

Rape Fantasy and the Feminist A History of Critical Thought

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How have women's erotic rape fantasies been explained and criticized in the past?

The Psychology of Women

Helene Deutsch attributes women's rape fantasies to the masochism she claims is inherent in feminine sexuality.

Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape

Susan Brownmiller insists that rape fantasies are a direct result of patriarchal conditioning and that it is our responsibility as feminists to eradicate them.

Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women

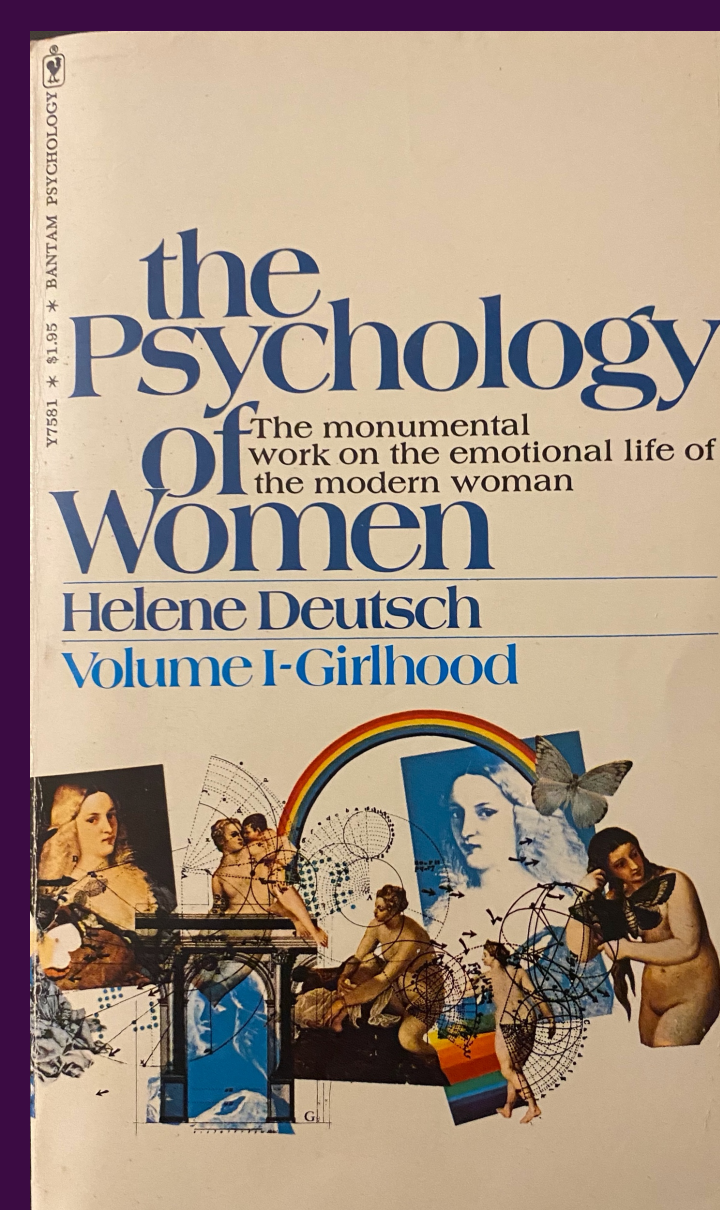
Tania Modleski delivers interpretations of mass-produced literature which reverse conclusions drawn by Deutsch and Brownmiller; Modleski explores ways in which tropes that seem patriarchal may in fact function to address patriarchal concerns, subvert them, and satisfy women's desires.

Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature

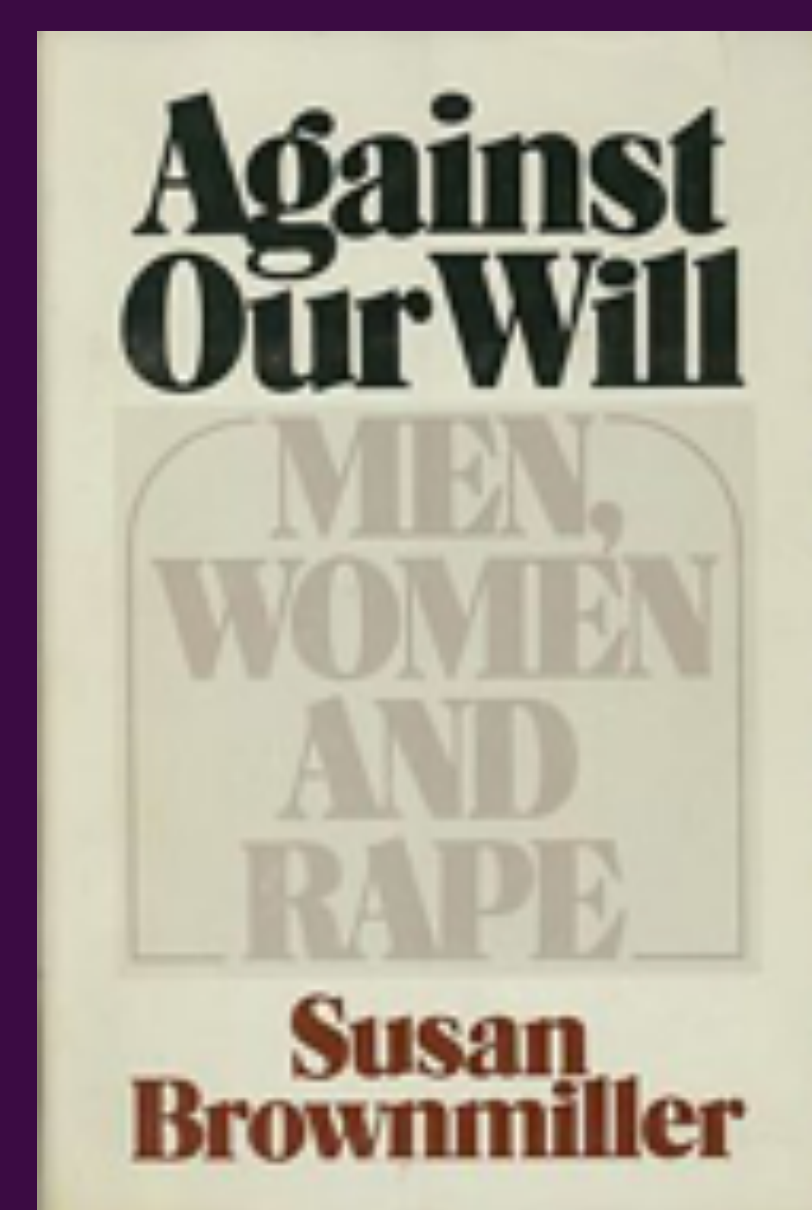
Janice Radway addresses the popularity of romance books containing rape scenes, claiming that romance readers are repulsed by these scenes, rather than aroused, and that these women read such books to work through real anxieties.



Does having a rape fantasy make me a bad feminist?



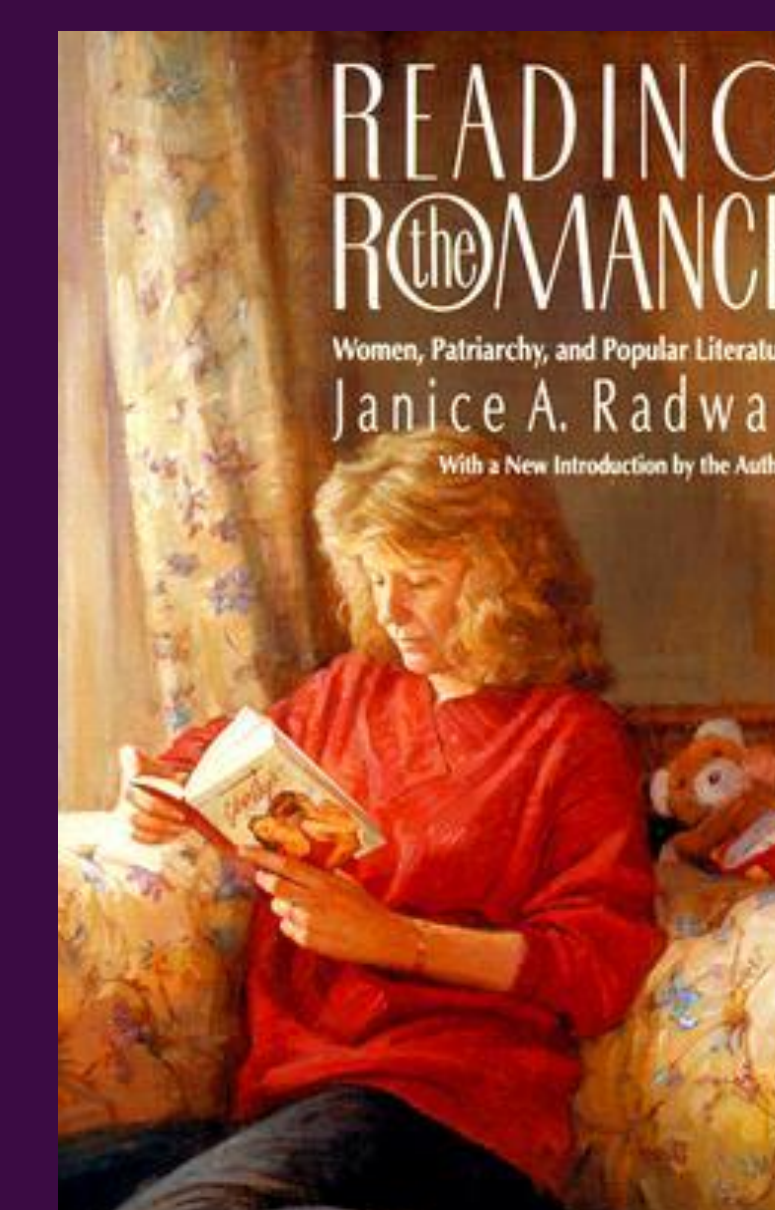
1944



1975



1982



1984

Women's Erotic Rape Fantasies

Jenny M. Bivona
Doctor of Philosophy
University of North Texas
2008

What do we know about women's erotic rape fantasies today?

According to Jenny M. Binova's doctoral dissertation, 62% of women have had a rape fantasy. She is the first to test the seven most common theories (below) about why some women have rape fantasies.

Rape Fantasy Continuum Theory

These fantasies exist on a continuum; neither 100% erotic nor 100% aversive, they lie between the two extremes.

Openness Theory

Women who have rape fantasies are generally more open to a variety of fantasies; the rape fantasies that occur indicate her openness to her sexuality.

Blame Avoidance Theory

The use of force against the self-character's will allows the fantasizer to absolve herself of sexual guilt.

Desirability Theory

Some women have rape fantasies to feel that their desirability has the power to make men lose decency and self-control.

Sympathetic Action Theory

"Anxiety, fear, and anger, which activate sympathetic arousal, can enhance sexual arousal" (Bivona 123).

Hariton's Descriptive Theory

Frequent rape fantasies indicate a "dependent...controlled... traditional woman; a variety of fantasies with occasional rape fantasies indicates that the woman is "impulsive, independent, and dominant" (Bivona 30).

Ovulation Theory

Evolutionary studies have shown that when they are most fertile, women prefer powerful, more aggressive men; women are more likely to have rape fantasies during ovulation.

Discussion

It is easy to understand why many feminist scholars would not want to bring up the fact that some women have erotic rape fantasies. Though some may fear that doing so would undo the progress that feminists have made, Bivona demonstrates that this discussion itself constitutes a feminist act:

By avoiding an area of study that is difficult to understand and perhaps uncomfortable for researchers to discuss, such as rape fantasy, knowledge is limited and ignorance perpetuated. Just as important, an avoidance of this topic sends the false and disturbing message that women's sexuality is something to be ashamed of. (Bivona 3)

References

All quotations are from Jenny M. Bivona's 2008 doctoral dissertation entitled *Women's Erotic Rape Fantasies*. The following are her most recent publications on women's erotic rape fantasies.

Critelli & Bivona. "Women's Erotic Rape Fantasies: An Evaluation of Theory and Research." *Journal of Sex Research*, 45, 1, 2008, 57-70.

Bivona & Critelli. "Women's Rape Fantasies: An Empirical Evaluation of the Major Explanations." *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 41, 2012, 1107-1119.