled by a bad date. “It got to the point where I had to stab him. He survived, thank god... but I was put in jail,” she said.

Situations like this one demonstrate the vulnerability of female sex trade workers and the permanence of rape myths like female sexual availability. It seems that because she is a sex trade worker, her “date” can do anything he wants to her and she has no recourse to protect herself. Like Sarah in The Accused, Tracy is not considered a credible person and her “bad date” is not punished for his behaviour toward her and once again male sexual aggression is deemed acceptable.

The Kobe Bryant rape case is another example of the mobilization of female sexual availability the consequent acceptability of male sexual aggression. Setting the complexities of
race relations in the United States aside, this case demonstrated the failure of rape shield laws and how rape myth is often used to construct consent. The woman in this case was subjected to prolonged harassment by the media and had to discuss her sexual history in order for the judge, Frederick Gannett to decide if it was relevant to the case. The transcripts were later accidentally leaked to the media. The victim's prior sexual history is not supposed to be relevant to the case and her identity is to be protected. This did not happen as Bryant's defense team hired private investigators to search for any information about his victim (Toobin, 2003: 44). The laws failed to protect her and were often ignored. Eventually after over a year of harassment by the media and in some cases death threats by Bryant fans, she dropped the case. Unfortunately, now she will not be able to tell her story and because she dropped the charges observers may be less inclined to believe that Bryant raped her, once again affirming the rape myths of our society.

Much more can be said on the subject of rape in film, which must now be extended to include the use of video by rapists (as with Bakker case) and the misrepresentation of victims on television (as in the Bryant case) and this essay only briefly touches on the complexities of the representations I have selected. These films depict specific "mythical realities" of our society in an effort to construct a particular understanding of rape and sexual behaviour. At times they comment on race, class, sexuality, homophobia and gynophobia by affirming or silencing these conceptions within an androcentric heteronormative environment. An interesting direction for further analysis may be to explore the gang rape, race and class elements of these films, and to consider the representations of rape over a longer period of time (from Straw Dogs 1972 to current). I am particularly concerned and interested in the escalating nature of the violence depicted in these films (Showgirls, 1995; Leaving Las Vegas, 1995), as it seems very unnecessarily aimed only intensifying the shock and entertainment value of films. Given the complexities of the films analyzed here particularly The Accused and Boys Don't
Cry, it would be possible and maybe even necessary to investigate the rape scenes in each film individually. As this is only an exploratory and preliminary investigation of rape in film I feel that I am leaving many questions unanswered and this incompleteness is something that I have struggled with throughout the process of writing. However, a friend reframed my struggle by telling me that a thesis is never really finished, it just stops in an interesting place.

IV. Endnotes:

1 According to Wilson (1988) the least common type of rape committed is aggravated rape. He defines aggravated rape as “the legal ideal of establishing sexual assault by a stranger or strangers that includes severe violence and threat with a weapon,” whereas the more commonly committed simple rape is defined as “rape by a known party that does not involve severe physical abuse or a weapon threat” (608). The films he examined show and exaggerate aggravated rape more often while neglecting depictions of simple rape.

1 Brandon Teena, the victim of rape in Boys Don’t Cry, is often described as a transgendered man, but it is not clear that he self-identified this way. In the film Brandon described himself as a man and at other times as a hermaphrodite.
V. Bibliography:


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