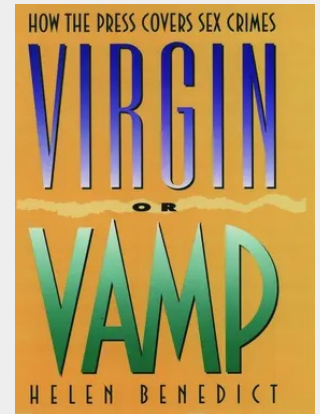


Virgin or Vamp

Sex-related crimes such as rape and rape-murder are popular fodder for the print press. They lend themselves to huge, racy headlines (as in the recent trial of William Kennedy Smith), and they sell papers. Yet little attention has been paid to how the print press tends to cover such crimes. This book examines recent cases and exposes the myths and assumptions of the press. The author has interviewed reporters who covered the trials, questioning them about their use of language (and thus revealing the biases inherent in the words they choose), and the result is a study of how sex-crime news is made and reported. Benedict focuses on four cases: The Greta Rideout case in 1979, the first marital rape case to reach trial; the New Bedford gang rape in 1983; the Chambers/Levin case in Central Park; and the Central Park jogger case. She chose these cases not only because they were the most nationally prominent in the decade, and therefore the most talked about, but because each symbolizes a critical element in public opinion of sex crime cases. Rideout brought up questions over the basic rights of husbands and wives; the New Bedford case became notorious for its ethnic conflicts; Levin brought up issues of class; and the Central Park jogger cases revolved around race. Marriage, ethnicity, class, and race are revealing windows through which to examine public attitude toward crime and toward women. Benedict also discusses the history of media reporting on sex crimes, and debunks long-held myths about the nature of sex crimes.

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