



# Framing the Rape Victim: Gender and Agency Reconsidered

*Carine M. Mardrossian*

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In recent years, members of legal, law enforcement, media and academic circles have portrayed rape as a special kind of crime distinct from other forms of violence. In *Framing the Rape Victim*, Carine M. Mardorossian argues that this differential treatment of rape has exacerbated the ghettoizing of sexual violence along gendered lines and has repeatedly led to women's being accused of triggering, if not causing, rape through immodest behavior, comportment, passivity, or weakness.

Contesting the notion that rape is the result of deviant behaviors of victims or perpetrators, Mardorossian argues that rape saturates our culture and defines masculinity's relation to femininity, both of which are structural positions rather than biologically derived ones. Using diverse examples throughout, Mardorossian draws from Hollywood film and popular culture to contemporary women's fiction and hospitalized birth emphasizing that the position of dominant masculinity can be occupied by men, women, or institutions, while structural femininity is a position that may define and subordinate men, minorities, and other marginalized groups just as effectively as it does women. Highlighting the legacies of the politically correct debates of the 1990s and the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the book illustrates how the framing of the term "victim" has played a fundamental role in constructing notions of agency that valorize autonomy and support exclusionary, especially masculine, models of American selfhood.

The gendering of rape, including by well-meaning, sometimes feminist, voices that claim to have victims' best interests at heart, ultimately obscures its true role in our culture. Both a critical analysis and a call to action, *Framing the Rape Victim* shows that rape is not a special interest issue that pertains just to women but a pervasive one that affects our society as a whole.

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