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**Analysis and Reflection Paper**

**(1) Discuss your reactions to the elements of the movie; what was going through your mind as you were following the story line?**

The Accused captures the horrors of sexual violence and the difficulty of navigating the justice system. The movie reminded me of a recent experience with a client in which I had to accompany her to a court hearing related to a sexual crime. As the story unfolded, my heart was saddened for my client and what she may have experienced. The legal system is required to maintain the status of innocent until proven guilty, which often results in delayed justice. Similarly, justice may not be administered as one hopes because of the nature of the legal system. In the movie, the victim did all the right things to achieve justice. She went to a hospital, had a forensic exam, and contacted legal counsel. In my experience, women either do not have access to these services or are too traumatized by the event to take immediate action. Thus, it is almost impossible to prove a crime was committed. The woman in the film was able to see her attackers locked away swiftly. This is not always the case for women in the real world.

**(2) Some movies, such as this one, depict people who commit extremely violent acts but do not suffer the consequences. In your opinion, what kind of meaning and impact does this have on the viewer?**

The reality is that many perpetrators walk free. This is a sad but true reality for many women. This movie has a happy ending, but that is often not the case for survivors of sexual violence. Even in this movie, the rapists received a light sentence to protect their reputation. These movies tend to leave the viewer with a sense of hopelessness. We pity those who have suffered and feel the legal system is ill-equipped to protect them.

**(3) In your opinion, is there a relationship between pornography and violence against women? Support your opinion with references from the literature or statistics.**

Pornography has contributed to violence against women. Pornographic material creates unrealistic sexual encounters that illicit the greatest possible reaction from the viewer. Many people have an addiction to pornography that negatively impacts their ability to have healthy sexual relationships. Thus, they are turning to sexually explicit material on a regular basis for pleasure. The premise of many pornographic materials involves the subjugation of women and violent sexual behaviors. This leads men and women to desire violent sexual interactions and begin to see them as normal. According to DeKeseredy & Corsionos (2015), pornography leads to more violent behavior against women. Their study showed that porn results in more violent actions against others (DeKeseredy & Corsionos, 2015) and increased intimate partner violence. Other studies have shown that pornography consumption is rapidly increasing which may result in more violence against women (Tarzia & Tyler, 2021).

**(4) Should alcohol or drugs be considered mitigating circumstances in cases of rape or murder? Why or why not?**

Alcohol inhibits an individual’s ability to make logical decisions. Both men and women can become so inebriated with alcohol that they do not remember chunks of time. Thus, alcohol and drugs should be mitigating circumstances in rape cases. Depending on the degree of intoxication, neither the accused nor the accuser may be able to remember the details of the event. Consent may have been given without the accuser remembering. This is why it can be very difficult to convict perpetrators of rape when drugs and alcohol are involved without witnesses or physical evidence.

In murder cases, drugs and alcohol are not mitigating circumstances. Murder is illegal regardless of whether you are under the influence or not. Sex is not illegal when sober, forced sex is illegal. Whereas murder is always illegal and forced.

**(5) Should a woman’s dress or provocative behavior be treated as extenuating circumstances in a rape case? Why or why not?**

Clothing is a form of self-expression that is both culturally and individually specific. Regardless of the cultural setting or circumstances, clothing does not indicate consent. A woman's or man’s clothing choice should not be a subject of consideration in a rape case. Similarly, provocative behavior does not indicate consent. There are countless settings where sexually provocative behavior is common but not indicative of consent. For example, in a dance club, a woman may dance erotically for several people and refuse physical contact. Sexual behavior is a common aspect of party culture but does not indicate sexual desire. Dancing and flirting are part of the party culture. Even in strip clubs, one of our culture’s most blatantly sexual environments, men are usually not allowed to touch the performers. If one is not allowed to touch a stripper who is almost completely naked, why would they think a woman wearing a short skirt is evidence of consent to sex? It simply is not. Thus, clothing and provocative behavior are not extenuating circumstances in a rape case.

**(6) What steps could police officers and hospitals take to ensure right victims are treated humanely and compassionately?**

Police officers and hospital staff should immediately call sexual assault hotlines to connect survivors with victim services such as forensic exams. They should limit the amount of time the survivor has to share their story. This could be done by taking a single statement and connecting them with an advocate who can support them throughout the process. At Partnership, clients are taken to the Rape Crisis Center and provided an advocate who can help with finding case management services, counseling, and exams and support them in court. This can be achieved by training hospital staff and police about trauma-informed care and resources in their area. This can help them understand the importance of not retraumatizing victims of sexual crimes.

**(7) As a social worker assigned to her case, what aspects from Sarah’s life or personality traits would you build upon to assist her in her crisis? What protective factors helped Sarah throughout the story to grow from victim to survivor?**

As a social worker assigned to Sarah’s case, I would have intervened during her time in the hospital. She was bombarded with individuals who were making her tell her story repeatedly. I would have helped mitigate traumatization and connected her with resources when she left the hospital. She needed financial assistance, counseling services, and overall case management. She struggled to continue working due to the stress of the workplace and television programs. I would have held a goal-setting session with her after she returned home. This would allow her to decide how she wanted to proceed and what assistance she would need to achieve these goals. For example, her stress at work could have been mitigated by asking her boss to change to a channel without the news. I would also connect her with trauma-informed counseling sessions to help her heal. Sarah needed to have a sense of control over her situation. Thus, I would have encouraged her to decide how she wanted to proceed with the case. She needed to determine her own future and how to share her story.

**(8) What conformity studies in social psychology can be used to understand the behavior of the bystanders in The Mill bar who do nothing to help Sarah Tobias?**

The bystanders in the bar acted out of shock and conformity. Some chose to cheer on the violence, and others froze in shock. A study by Paruzel-Czachura and associates (2024) found that half of the participants in their study conformed to the opinions and actions of the group even when wrong. They knew the correct answer but chose the wrong answer due to the pressures of the group (Paruzel-Czachura et. al., 2024). Another study found that seventy-five percent of participants conformed to the incorrect answers in a study at least once. Similarly, forty-six percent of participants in a study about punishments for sexual harassment conformed to mislabeling, misreporting, and poorly punishing sexual harassment cases (Goodman et al., 2020). These studies show that it is common for people to conform to the group even when they are knowingly wrong. Individuals are so easily influenced by others that they will ignore what is right most of the time for the sake of following the group.

**(9) If the client is of a different cultural background than yours, do you as a therapist have an obligation to respect cultural values and practices that may be harmful or degrading (for example: slapping children for misbehaving)?**

Clinicians are obligated to respect the cultural differences of clients and meet their needs accordingly. Clients come from a variety of backgrounds and treatment should be catered to the client’s cultural background. Actions in one culture may be considered disrespectful in another. There is a degree to which we must respect cultural traditions unless a law is being broken or a person is in imminent danger. For example, a person may be from a culture that practices female circumcision. This may be acceptable in their culture but is illegal in the therapist’s. The therapist is obligated to report abuse and neglect. Other traditions, such as spanking, may not be mandatory to report. The therapist must respect the parenting standards of that client, as it is not necessarily abuse, even if they would not practice them in their own home.

**(10) How did the movie change or add to your understanding of how to help a client in handling a personal crisis?**

The Accused gave a practical example of why self-determination is a critical social work value. Sarah, the client in the story, was not granted the ability to make decisions about her case in critical moments. Thus, she felt her story was inaccurately told, and she had little influence over her own life. She advocated for herself and sought opportunities to tell her story. The lawyer chose to prosecute the rapists on non-sexual charges because she knew it would ensure they went to prison. She did not consider how her client would react to this decision. The client responded negatively to this conviction because she felt that it inaccurately portrayed her experience and stunted her recovery. As social workers, we must listen to the perspective of our clients and allow them to have ownership of how their story unfolds. In a crisis situation, we should work with the client to create solutions according to their understanding of the situation and goals for the future.

**References**

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