

# Hating Girls

*An Intersectional Survey of Misogyny*

*Edited by*

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# Introduction

*Debra Meyers and Mary Sue Barnett*

In the 2015 documentary film, *The Hunting Ground*, clinical psychologist David Lisak reports that the problem of sexual assault on college campuses in the United States is out of control. Caroline Heldman shines additional light on the widespread trauma caused by these sexual assaults stating, “There’s a lot of victim blaming with this crime which has a silencing effect on survivors.”<sup>1</sup> Various students from universities across the country were interviewed after their sexual assaults on or near their campuses by male students. Female students report having heads slammed into walls and having faces pushed into the bathroom tile during rape assaults. In addition to a crime of violence against their intimate, sexual selves, it seems the rapists also aimed to assault their minds, deface them, and rob them of any agency they possessed.

Rachel Hudack, a Saint Mary’s College student who was raped by a Notre Dame student in his dorm room, describes how she became isolative and felt “completely changed as a person.”<sup>2</sup> Upon reporting the assault, Hudack’s distress deepened with the dismissive response of Saint Mary’s College president Dr. Carol Ann Mooney. The film argues that perpetrators, college administrators, coaches, and the fraternity system want survivors silenced. Yet, the young women in this film told their truths with boldness. In the face of re-traumatization and death threats, they persevered in their healing and emerged as advocates in solidarity with one another. While still students at UNC Chapel Hill, campus sexual assault survivors Andrea Pino and Annie Clark became advocates for other survivors, traveling across the country to hear stories and to share findings of their Title IX research initiative. They formed alliances with survivors on many campuses to force universities to address sexual assault more rigorously.

Despite the efforts of activists to promote justice for sexual assault survivors, the hypersexualization and objectification of girls throughout our society allows our rape culture to thrive. Gail Dines, in her 2010 book *Pornland: How Porn Has Hacked Our Sexuality*, describes the hypersexualized U.S. culture in which girls and women are inundated with images and messages that prioritize sex and de-emphasize other aspects of life experience and personal identity. She says that sexualized pop culture *grooms* females like a predator,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Hunting Ground*. Kirby Dick. (United State: Radius-TWC, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

stripping them of self-esteem and a full sense of their humanity. She points out that the American Psychological Association's landmark study describes how the sexualization of girls affects them negatively in "cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, and attitudes and beliefs."<sup>3</sup> This often leads to eating disorders, depression, and low self-esteem, all of which are symptoms experienced by females who have been sexually assaulted. Dines argues that, "we appear to be turning out a generation of girls who have been 'assaulted' by the very culture they live in."<sup>4</sup> Similarly Kate Manne suggests that understanding misogyny means understanding the hostility that girls and women face. What we need to know, she contends, is that a girl or a woman faces "gendered, hostile treatment because she is a *woman in a man's world*."<sup>5</sup> But this misogyny is not limited to our culture.

In recognition of the United Nations International Day of the Girl, the UN Women website published a video of Sore Agbaje performing her poem, "We Do Not Wait Tomorrow," in which she briefly closes her eyes while gently placing her hands to her chest and speaks the names of diverse feminist icons so that the women fill the rooms, "until we keep the promises of the Beijing Declaration, until consent is everyone's first language."<sup>6</sup> From this global platform dedicated to the empowerment of girls around the world, Agbaje embraces global sisterhood in highlighting the importance of fulfilling the objectives set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. It was the most progressive blueprint ever produced for advancing women's human rights. Devoted to the safety and flourishing of girls around the world, Section L of the Declaration calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against girls, stating that girls are often treated as inferior and are socialized to put themselves last. It calls for the elimination of all negative cultural attitudes and gender-stereotyping that work against girls achieving their highest potential. And it calls for the eradication of egregious forms of violence against girls including child marriage, rape, and female genital mutilation.

In 2011, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 66/170 to declare October 11 as the International Day of the Girl Child. It is a day for organizations all over the world to provide platforms for girls to assert their power, to mobilize as change agents, to share their visions for the future, and to

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3 Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010) 118.

4 Dines, *Pornland*, 118.

5 Kate Manne, *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women*, (New York: Crown, 2020) 9.

6 UN Women, "#GenerationEquality: We Do Not Wait Tomorrow," [unwomen.org](http://unwomen.org), October 11, 2020.

connect with one another across the globe. It is also an opportunity for adults to encourage girls and to listen to them. On International Day of the Girl 2020, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed told girls, “Be bold in your demands and be confident in the steps you are taking.” She added, “your solutions and ideas are essential to step up the pace of progress.”<sup>7</sup> This charge is applicable to all of us who advocate for safety, peace, and justice for girls in the world today. As adults, we too must be bold. Our visions, words, and actions on behalf of girls everywhere must be formidable and unrelenting in resistance to the misogynist barriers and traps that cause them great harm.

Toward that end, *Hating Girls* is a collection of cutting-edge essays addressing the pervasive problem of misogyny from an intersectional framework, particularly focused on identities of gender, race, class, sexuality, and religion. Scholars, activist reformers, and social justice practitioners offer multiple perspectives of the misogyny that dominates our culture, providing both macro-views as well as case studies in the United States. This interdisciplinary analysis exposes the destructive, oppressive beliefs and practices inherent in our society and offers a progressive, equitable way forward.

Kristi Gray and Dorislee Gilbert open with a disturbing overview of the current state of criminal justice for sexual assault victims. They argue that we desperately need a true culture shift in order to change the hearts and minds of juries, prosecutors, police, and judges in order to bring about real justice for sexual assault victims. In chapter two, Tammy Hatfield, Portia Allie-Turco, Sarah E. Johansson, and Melissa Brennan provide a pathway forward to creating a pedagogical social justice practice that promises to bring about the cultural shift needed in order to extinguish misogyny. Tara M. Tuttle, in chapter three, introduces readers to the profound dangers inherent in the purity culture movement espoused by many religious groups. Shockingly, this movement has actually contributed to our rape culture rather than offer a way forward.

Chapter four offers us a case study illustrating the devastating impact of the objectification and sexualization of girls in the middle of the last century through the lens of divorce, birth control, domestic violence, and rape. Rather than laying the blame with the objectification and sexualization of girls with the media, Debra Meyers suggests that Christianity may have played a larger role in creating our society’s rape culture. Johanna W. H. van Wijk-Bos, in chapter five, argues that the objectification and sexualization of girls begins very early on in human history with patriarchy’s erasure of women from the earliest religious texts and traditions. Chapter six investigates the psychological impact

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7 UN Web tv, The United Nations Live & On Demand, [webtv.un.org](http://webtv.un.org), October 9, 2020.

of victims of sexual assault, and Mary Sue Barnett offers some suggestions for a pathway forward by challenging the male-dominant Christianity that supports our rape culture today.

Donna Pollard, in chapter seven, lays bare her personal experience of sexual assault, child marriage, and the inadequate institutions that should protect girls from sexual predators. Her social status, age, physical health, and limited family resources all acted against her ability to reach her potential. Pollard works to prevent child marriages in every state so that others might escape the nightmare she endured. Sandy Phillips Kirkham's childhood experiences have also prompted her to be an active agent for social change. Chapter eight highlights her sexual objectification and sexualization at the hands of a minister she trusted. Her rapist was protected and excused by the entire institutionalized church that she thought was supposed to love and protect her. In chapter nine, Diane Dougherty helps us to better understand how misogyny has been embedded in Christianity that creates rape culture by outlining the role of several patriarchal right-wing institutions within the Roman Catholic church. Similarly, Angela Cowser, in chapter ten, details the destructive power of patriarchy in African-American religious institutions. And Stephanie A. Welsh digs deeper into this religiously sanctioned misogyny in her case studies of Black Methodist Episcopal church clergywomen in chapter eleven. We complete our survey of misogyny with Francoise Knox Kazimierczuk and Meredith Shockley-Smith's research into how our rape culture continues to impact Black women's health and safety. In this chapter, quantitative data details the problem of maternal and infant mortality, alongside qualitative data giving voice to the experience of Black women as they confront racism, sexism, and classism during pregnancy and birth.

Collectively, these chapters in *Hating Girls* provide a cutting-edge intersectional perspective that deconstructs the pervasive misogynies and gender-based violence against females and gender non-conforming people today. And while the interdisciplinary analysis in this volume exposes the destructive, oppressive beliefs and practices inherent in our society, it also provides a progressive, equitable way forward much like the United Nations' Girl Declaration. The Girl Declaration was delivered by a delegation of girls to the United Nations on International Day of the Girl in 2013. Endorsed by Malala Yousafzai and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, it proclaims the hopes and ambitions of five hundred girls in fourteen countries across four continents. A global anthem of empowerment, the girls' voices insist that they are not invisible, and they want their dreams recognized. They locate their enormous hopes in the present moment, not the distant future, through repetition of the words *this moment*—so pressing is their safety, their health, their education, their rising

out of the confines of poverty, violence, and stigma. Heralding the powerful immediacy of *now*, with both tenderness and unapologetic fierceness, they proclaim, “This is the moment when my rising no longer scares you, and this is the moment when being a girl became my strength, my sanctuary, not my pain.”<sup>8</sup> The Girl Declaration is a manifesto calling for the global rising of girls in a future where the feminine is no longer imprisoned and ravaged. The contributors in this volume, each writing from her expertise, vision, and solidarity, are heeding the voices of girls by doing the invaluable work of exposing misogyny to help clear the path for diverse girls to live their lives on their own terms.

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8 The Girl Effect Team, “The Girl Declaration: Making Girls Heard by The World,” (October 12, 2016). Retrieved from <https://global.girleffect.org/stories/girl-declaration-making-girls-heard-world/>.