

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra. And today I'm joined by Dida Sundet, a PhD candidate at Edith Cowan University to talk about her doctoral project on the theme of the "heroic" rapist in ancient mythologies and how this connects to today's rape myths. So first do you want to tell us a bit about your project?

DS: It's a creative PhD. So it's 50% creative work and 50% research. And what I look at is how this myth of the heroic rapist came to cement itself in mythology and how it's traced through history to become an actual thing. It's become so normalized that we don't really see it, but it plays out in news articles and cinema and everything constantly. And also how a lot of these artworks that came to be in the Renaissance, which was like the golden age of revival of mythologies. They were obsessed with heroic rape and they've lost their context completely. So nobody knows what they're looking at anymore. So there's like, in one article that I like to pull up is like leading questions. It's an advice column in the Guardian. And they love illustrating with classical paintings, but boy, do they get it wrong. They have one that's called, "I think my girlfriend is going to leave me. What can I do?" And the picture that they've chosen was a painting, I can't remember who did it now, but it's of Daphne and Apollo. And it's the myth where Daphne doesn't want Apollo and he chases her and she turns into a tree and he still basically ravages the tree.

AT: That's the one where she turns herself into a laurel tree and he basically takes the leaves and branches of the laurel to make himself like a little crown and it becomes a symbol associated with him. So even turning herself into a literal plant couldn't save her from being ravaged by him.

DS: No. And it even says that the tree kind of pulls away as he still tries to. But it's like, "my girlfriend is trying to leave me, what more can I do?" And then you put Apollo and Daphne? Like, what are you really saying here, right? And then there's a few other ones they've used like Botticelli's *La primavera*. And it's something about not having a work-life balance. But one of my favorite one is, "my friend is harassing people online, what do I do?" And they've taken Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare*, which is, this woman is asleep and there's an incubus sitting on top of her chest. And the incubus is a demon that raped women in their sleep. And it's like, what are you guys doing? How are you not knowing that these are not just pretty pictures? Like, who's responsible for this? So my exegesis has a whole section on leading questions, but I had to stop at one point because you can go on and on and on. And then the other half of my project is a really big creative thing where I make a massive exhibition of photographic interventions in key myths and representations. And then the other part is cyanotype prints on vintage ladies handkerchiefs that combine the two. So you've got classical paintings, news media, headlines, advertising, quotes, all kinds of things that become this like research map. So my dream is that people understand that you can find every single reference in the paintings in the cyanotype work. Like it's a decoder, which I think is super cool.

AT: And so you're drawing this throughline from the original stories that we find in predominantly Greek and Roman mythologies. I think we all know Roman mythology is just Greek mythology with different names. (DS: Yeah.) And then how these painters and sculptors, I would say misinterpreted the work, like the way they're presenting it is very problematic. And then you've got people today acting like these are somehow accurate. And so can you tell us about how these artists were misrepresenting the stories?

DS: I don't know that I would say that they were, because it is very glorified in mythology. There was a shift in, I think it was the fifth century BC, where they wanted to demonize women. So they started to rewrite a lot of the characters and that's part of the Medusa development where she went from being a monster to a rape victim, thanks Ovid. They wrote in rape as an aphrodisiac already in there. So what I think happened is that there was, and I'm not sure I think it was inaccurate. I think that they really just kind of went, "hang on, this is how it's written." Because when you read it, it's not brutal, it's not violent. It is very glossed over and there's this

concept called like narrative immunity that's applied to particularly Zeus, who's like the chief rapist. And they had a purpose, right, these paintings. In Italy, they were used on like cassone, these marital chests to basically teach you how to be a good wife, and they would be in the bedrooms. They were also used as pornography, obviously. But it was mostly for the aristocrats, that's who ordered them. And I'm sure that they had a particular way that they wanted them. But yeah, I'm not sure I would say that they misrepresented it. I would say that more comes when the historians and the art critics, they are the ones where the biggest misrepresentation happens, which John Berger called cultural mystification, just basically where you start talking about brushstrokes and all these fancy pantsy things instead of what's actually there. And that's how rape becomes "seduction" and all of these manners of things. I'm sure people, women didn't just lie down next to the streams with their bosoms open. So there's a certain amount of misrepresentation.

AT: But even if they did, it's not an invitation, people.

DS: No, I do find it interesting, though, that particularly Mars and the Vestal Virgin, where one of the versions is that she was asleep, catching the breeze with her bosom by a stream and then Mars came. And in all of the paintings, he's like perving or lifting up her (skirt). It's really gross. But the other version was that he came to Rhea Sylvia and she was a Vestal Virgin and she's tending the flames, the sacred flames, and that he comes out as a disembodied phallus. Now that, I was like, okay, I would have liked to see that picture, like out of the flame comes this erect penis. So yeah, I'm not surprised that artists chose to lean on this. And the Vestal Virgins, actually, their punishment for not being chaste was being burned alive or they had molten lead poured down their throats.

AT: Well, what's interesting about that is there is so much, not just blaming, but punishing the victim, right? So you were saying that all these women just happen to be sleeping naked out in the wilds. And there's sort of that implication on the part of the artist or the storyteller that like she was "asking for it." But one of the things that really gets me about Greek myth in particular is how much you have the complicity of powerful women. So like specifically goddesses in this context, but these women aren't using their power to hold men accountable. They're using it to actively attack their victims. And I feel like that is something that we see today as well. So in the myth context, you have Athena punishing Arachne for telling these kinds of stories of the gods' misdeeds during a weaving contest. And so she turns her into a spider. You've got Athena again, so you mentioned Medusa. Athena sends Perseus after Medusa, after Athena herself made Medusa into this dangerous "monster" because she was raped. So she was raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple, Athena's mad, and rather than being mad at Poseidon, she punishes Medusa and then sends someone to kill her. And Hera is just constantly going after her husband Zeus's victims. Like you said, he's the rapist in chief. And then even, so when we're talking about like the Vestal Virgins being punished for no longer being chaste. There's also a myth where Artemis was famously like the virgin huntress and she turned her attendant Callisto into a bear as punishment for breaking her vow of chastity after she was raped by again Zeus. And then again Hera causes Callisto to be mistaken by Artemis for a real bear. And so Artemis ends up killing her by accident through these machinations of Hera. And so it's just very telling how often you've got not just the powerful men victimizing women, but then the women who do have power are further victimizing them and arguably victimizing them in worse ways.

DS: Well, I think it's really important to remember though that all of these texts were written by men for men. They did not view women very well back in the day, Aristotle was a famous misogynist, Hesiod before Ovid and all these people basically declared women was the curse sent upon men from Zeus because Prometheus, I think it was, shared the gift of fire. Hera, I don't know what they're thinking there. Maybe they're idealizing the jealous wife. Myth is very far from truth, I think, although most ancient people really wanted to believe that it did have something to it. It was very important that they're descended from the gods, which is why a lot of these

rapes, the trauma is just neglected. It's like, "oh, but yes, she went on to give birth to heroes." Like Romulus and Remus founded Rome, right? So it doesn't matter that Rhea Silvia was raped, she's fine. Very often they can also get reintegrated into society because they gave birth to a hero, which makes no sense when you think about it, because there's a certain amount of time passed from giving birth to like becoming a hero. What happens in that gap? But yeah, the Amazons were, I like the Amazons. They were like the one thing that the Greeks feared the most. I quite like that. But they were into all kinds of weird stuff like the pederasty. The myth of Ganymede is quite awful. And speaking of artists, Rembrandt has a famous rendition of Ganymede, which, I can't get over it. Zeus is an eagle, comes and grabs Ganymede and Rembrandt has chosen to depict him as a baby. So he is a crying baby, urinating as he's being carried away by an eagle. So, Ganymede was to be the cup bearer for the gods and Zeus's "lover." But Rembrandt then reads this myth and goes, "oh yeah, I'm going to turn him into a baby that urinates." Like, you gotta wonder, right? Like are these people, were they okay?

AT: No, no, they weren't. (DS: No, no.) Not the painters, not the, well, and I think it is important also that we recognize that myths evolved, right? This wasn't like somebody published a fully formed set of stories. So for example, Aphrodite, there's evidence that she was originally a warrior goddess herself, and then she was transitioned into the love and beauty representation that we are more familiar with. And the same is true, I think, of a lot of different religions, but also how we tell our stories reflects who's in power at any given time. And when we say "Greek mythology," we're actually talking about a bunch of different civilizations, like the Spartans and the Athenians were two different cultures. And so it is funny, anytime somebody tries to say, "oh, that's not how the story goes." Because there's, there's countless versions of these stories. But the ones that get preserved, unfortunately, what we've seen, is this very misogynistic rape culture tone. And so, when we're looking at a rape by the heroic male figure, that is presented as like, "oh, it's fine." And in the paintings, you talk about how the victims are rarely, if ever presented as scared, angry, harmed by this, nobody's showing the aftermath. And I'm just curious in terms of what is the point? Is it purely reproductive in order to say, "okay, this is how this hero came about? And the gods are just such awful people that they couldn't possibly seduce a woman? Just by being cool?"

DS: I definitely don't think that's what they're trying to say, because they want the gods to be revered. It's about conquest, right? And there's theories that there was this ritualistic initiation. So it almost becomes that. And if you look at through history, you can see this comes up as a theme again, like young men going out gallivanting or whatever you call it, and rape as like an introduction to manhood. It was Ovid in like *Ars Amatoria*, who basically, wrote, it's like the biggest, it's the ultimate rapist charter is what Helen Morales calls it, where he says that you should take the mythological resistance of women as validation that she really wants it, like no means yes. So it's all written in there. And then they had all these sick beliefs that you couldn't rape a sleeping woman, like the vagina had ways of doing all kinds of things. So yeah, I definitely don't think they wanted to show that gods as depraved. They believed, when I say "they," obviously lots of people, long timeframe, that men were closer to gods, and women are closer to nature and animalistic, they're untamed, and they need to be tamed, put in their place, so to speak. (AT: So they keep getting turned into animals.) Yeah, but they got off on this stuff. It was an aphrodisiac. One of the symbols that they used in painting was that they would have her hair disheveled, or gripping of the wrist was also another symbol for rape and sexual violation. And the only good rape victim, if you can say good, was a dead one. Like Lucretia. If you took your life afterwards, then you were a good rape victim. The patriarchy approves.

AT: So again, we're coming back to that, the "happy ending" is the victim gets further victimized.

DS: Yeah. Pretty much. Susan Brownmiller is the one who termed this myth of the heroic rapist, and she really put a name on it. But when I was doing research, I stumbled upon, as you do, Joseph Campbell and he's like the monomyth and in there, he, without kind of outing him, kind of identifies the figure of the heroic rapist

before Susan Brownmiller, where he wants to kind of say, “oh, no, both men and women can be the hero and blah, blah, blah.” But the woman is the goal. And there is this quote, I don’t remember how it goes now, but it’s about the man taking the woman or the goddess to bed, whether she will or not. And like, bam, there you have it. And then a few years later, Susan Brownmiller comes along and she puts it all in context, but she completely dismisses mythology, though. She’s like, “oh, it’s got nothing to do with real life, we’ve got to look at like war and all of this stuff,” which is also true, but also not. Because we’ve made these things into pillars of Western culture, they’re masterpieces, they’re triumphs of human evolution. And I don’t think that we can dismiss the impact of that. Susan Brownmiller, though, is a very problematic figure, I’ve got to say.

AT: Yeah, we’re not idealizing her. So it sounds like what we’re really talking about here is male entitlement and the entitlement of the powerful to do whatever they want and take whatever they want from anyone who is perceived as weaker. And to me, that really sounds like toxic masculinity, that obviously we still see today, but it is very much that idea of, not just that men are entitled to whatever they want, but that dehumanizing of women because of male supremacy and this idea that men are so sex-obsessed, this idea that they can’t control themselves, that, again, that they are entitled to sex, this all just feels like some toxic masculinity incel bullshit.

DS: Oh, yeah, very much so. Definitely. It’s just scary that it was put forward as this very natural, the natural order of things. Like, “this is how we roll. I’m the man. I’ve got the testicles.” And women have already always been feared, right? Because we can grow and give and sustain life. We see time and time again how patriarchy as a system, they don’t particularly enjoy older women. Older women are demonized. And I think you reach a point in your life where you see through all the bullshit and you’re like, “hang on.” And that’s very scary, right? When you’re used to being able to gaslight people and say, “oh, these things are important.” And then they come to a certain age where other people’s opinions stop mattering as much. And you come into yourself in a bit of a different way. And most women I know have gone, “hang on.” And they find it incredibly intimidating. Which is why I think you see older men going for younger women time and time again, they’re easier to gaslight, they’re easier to control. Plus, you have the whole beauty and youth myth that we’re only really attractive when we’re young and perky before things start going south or whatever way it is that they go.

AT: It’s Australia. I think they go north because we’re on the other side of the world.

DS: Well, I’m from Norway, so I’ll pretend that I’m there and then they go down. (laughter)

AT: So we’ve touched on a couple of these myths that we’re seeing in these throughlines. So the idea that women are to blame for tempting men, men can’t be expected to control themselves, men’s potential is more important than the harm that they inflict on women, which we still see presented as an argument today. And that’s what really bugs me is that, it’s been literally millennia and these things have not improved. So do you have any thoughts from your work on how we can counter these myths? Because the fact that we’re still seeing them today makes it feel kind of hopeless.

DS: Yeah, look, that’s where I came to this. I came to this project from a point of rage. Before I answer your question, let me tell you how I came to the project. So I was really into following all of the rapes and all the statistics on femicide and everything and the trolling online and receiving my fair share of, “oh, you’re too ugly to be raped.” And I was like, “what the fuck?” Anyway, and as someone who, I’ve studied classical art for as long as you can choose your subjects, but I studied in Europe. So it’s mid-’90s to late ’90s in Europe. And I did not hear about the concept of heroic rape until 2019. And it blew my mind. I was like, “what is this?” Because I knew everything and everyone that came up, all of these paintings, all of the artists. And I had no clue. And I was filled with so much rage because I started to see the same things being perpetuated in news media. And it was like, once the veil dropped, I was like, “oh my God, I’ve got to do something.” So for me, I think part of the

answer is that we can't expect everybody to go through academia or to go to conferences or read research papers or whatever. We also can't expect a lot of these people that we need to educate to go past clickbait headlines. So one of my ideas, which might be the ideal, is that I think that we can change things through visual art and I think that we can reach more people in that way. So that's part of how I'm hoping to change it is that, here's an art exhibition. Ooh, it's about rape. A lot of people would come because they're curious, right? And it's not about being preachy or anything. And the other part is just to start conversations. Like I'm notorious for stopping any dinner conversation. Somebody goes, "so what's your PhD about?" I reply and then people just shrink. They're like, "oh, she said the big R word. OK." So I'm really hoping that this will, because it's clear that if you wait for textbooks and everything to be updated, it takes ages because the '70s, the second wave feminist movement was all about that. But those things hadn't filtered through to the textbooks in the mid-90s when I was doing this. It wasn't there. We still weren't discussing feminist art or feminist artists. So yeah, we just need more places to reach people where they don't feel preached at and where they can do a bit of a self exploration and come to their own conclusions. That's what I hope my work is doing. It's not very preachy. And it sets things in a very contemporary setting. So Rhea Sylvia isn't the Vestal Virgin, she's a woman. And most of my models are older women because I quite like that they've aged. But she's a woman waking up, having been assaulted at a party and there's people there. There's all of these threads to contemporary stories. But yeah, as far as what do we do, speak louder and more often, close down every dinner conversation.

AT: I think that is also a question of who's in power and who do we allow to retain power. So a very publicized rape case in recent years was Brock Turner, I believe he was at Stanford. And this is an example where everyone's talking about, "oh, but he had such a promising future." Yeah, and he also raped a woman while she was unconscious. And one of the reasons it even got to trial was because two other men came across the scene, stopped him, held him, and were able to testify as witnesses. Like if it wasn't for them, it almost certainly would never have made it to court.

DS: No, because she had no memory of it.

AT: Yeah. And the judge in that case who basically gave him a slap on the wrist, because "this young man has such potential and such a bright future." I think one of his parents even said something about how his life shouldn't be ruined for like a few minutes.

DS: "Twenty minutes of action" is what he called it.

AT: Yeah. But that judge was later, I believe, removed from the bench.

DS: Yeah, I use that case as a reference both in one of my images and in the cyanotype work, actually. I put those things that are from the police report in there. But it's such a common experience, unfortunately. But there was Steubenville, which is really gross, where this woman, they've got photo evidence, they've got people recording videos of saying, "oh, she's so raped right now." They're having like a conversation about what's going on. It's really confronting. And then the news media is like, "oh, my God, the careers of these two boys are completely ruined.

AT: It's funny how they're "boys," right? (DS: Yeah.) They are men.

DS: Yeah. And then Anonymous came in, like the hacker group, and exposed everything. And I think that the person from Anonymous got a stricter conviction than the actual rapists. But then you fast forward to now, because that's a few years ago now, and the Bruce Lehrman, Brittany Higgins, where one of the news headlines was, "life comes crashing down around man."

AT: Can you explain that situation for anyone who's not Australian?

DS: Well, it's the case of Bruce Lehrman, who, well, I don't really have to say allegedly anymore, but he's appealing, raped Brittany Higgins in Parliament House, took her back there. She was quite drunk, left her naked on a sofa. And then he ended up suing for defamation because there was stuff published. And then the judge found on the balance of probabilities that he was indeed guilty. He is now appealing that. So it might be a defamatory statement in a year's time, like a lot of the other things have been. It's the new weapon of choice now, is appeal until you wear the victim down.

AT: Yeah, so what we're seeing is systems of power that were meant to protect particularly wealthy white men doing their job. And this is one of the things that when we talk about racism among police forces, and that sort of thing, where it's like, no, the system is doing what the system was built to do. The system was fundamentally flawed in the first place. It's not a bug. It's a feature.

DS: Oh, yeah, and a documented one as well. Like they went through court transcripts from like the 1500s or whatever. And they found that wealthy or well-established men accused of rape would have if there was too much evidence, they'd be given lesser charges. Because if there was too much evidence, they couldn't just dismiss it. But if they could, they would dismiss it. And it was written into the law. But then you also had medicine as well saying, "oh, but you can't actually do that. It's not possible to rape a woman when she's sleeping. It's not possible to overpower her. It's not." So this is where you had that whole, like a hue and a cry, right, the evidence you had to present to court, you had to present right away. You had to be visibly bruised or violated. You had to be hysterical, but not too hysterical, obviously, because then you probably have hysteria.

AT: And you can't trust a woman who's hysterical.

DS: No, like her womb could be in her head at that time, like, oh, my God, she could be a witch.

AT: We have to clarify, the wandering womb was actually a thing that people believed in. I want to say this is another one from ancient Greece, but basically saying that, "oh, yeah, it just goes wandering around the body." (DS: Yeah.) That was a thing that they believed.

DS: But it makes you wonder, right? If you're trying to impregnate her and you don't know where the womb is.

AT: Well, they still don't know where the clit is. (DS: No, I know.) These are not the people that we should be going to for how to live our lives today. That's all I'm saying.

DS: I do like the one, though, that says in classical paintings that cherries and strawberries were the fruits of paradise and they represented the souls of men. I don't know about you, but sometimes I like the souls of men frozen with a dash of alcohol. Lovely. So refreshing.

AT: Well, it's funny when you talk about fruit, it makes me think of pomegranates and Persephone and another instance where, her uncle just kidnaps her and is basically rewarded by, "oh, you get to keep her." And the fact that we've still got places where it's considered acceptable and proper to force women to marry their rapists.

DS: Oh, yeah. It's crazy. Her name escapes me now, there was this famous, she's in part of my work, a woman from Italy who was the first woman to take her rapist to court because she didn't want to marry him. And he staged this like massive kidnapping with a group of dudes who helped him out, kidnapped her, took her and locked her up somewhere and kept raping her because then, she had to marry him. That was what he wanted.

And she, Franca Viola, she took him to court and won. So she's become this very feminist icon because it's absurd. Right?

AT: Well, you see that today with Gisele Pelicot in France. And for anyone who's not familiar with the case, this is, again, an older woman. I believe she's in her 70s, but it came out that her husband had been drugging her and allowing men to rape her while she was unconscious for years. Like I think this was actually like hundreds of men and it took that long for this to come to court. And it's obviously a huge scandal. But the fact, not just that her husband was doing this to her, but again, that the fact that it was a widespread conspiracy.

DS: There was a website. There was an actual recruitment website, so there would have been people that didn't want to do it. That still said nothing. And when you see these social experiments that are videos online, I saw one yesterday, which is about drinks spiking. And there was two men who sat there and chuckled like, "oh ho." And then there was the woman and she got up and knocked over the glass. But yeah, the bystander is equally problematic in these cases. It's like, "oh, well, it's not about me. I mean, I'm sure she was asking for it. All women want to be raped." Lots of rape myths there. But yeah, they still argued that they didn't really think it was rape. That case is just absolutely awful. And the problem, I also think, is that we know Gisele Pelicot's face, but the other people, the men. We don't. They're hiding under masks and hoods and they're allowed to just bombard her with really intrusive and downright insulting questions like "surely you were just pretending to be asleep." It's like, no.

AT: Who would choose to put themselves through like that's always the most insane thing when people try to claim that victims are lying, which, yes, I'm not saying that that never happens, but statistically, it is incredibly low. And the idea that Gisele Pelicot, why would she lie about this? Like genuinely, everything that she has been going through, not just being victimized, but again, being re-victimized. It's just so stupid. And I saw this really interesting visualization of rape culture, where the top section is a white box next to a red box. And it's "what a lot of people think rape culture is." And so like the white box is all the good men and the red box is the rapists (DS: The deviants.) But then the second section is a more gradient. So you've got white and red, but then all these different shades of pink in the middle. And so you've still got either extreme, but then you've got like the apologists, right? The people who will actively protect them or the ones who say, "oh, maybe you misunderstood." And "oh, it probably wasn't that bad. Like how do we know she is telling the truth" or "she was asking for it because she got drunk and was wearing a short skirt." And so you see all of these people who are contributing to it, even if they aren't actively the harasser. So like you were saying, like not just the bystanders, but then they become an active participant by like, bystandering is not a passive act. You are making a choice. (DS: Oh yeah, definitely.) And then the people who actively stand up and say, we shouldn't ruin my son's life because of 20 minutes.

DS But this comes back down to like the rape myth again, right? So the heroic rape myth is dependent on the other side, which is the deviant. And that is that there's only depraved men, evil. I really don't like it when they use the word evil and monster because like they're just men. They're not evil. They're not monsters. And God forbid they have any kind of diagnosis because then that is front and center immediately, particularly if they're neurodivergent. And I cannot state how much this annoys me because there is nothing about, it could be depression or being autistic. None of those things means that you are more prone to rape someone. There's no evidence for that. So the news media loves to create this stereotypical poster boy for the evil, depraved rapist, lurker in the bushes, attacks women on the streets, stalks them, all of these terrible things, which yes, they are terrible, but that doesn't mean that when your husband rapes you in the bedroom, that that's any less terrible. It's the good bloke defense. And then it goes back to that narrative immunity, which is particularly applicable for sports athletes and stuff, where they have groups that they put the women in, the groupie, the gold digger, woman scorned. And once you're going to become aware of this and you start reading the stories,

you're like, oh. There was this guy called Rhys Kember, I think he's a BMX "champion." I use quotation marks. They use the word "champion" like four times. It was in the headline. It was in the text underneath the picture. And then two more times in the introduction to the story of how he gave young girls alcohol and basically was trying to procure underage teens. And the judge in that story cited groupie culture as a redeeming factor. So what he did wasn't really criminal because he was an opportunist. He was just kind of, they were there and offering. And it's not how it works.

AT: It's really interesting because, rather than acknowledging that this person is weaponizing a form of power that they have and weaponizing that power imbalance between him and his victims, they are using that power imbalance as the justification, which we see in other, "oh, women just can't resist a powerful man." It's like, "yeah, we can. Yeah, we would really like to, please stop."

DS: It's just like, "oh, she slept her way to the top." Did she? Or was she taken advantage of and pushed into this thing where she goes, "if you want to go anywhere, you're going to have to do that." Like, was it coercion? Was it force? Or was it really that she "slept her way to the top?" Like, it's always the woman's fault, right?

AT: But even then, she's never at the top.

DS: No, but it's Monica Lewinsky in a bow. What an awful case to look back on. Talk about power imbalance and demonizing a woman. That was awful. And it was like, "oh, Bill Clinton, no, he's the president. I mean, sure, a bit of a transgression, but Monica Lewinsky, oh, my God." The amount of hatred that that woman faced was insane.

AT: In a previous conversation, I forget how this came up, but we were talking about Anita Hill and how when she testified that Clarence Thomas was a sexual predator, basically, in the workplace when he was being confirmed to the Supreme Court, people went after her. And I will say this, Joe Biden went after her, like they are attacking her in every way you can think of in the Senate, but also in the media and in communities. And one of the things that we were discussing in this previous conversation was about how, if you are part of a marginalized community, there is always this hierarchy, right? And if you are seen to be trying to bring down somebody who's actually getting ahead, so in this case, the Black community, the African-American community, she was made out to be the bad guy because one of their community was about to be appointed to the Supreme Court. I believe he was only the second African-American ever to be on the Supreme Court. And they are overlooking the fact that this powerful member of your community is harassing and assaulting someone else in your community, right? Like, again, just the whole blaming the victim because, you need to stay silent because his potential is more important than whatever he's done to you.

DS: That reminded me of part of the research that I did for this project, which was from 1948. And I always pull up the year because I'm like, "this was years ago, people. We should know this by now." And it was by Dr. Orrin E. Klapp, who said that people's loyalty to a hero is generally superior of truth and they will vigorously defend them. Which I think is, yep, very much so. And he also goes into who do we think are heroes? And, we do that besides superheroes, in real life, we identify people in power or people with authority. Could be the priest, it could be the schoolteacher, could be the president. The incel culture used to be on the out, the periphery, right? It was there, but it was shrouded in mystery and darkness. And now it's kind of accepted. Incels are in the mainstream, we now have what we call misogynist influencers. Like how scary is that?

AT: Well, the thing about the changes that we're seeing in the US is that this has been a natural progression, right? Like even the cult of celebrity, we elected Ronald Reagan, who did a lot of awful things that we're still feeling the consequences today. We elected an actor to the White House and that happened decades ago,

right? Like people who act like the orange menace is some phenomenon out of nowhere. Like, no, it has all been building to this. The overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, they've been working on that for decades. And so I don't buy this whole idea that this just came out of nowhere. And part of that is media. So you mentioned Joseph Campbell earlier, and his structure around the hero's journey has been used by media writers for decades, right? Like he set the template where if anyone goes and reads this, you'll be like, "oh, yeah, that's so many of the movies and TV shows and books that you've ever consumed follow this template that he laid out." (DS: George Lucas loved him.) Oh, yeah, it's all over *Star Wars*. (DS: Oh, yeah.)

So when you're talking about how, yeah, Joseph Campbell was enshrining this, then it's not surprising when we see things like *Revenge of the Nerds*. And specifically for context, you don't have to go watch the movie. I don't encourage it. But this guy tricks the hot sorority girl into having sex with him because she thinks that he's her boyfriend because they're wearing the same costume. And it's okay because he actually gave her an orgasm, right? So it's totally fine that he raped her by deception. But then even the phrase rape by deception gets into the degrees to which we constantly have had to fight for different types of rape to even be acknowledged, like marital rape, rape by deception, rape of an unconscious woman, right? These are all rape. And yet even getting legislators and judges and police to acknowledge that is just seems like this constant battle. And right now it's about digital spaces and digital harassment and the real-world consequences of that.

DS: Well, no one really wants to talk about James Bond as a rapist. *Goldfinger* and *Pussy Galore* where, I was trying to...

AT: He basically overpowers her and she submits.

DS: Yeah, and she was a lesbian, was she not?

AT: Yes, in the context of the film, yeah, it's like an all female little society that they've created for themselves.

DS: But it's okay if the hero is persistent, right? Because... (AT: No means yes.) You know you want to once we get started is this idea. And as a woman, I've been presented with that myself, like, "oh, but you know you want to once we get into it, you might not want to now, but just let me force you for a few minutes and I'm sure that you will get into it." And it's like, no.

AT: But that's also the idea that a woman who submits, who gives in, may be doing it for self-protection, right? Like that guy's got a gun. I don't remember exactly how the scene played out, but I'm quite certain James Bond had a gun.

DS: What about the stereotype, though, of women giving in to get it over with? That's not consent, though. That's like, you get so tired of fighting that you're like, oh, God, all right, whatever. But it's like... (AT: Still coercion.) Oh, yeah. (AT: It's a degree of coercion.) Massively.

AT: And like we were saying, like sleeping her way to the top, if you are coercing a woman by withholding promotions, withholding salary increases, threatening their job, their livelihood, their ability to possibly support their kids or just themselves, that's coercion. That is rape.

DS: Yeah. And this is where I feel like a lot of men duck out of the conversation is that it is very uncomfortable for most of them to come to terms with the definition of rape and sexual assault. And because most of them would have been to a certain degree guilty of it at some point or another, because it was so normalized. Like my almost 10-year-old daughter asked me recently, how would that come to be normalized, Mom? And I had to give her, a kind of innocent but disturbing story. Not that those two things really go together, but from my own

childhood where I remembered, the older boys would, this is a bit graphic, basically whack you on the head with their penis and I would get very upset, but then nobody else would be upset, right? So you're demonized for standing up for yourself and this gradually eats away at your resistance. It gradually gaslights you to the point when it becomes something else, you no longer stand up and say something because you have been convinced over time that what you're saying isn't right. Your experience of this isn't right. It's just a joke.

AT: But then if you don't come forward, it's used against you anyway.

DS: Yeah. And if I'd stood up and said, no, that's sexual assault, people would be going, "whoa, stop exaggerating. Don't take it so seriously." Not that I knew at the time what sexual assault was, but I knew it was wrong. But this whole complicitness of everyone else, right? And that's something that I think about a lot actually is this whole kind of societal gaslighting of victims, of people who speak out about something and people erode their confidence or their belief in their own truth. And it's extremely disturbing. But then we have movies like *Ace Ventura* and comedy movies, particularly with Jim Carrey, where rape is, again, a plot device and it's for humor. It's funny, right? And it's really not. And how did we ever accept that?

AT: Well, especially even today, because those *Ace Ventura* movies were over 20 years ago at this point. But even today, I was watching something about how in the show *The Boys*, sexual assault on a male character is used for laughs. It's not treated seriously. It's not treated the way you would expect if the victim were female. And similarly, in the Me Too movement, you had people like Terry Crews, who is a very large former athlete, muscular Black man. And he was talking about having, I believe was an agent, grab his crotch at an event. And so he came out and talked publicly about, that is sexual assault. And people were having a go at him because I think it's very much the idea that even men can be vulnerable shifts that dynamic. And so I actually wouldn't be surprised if they go after men who talk about being victimized harder than they go after women. I don't know that for sure. I'm not saying that that is statistically true, but psychologically, I would not be surprised.

DS: But a lot of men aren't even allowed to frame their experience as rape, right? If something happens to a guy at a party when he's passed out. And this reminds me of these horrible stories that I grew up with, boys falling asleep at parties and then waking up with like toothbrushes in their anus and really graphic things that were portrayed as just jokes. So I remember when I was getting married, I was terrified of the Box Night because of all of the stories I'd heard of sexual assault and I mean of like the man, but also putting them on a train naked without a return ticket, like all of these horrendous things that were supposed to be a rite of passage. Because if you fall asleep, you're asking for it. It's very problematic. And I don't know if this is just my personality, but I've always been the one to vigorously fight against those things. I've had people wanting to shave a friend's eyebrows who passed out and I would vigorously defend, physically get in between and go, no, no. And like, surely I'm not, more moral than the rest of people, like I'm assuming that people know what they're doing is wrong.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast. And remember well-behaved women rarely make history.