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### Rape, Race, and Representation: The Power of Discourse, Discourses of Power, and the Reconstruction of Heterosexuality

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# Rape, Race, and Representation: The Power of Discourse, Discourses of Power, and the Reconstruction of Heterosexuality

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Elizabeth M. Iglesias

49 Vand. L. Rev. 869 (1996)

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*In this Article, Professor Iglesias offers a number of reform trajectories through which the feminist struggle against rape can be made more effective. Professor Iglesias argues that legal strategies aimed at reforming criminal laws and enforcement practices are unlikely to eliminate rape because case processing decisions are inevitably discretionary. Moreover, these strategies only target after-the-rape interventions. This Article directs out attention instead to the policies and practices that construct women's sexual vulnerability.*

*Professor Iglesias first links rape to women's sexual vulnerability and connects both of these phenomena to the images of commodified femininity and pornographic masculinity through which the dominant culture makes male power appear to depend on female powerlessness. The initial focus is on the way images of women as mother, virgin, and whore promote the practice of male sexual dominance. She then argues that images of mother deployed in white, American cultural discourses promote policies that pressure women to abdicate sexual autonomy and maternal power to the will of a dominant male partner. By contrasting the images of mother in Black and Latin cultures, Professor Iglesias provides a critical perspective on the way the regulation of motherhood increases women's sexual vulnerability. The virgin/whore dichotomy is also used to restrict the parameters of women's sexual autonomy. The image of the sacred prostitute is introduced as one way to shatter the cultural power of this dichotomy.*

*Circulating alternative images of women is, however, only a first step in a struggle where success depends equally on the circulation of alternative images of men. Accordingly, Professor Iglesias links the struggle against rape to an ideological effort to promote narratives of masculinity that redefine the meaning of power and shatter the delusion that male power depends upon female powerlessness. Thus the Article attacks pornographic narratives as truncated distortions of the mature masculine and contrasts them to the kinds of power that mature masculinity calls men to enact. Finally, Professor Iglesias examines specific instances where these alternative images of women and men might be used to reform policies and legal doctrines through which many women's sexual vulnerability is currently constructed. This analysis focuses on welfare eligibility rules and child-custody determinations.*