

## Rape Culture Discourse and Female Impurity: Genesis 34 as a Case Study

Jessica M. Keady

The essays in this volume testify to the multiple ways in which religious texts, traditions, practices, and beliefs intersect with contemporary cultural ideologies and discourses that support rape culture and gender violence. These intersections are particularly important, given the authority and impact that religious texts and their use in teaching, preaching, and private devotions can have on determining readers' attitudes towards sex and gender. In this chapter, I contribute to the discussion by exploring the relationships between *biblical* conceptions of gender violence and impurity, and *contemporary* rape culture and purity culture discourses, using Genesis 34 (the rape of Dinah) as a case study.<sup>1</sup> Biblical rape texts such as Genesis 34, can serve as a lens through which we can examine and critique ancient ideations of gender violence and purity; yet they also allow us to trace the ways these ideations continue to shape and inform contemporary understandings of rape. I begin by defining rape culture and purity culture, before outlining some recent events that give voice to their dominant discourses. I then uncover the constructions of literary rape in Genesis 34 (focusing on several key verses), and address various interpretations of Dinah's sexual violation in scholarly literature. Finally, I consider the relationship between defilement, rape, and violence in Genesis 34, drawing on contemporary discourses embedded in rape and purity cultures. By so doing, I seek to encourage readers and interpreters to perform an act of "political resistance" to biblical ideologies that sustain contemporary rape and purity cultures (particularly those pertaining to female sexuality and purity), and to assess the possible significance that such ideologies have for biblical readers today (Gravett 2004,

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<sup>1</sup> A shortened version of this chapter appeared in *The Reader*, Winter 2016, 115 (5), pp. 18-20.

p.298). As Gravett explains, recognizing rape in biblical texts “opens up the text beyond the bounds set thousands of years ago and invites translators to be more than passive recipients of ancient words and to do more than simply reinscribe the cultural norms of these past societies onto the modern stage” (pp. 298–9).

### *Defining Rape Culture and Purity Culture*

I stood there examining my body beneath the stream of water and decided: I don’t want my body anymore. I was terrified of it, I didn’t know what had been in it, if it had been contaminated, who had touched it. I wanted to take off my body like a jacket and leave it at the hospital with everything else. (Cited in Buncombe 2016)

This powerful quote, outlining a woman’s sense of bodily defilement and contamination after being raped, is taken from a twelve-page letter written to Brock Turner by the twenty-three-year-old woman he sexually assaulted in 2015. The woman read out the letter directly to Turner during his sentencing hearing, describing to him with painful honesty the multiple ways her rape continues to affect her everyday life. Turner was convicted on three counts of sexual assault,<sup>2</sup> and was subsequently sentenced by Judge Aaron Persky to a six-month prison sentence and ordered to register as a sex offender (Grecian 2016). The prosecutors of the case had originally requested a six-year sentence, and the Judge’s leniency sparked public fury. Reactions included an online campaign to have Judge Persky recalled (this petition received over 500,000 signatures), blog posts and newspaper articles that discussed the significance of the case for rape survivors,<sup>3</sup> celebrity supporters and campaigners reading out the woman’s

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<sup>2</sup> Turner was found guilty of three felonies: assault with intent to rape an intoxicated woman, sexually penetrating an intoxicated person with a foreign object, and sexually penetrating an unconscious person with a foreign object.

<sup>3</sup> Following the lead of sexual assault prevention advocates, I have chosen to use the term “survivor,” rather than “victim,” when referring to people impacted by sexual violence. I do, however, use these terms interchangeably from time to time, particularly when referring to “victim blame” as an intrinsic part of rape culture.

letter on public forums, and vibrant debates and discussions on social media (especially Facebook and Twitter) (Li 2016).

Many of the discussions surrounding this sexual assault, the subsequent trial, and Turner's sentencing, have been located by participants within a wider rape culture framework, in an attempt to highlight and challenge the injustices experienced by the rape survivor and put the perpetrator at the centre of his crime. As Debra Ferreday has argued, the term "rape culture" indicates the need to understand rape as an intrinsic *part* of culture—a complex social phenomenon that is the product of gendered, raced, and classed social relations, which are central to patriarchal and heterosexist cultures (2015, p.22). Rape culture is a term used to describe the sociocultural normalization of sexual violence and its links to broader patterns of misogyny and sexism. Such normalization is woven through our global, civil, social, and cultural discourses: rape-supportive hashtags trend on Twitter; rape jokes are regularly used on TV shows and radio programmes as a source of humour and entertainment; judges hand out lenient sentences to convicted rapists due to the perpetrators' age, sporting or academic ability, and lack of criminal history; and rape complainants are commonly critiqued and blamed for their own assaults because of their dress, alcohol intake, and sexual history. It is within this rape culture framework that religious texts such as Genesis 34 are being read, preached, and interpreted.

Moreover, rape cultures also give expression to various discourses around issues of purity, which again may shape the contexts in which religious traditions are read. Purity culture can be understood as an intrinsic part of rape culture, which blames rape survivors, particularly female survivors, for their own violation (Matthieu 2015). The dominant discourse of purity culture demands that women should remain sexually (and thus spiritually) "pure," and that sexual activity outside of marriage renders a woman sexually and morally "defiled"—"used goods" with little or no social value. Additionally, purity culture discourses

insist that it is the woman's responsibility to "preserve" and "guard" her purity, by protecting her bodily boundaries from unwanted encroachments. To take a contemporary example, it is not uncommon for an applicant seeking political asylum to omit mention of their experiences of sexual violence, especially if their religious tradition considers extra-marital sex a sin, even in the context of rape. For, to acknowledge their rape is to acknowledge their own sense of sinfulness and impurity, bringing shame upon both themselves and their family (Einhorn and Berthold 2011, p.41).

A recent event in Wales likewise demonstrates the devastating power of purity culture discourses to shape public and judicial understandings of rape. In June 2015, a Cardiff man was jailed for sixteen years after repeatedly raping a young Muslim woman and forcing her to marry him (Wright 2015).<sup>4</sup> This man had systematically raped the woman for months, before threatening to release hidden camera footage of her naked in the shower unless she became his wife. This footage was taken after her first rape, when, according to journalist Benjamin Wright, the perpetrator had "cruelly stolen" her virginity. Judge Williams, who was presiding over the case, told the defendant during sentencing, "When you first raped her, she was still a virgin—something which you would use to ensure her silence ... You made her feel that she was no longer marriage material (for anyone else) in the hope that she would turn to you ... Over the months of which you raped her ... it was your intention to cause her irreparable harm so that no one would want her" (cited in Wright 2015). Although sympathetic to the woman's plight, Williams's (and Wright's) language nevertheless reflects purity culture ideology; the perpetrator's violent actions against this woman's body (he bound and gagged her before raping her, and subsequently used threats and coercion to prevent her from reporting her assault) are evaluated as wrong, not in terms of their aggressive disregard for

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<sup>4</sup> This man was the first person in the UK to be jailed under the newly formed forced marriage law that was criminalised under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act in 2014.

her bodily and sexual integrity, but rather because they are a source of her sexual defilement. No longer a virgin, she is reduced to something less valuable, an impure, damaged body that “no one would want.”

Another way that rape culture and purity culture may impact people’s experiences of sexual violence is in relation to survivors’ willingness and ability to seek justice through the judicial system. In the United Kingdom, nine out of ten rapes go unreported and only 6 percent of reported rapes end in a conviction (Lees-Massey, Morris, and Tanner 2016). A survey conducted by research group YouthSight at the beginning of 2015 suggested that half of female undergraduates and a third of male undergraduates know someone who has suffered sexual assault or unwanted advances ranging from groping to rape (Goldhill and Bingham 2015). The survey also found that 34 percent of female students polled indicated that they had experienced some form of assault or abuse. Meanwhile, one in eight male students had also been subjected to groping or unwanted advances. Significantly, almost half (43 percent) of the female students who had experienced sexual assault or abuse at university did not report their ordeal to anyone—including family and friends. The survey also revealed that 60 percent of male students who were survivors of sexual assault had likewise not disclosed their assault to anyone.

These statistics are disturbing, both in terms of the ubiquity of sexual assault and the prevalence of occasions when these are not reported. This raises the question of whether purity and rape cultures, particularly the issues of victim blaming and shaming, are at play here. Focusing particularly on female rape survivors, E. J. Graff (2013) argues that understanding rape as primarily a *sexual* violation places the burden on women to protect their bodies’ purity; subsequently, public perceptions of sexual assault typically focus on the woman and her actions (was she drunk? What was she wearing? Did she flirt with her “attacker”? Was she “asking for it”?). For example, in his statement to Judge Aaron Persky,

Brock Turner placed the blame for his act of sexual assault on a student “party culture” of excessive drinking (Levin and Wong 2016). This allowed Turner’s defence lawyers to argue that the complainant was so intoxicated by alcohol that she could not know whether Turner had assaulted her without her consent (Grecian 2016). Her failure to adequately guard her own sexual boundaries (and thus preserve her “purity”) rendered her culpable for her own violation. Gender violence, and the rape culture discourses that sustain it, are thus built upon unequal gendered power relationships, which are themselves supported by patriarchy (Kilmartin 2007, 5). These relationships create and sustain the rhetoric of rape cultures so engrained within our world—a world where gender violence is normalized and survivors are blamed for their own assaults, deterring them, ultimately, from seeking support and justice.

### *Reading Biblical Rape Narratives*

Given the global prevalence of rape cultures, how can contemporary issues surrounding consent, sexuality, purity, and forced marriage inform our reading of biblical rape narratives, allowing us to read these against the grain of rape and purity culture discourses? To answer this question, I am guided by the recent work of Rhiannon Graybill (2015), who discusses the challenges of teaching sexually violent biblical texts within American universities (many of which are themselves confronting crises of sexual violence on campus). Given that the UK statistics of campus sexual assault, outlined above, are equally shocking, I want to follow Graybill’s lead and review the importance of teaching biblical rape narratives in ways that directly assess and confront rape and purity cultures.

A reading of biblical rape narratives in light of contemporary rape culture, intentionally juxtaposes ancient and contemporary understandings of sexual violence in order to better understand and respond to such violence (Graybill 2015). Although there are no biblical Hebrew words for “rape” or “rape culture”—as we understand these terms today—

this does not mean that sexual violence is absent from the text. On the contrary, many of the features contemporary commentators identify as central to rape culture—including discourses around female sexuality, male dominance, defilement, and purity—do appear in the Hebrew Bible. There are several descriptions of rape or threatened rape, including the (threat of) rape faced by Sarah (Gen. 12.10-20; 20), the rape of Dinah by the Canaanite prince Shechem (Genesis 34), the fatal gang rape of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19), and the rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13). These biblical texts, and others similarly relating accounts of sexual violence (e.g. Gen. 19:1–11; 39:6–18; Num. 31:15–18; Deut. 21:10–14; 22:23–9; Lam. 5:11; Ezekiel 16; 23; Rev. 2:22–3; 17:16), are read and used in various social and religious settings, including teaching, research, preaching, and various other church educational settings. Without critical and meaningful interpretation, the sexual violence contained within these biblical texts is often either ignored or re-inscribed in contemporary reading communities. As Esther Fuchs insists, readers' propensity to ignore the problematic and misogynistic discourses articulated within biblical rape texts and their interpretive traditions only "reencodes the silence about women's oppression" (2000, p.138). Consequently, these texts need to be read in ways that are sensitive to the rape cultures present within both the biblical text and contemporary societies where they are read, studied, and interpreted as sacred scripture. This allows readers and interpreters to perform an act of political resistance against those patriarchal ideologies pertaining to gender roles, female sexuality, and purity, which are articulated in the biblical traditions, and to assess the possible significance that such ideologies have for biblical readers situated in contemporary rape and purity cultures. . In the following discussion of Genesis 34, I therefore read Dinah's narrative from within my own space of political resistance, highlighting the texts' various articulations of gendered violence, and the ways that these may echo and affirm contemporary rape and purity culture discourses.

### *The Construction of Literary Rape in Genesis 34*

In Genesis 34, Dinah the daughter of Leah and Jacob is portrayed as having been raped by Shechem. After the violent sexual encounter (v. 2), Shechem is so overcome with love for Dinah (v. 3) that he asks his father, Hamor the Hivite, to assist him with his plan to marry her (v. 4). When Jacob hears of his daughter's defilement (*tm* ' ) he remains passive (v. 5), while his sons react strongly (they are "indignant and very angry"; v. 7). When Shechem and Hamor negotiate the marriage with Jacob (vv. 8–12), Dinah's brothers demand that, before there can be any intermarriage between the Jacobite and Shechemite people, all Shechemite males must be circumcised (vv. 14–17). And, while the male Shechemites lie in pain after their mass circumcision, Dinah's brothers attack the city and kill them all, including Shechem and Hamor; they take back Dinah (who has been kept captive by Shechem following her rape) and abduct the Shechemite women and the children (vv. 25–9). When Jacob hears about these actions he condemns his sons (v. 30). In response, they ask if their sister should be treated "like a whore," and it is with this question that the narrative ends (v. 31). Dinah, meanwhile, remains silent throughout the entire narrative. I turn now to look at key verses to discuss the construction of her literary rape.

Dinah is introduced in Gen. 34:1 as the "daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob."<sup>5</sup> Dinah's identity is immediately set in relation to her mother, rather than her father, and it is only after the sexual violation by Shechem that Dinah is identified explicitly as Jacob's daughter (v. 5). This may be because Dinah's defilement has repercussions for Jacob (Stiebert 2013, 50).

In Gen. 34:2 we are introduced to Shechem the "son of Hamor the Hivite." The verse goes on to describe what Shechem did when first encountering Dinah; he "saw her, he seized

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<sup>5</sup> All translations are taken from the NRSV.

her and lay with her by force” (Gen. 34:2). The three main Hebrew verbs used to describe the actions Shechem enacted upon Dinah are *lqh*, *škb*, and *‘nh* (in the piel form). As Blyth (2010, 44) has demonstrated, the reader is granted no access to the underlying motives for Shechem’s actions here and the narrator spends no time revealing the reaction of Dinah’s character to these actions. The narrative as we have it is not interested in Dinah as an individual; she represents the Israelites, just as Shechem represents the Canaanite nation (Shemesh 2007, 2). As such, Dinah’s *personal* experience of rape as a violent assault against her body is eclipsed and ignored.

There has been, and continues to be, disagreement as to whether Dinah is raped in this biblical narrative. Scholars have suggested a range of possibilities with regard to the relationship between Dinah and Shechem, from rape (e.g. Blyth 2010; Klopper 2010; Scholz 2000; Shemesh 2007), statutory rape (Frymer-Kensky 1998), and abduction marriage (e.g. Hankore 2013) to seduction (e.g. Bechtel 1994; Douglas 1993, p.177) and even romantic love (e.g. Fox 1983, p.139). I am inclined to agree with those scholars who argue that Dinah was raped by Shechem. The strongest evidence in favour of this reading is, in my mind, the biblical Hebrew usage and ordering of the three verbs (*lqh*, *škb*, and *‘nh*) used to describe Shechem’s actions towards Dinah in v. 2; some or all of these verbs are likewise found in other biblical narratives that unequivocally denote gendered violence, most significantly the rape of Tamar (cf. 2 Sam. 13:14) and the gang rape of the Levite’s concubine (cf. Judg. 19:25; 20:5).

In its basic form, *lqh* is used in biblical Hebrew to convey the meaning “to take,” or “to seize” and, as such, does not carry any inherent sense of violence or force (e.g. Gen. 21:14; Lev. 8:15; Num. 19:2). Another common use of the verb within biblical texts is the act of “taking” a wife in marriage (e.g. Gen. 4:19, 6:2; Exod. 21:10; Num. 12:1). This meaning is

also recorded in the *Damascus Document*, where *lqh* is used in relation to the observance of correct marriage laws (CD 4:20; 5:7; 7:6). There are, however, also a significant number of passages in the Hebrew Bible where the verb is used to signify the taking of a person in an aggressive manner in order to exert control (e.g. Gen. 14:12; Josh. 8:12; 2 Sam. 10:4). The verb *lqh* is used six more times in Genesis 34 (vv.4, 9, 16, 21, 25, 28) and in four of these verses, it relates to men negotiating with other men to “give” and “take” women as property (vv. 4, 9, 16, 21).

The second verb used in Gen 34:2 is *škb*, which has an array of meanings in Hebrew including, “to lie down,” “to go to bed, lie in bed,” and (as a transitive verb) “to lie [with], have sexual intercourse [with].” In Gen. 34:2, Dinah is the object of *škb*: Shechem “lay with her Blyth’s semantic study of the verb *škb* shows that when it is used to denote sexual behaviour, it primarily describes acts of sexual intercourse that are in some sense deemed illicit within the biblical traditions, including incestuous relationships, adultery, bestiality, homosexuality, sexual intercourse with a menstruant, sex with a prostitute, and premarital sexual relations between a man and an unmarried woman (2010, p.49). In relation to Gen. 34:2, however, it is particularly significant that *škb* is directly preceded by the verb *lqh* (Shechem “took” Dinah and “lay with her”). In other Hebrew Bible texts, when *škb* is preceded by a verb of seizure (e.g. *hzzq*, “to seize,” or *tpś*, “to capture, lay hold of”),<sup>6</sup> it typically depicts a scenario of coercive and aggressive sex, the woman having been forced or seized prior to the sexual act occurring (e.g. Deut. 22:25, 28; 2 Sam. 13:14) (pp.49–50). There is a sense, then, that the strategic use of the verb in Genesis 34 is referring to an illicit, violent, and sexual encounter, especially since the sexual act is described as defiling (v. 5).

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<sup>6</sup> The verb *hzzq* precedes *škb* in Deut. 22:25 and 2 Sam. 13:14, two occasions where the violent nature of the sexual event described is unequivocal. In Deut. 22:28, *škb* follows *tpś*, and again the sexual event depicted is unambiguously coercive.

The third verb used in Gen 34:2 to describe Shechem's sexual encounter with Dinah is *'nh*, which again can convey a wide range of meanings, including "to oppress, afflict" (cf. Exod 1:11), "to humble, humiliate, dishonour" (e.g. 1 Sam. 11:39; Isa. 58:3), and "to abuse, mistreat, overpower" (e.g. Gen. 16:6; Judg. 16:5, 6, 19). In relation to Gen. 34:2, David Clines defines the verb as "to humiliate (a woman sexually) by rape or unlawful sexual intercourse" (2009, p.334) In the Qumran scroll 4QOrdinances<sup>a</sup> (4Q159), *'nh* is used in relation to a woman's humiliation when her virginity is questioned: "If a man brings an accusation against a virgin of Israel, if [it is at the time] he marries her, let him speak and they shall investigate her trustworthiness. If he has not lied about her, she shall be put to death, but if he has testified falsely against her (*'nh*), he shall be fined two minas and may not divorce her all of his life' (4Q159 frag. 2 col. 4 ll. 8–10). In 2 Sam 13:14, the verb of seizure *h̄zq*, along with the two verbs *škb* and *'nh* (in the piel form) are used to describe Amnon's rape of Tamar: 'But he would not listen to her; and he seized (*wayyeḥezaq*) her,<sup>7</sup> he forced her (*way'anneha*), and lay (*wayyiškab*) with her.'" There is thus strong linguistic evidence to demonstrate that, in Gen. 34:2, the use of *škb* with the piel form of *'nh*—preceded by the verb of seizure *lqh*—conveys an aggressive sexual encounter between Shechem and Dinah. Yet, as I mentioned above, Dinah's experience of this encounter is never articulated in the narrative; rather, we hear only of the voices and responses of the male characters—her father, her brothers, and her rapist.

Despite the linguistic evidence suggesting Dinah's encounter with Shechem was coercive, some scholars have argued against this reading of Gen. 34:2, preferring to interpret the events in this verse as a consensual sexual encounter. Often, these scholars appeal to v. 3

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<sup>7</sup> The NRSV translates this verb as "being stronger than she was"; I have amended the translation to highlight the use of the verb of seizure here.

as evidence for their interpretation, where the narrator tells us that, following the sexual act in v. 2, Shechem's "soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her." Lyn Bechtel, for example, argues that Shechem did not rape Dinah, because "sociological studies reveal that rapists feel hostility and hatred toward their victims, not love," (1994, p.28). Gordon Wenham, meanwhile, describes Shechem as an "affectionate young man," whose love and affection for Dinah (expressed in v. 3) denotes "precisely the right bond between a married couple" (1994, pp.311, 317). Yet these arguments seem only to exonerate Shechem's sexual assault and frame it in near romantic terms, while implying that a woman or man cannot be raped by somebody who loves them or wants to marry them. The account I mentioned at the start of this chapter, where a man abducted and raped a young woman before coercing her into marriage, attests all too painfully that these understandings of sexual violence are simply not true. By treating Shechem sympathetically because of his "love" for Dinah, readers reinforce the common misperception (which lies at the heart of rape cultures) that rape is first and foremost a *sexual* act, driven by desire rather than by misogyny and violence. This misperception can likewise be heard echoing in the statement made by Brock Turner's father, who insisted that his son's life should not be ruined over "twenty minutes of action" (cited in Fantz 2016). This remark erases the violence inherent within Turner's acts of sexual assault, not to mention the devastating effects of these assaults on his victim. By lauding Shechem as a man "in love," or Dinah's "perfect" partner, readers of Genesis 34 likewise erase the violence of this duo's encounter in v. 2 and ignore the trauma it would have caused to Dinah's character. As Ilona Rashkow asserts, "the three verbs of force chosen by the narrator here [in v. 2] negate any possibility of seduction or mutual consent and imprints the act of violence on the reader's mind" (1990, p.220). To insist that a narrative of rape is really a love story is simply to repeat and condone the violent act evoked therein.

### *Defilement, Rape and Violence in Gen 34*

In Gen 34:5, we witness Jacob's (lack of) reaction to his daughter's sexual violation: "Now Jacob heard that Shechem had defiled (*timme*) his daughter Dinah; but his sons were with his cattle in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came." There are only three references to someone being "defiled" in Genesis and each one appears in this chapter to describe the impact of Shechem's sexual violation of Dinah (vv. 5, 13, 27). The verb is key to understanding the remainder of the narrative and, after its first appearance in v. 5, is used again twice with reference to the vindication of Dinah's "defilement" by her brothers (vv. 13, 27). On each of the three occasions it is used, *timme* appears in the piel perfect tense, which translates as "to make impure, make unclean, defile, or desecrate" (Clines 2009, p.141). In Genesis 34, it is Dinah (and not Shechem) who is labelled as ritually unacceptable after her sexual assault.

For some scholars, however, Dinah's defilement is less the result of her rape per se than an effect of Shechem "taking" her virginity before she was properly given to him in marriage (e.g. Feinstein 2014, p.67). Although Dinah's sexual status is not discussed in Genesis 34, we might presume that she was unmarried, and therefore likely a virgin (given that the text makes no mention of her husband). This is also hinted at in the Septuagint translation of this narrative, which describes Dinah as a *parthenos* (a term that can be translated as "virgin"). For Graff (2013), a culture in which women are expected to remain virgins until marriage is a rape culture; women's bodies are used primarily for procreation or male pleasure—women must therefore strive to maintain their sexual purity. And certainly, in the biblical traditions, a woman's social "value" was typically measured according to her sexual chastity and purity; an unmarried non-virgin could not expect to garner her father a generous bride price, as her socio-sexual currency had been diminished (Brownmiller 1993, pp.19–21). As with the woman I mentioned earlier, whom the judge described as being

sexually undesirable after her rape (Wright 2015), Dinah too is identified in this biblical text, not as a victim of a violent crime, but as a woman who has been sexually “defiled” by the loss of her virginity outside of marriage.

Continuing this focus on shame, Johanna Stiebert suggests that Dinah’s defilement may have resulted from the fact that her rape was considered a source of dishonour, not necessarily for Dinah herself, but for her father and brothers, because Shechem had not sought their permission before having sex with their kinswoman (2013, p.52). For, according to biblical norms of sexual etiquette, a woman’s sexuality “belonged” to her male kin, typically her father, and then her husband. Moreover, male honour was also measured by how successfully men were able to protect the sexual purity of their women (Brayford 2007, 375; Baaz and Stern 2013, 19). Read within this framework of sexual violence and (dis)honour, Dinah’s rape is again transformed from a violent assault on her personal integrity to a means of dishonouring and humiliating her male kin, because Shechem had exposed the Jacobite men’s incapacity to protect “their” women. Shechem’s misappropriation of Dinah’s sexuality (particularly his “theft” of her virginity can thus be understood as an act that brought shame upon her father Jacob, and her brothers, rather than an event that had a personal, devastating effect upon her.

Reading Shechem’s violation of Dinah as a violation of Jacobite male honour helps to explain Dinah’s brothers’ aggressive and deceitful reaction to hearing about her defilement. On learning what has happened, they plan their revenge (Gen 34.7). Shechem’s father Hamor proposes a programme of intermarriage between the Hivites and Jacobites, with both groups swapping their daughters with the other (v. 9). Dinah’s brothers Simeon and Levi appear at first to agree, but only on the condition that “every male among you be circumcised” (v. 15, echoing back to the covenant of circumcision made in Genesis 17). Throughout these negotiations, Dinah’s life and her sexual integrity are treated as objects to be negotiated and

exchanged amongst men (vv. 8–16). And still, she is rendered silent by the narrator, her thoughts about her sexual assault and the prospect of marriage to her rapist completely elided from the text.

Male violence continues in Gen. 34:25–30. As they had planned, Simeon and Levi kill all the Shechemite males in the city and take the women and children as war spoil. After killing Hamor and Shechem with the sword, the brothers “took Dinah” (v. 26) out of Shechem’s house and went away. The use and echo of the verb *lqh* in vv. 2 and 26 is significant, as the reader can trace the aggression inherent within the narrative from these two pivotal moments—when Dinah is first “taken” by Shechem and then, when she is “taken back” by her brothers. Again, her silence in this narrative is absolute. What she herself thought about the events around these “takings” is left unspoken. Had she been given the opportunity to write a letter and read it out to Shechem, what would it have said? How would she have described the impact of his rape and abduction on her literary life? Yet, like so many survivors of sexual violence, Dinah’s voice—*her* narrative—are silenced and ignored.

Jacob expresses disapproval at his son’s actions (Gen. 34:30). They retort, by asking their father, “Should our sister be treated like a prostitute (*zōnāh*)?” (Gen. 34:31). Exactly what they meant by this question is unclear. In the Hebrew Bible, a prostitute was understood to be a woman whose sexuality remained under her own control rather than that of her male kin. Dinah’s brothers’ words here may therefore suggest the real crime that took place in v. 2 was not Dinah’s bodily violation, but rather Shechem’s dishonourable act of “taking” her virginity without first seeking her father’s consent.<sup>8</sup> And thus Genesis 34 ends—Dinah is still silent. Like the many rape survivors who feel they can never share their experience with

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<sup>8</sup> This verse evokes another reference to prostitution in Genesis 38, where Judah sleeps with his daughter-in-law Tamar after she disguised herself as a prostitute (*zōnāh*). After negotiations, ‘he went into her and she conceived by him’ (v.15). Later, she is accused of “playing the whore” (v. 24). In Lev. 19:29, a harlotrous daughter (*zōnāh*) is described as a source of defilement and depravity (cf. Lev 21:7, 9, 14).

anyone, even family and friends, Dinah too is denied the opportunity to give voice to her own experience of sexual violence.

### *Conclusions*

As Gravett (2004, 298) demonstrates, recognizing rape in biblical narratives opens the text and its literary figures, allowing readers, teachers, and educators to question and query the social and gendered roles of these ancient societies in relation to our own. I have used Genesis 34 as a case study to demonstrate the importance of reading biblical rape narratives in a wider framework that takes seriously the depictions of sexual violence expressed therein. In a modern context, the narrative of Dinah in Genesis 34 touches on larger issues surrounding rape, female sexuality, purity and the status of women in biblical texts (Graybill 2015). These issues need to be read, written about, taught, and understood within a framework that seeks to actively avoid victim blaming and shaming, and takes into consideration the rape and purity cultures which pervade so many of our own cultural contexts. Reading Genesis 34 with this in mind, has demonstrated that biblical texts may echo and perpetuate the damaging discourses prevalent within contemporary rape and purity cultures. This biblical narrative testifies to the silencing of rape survivors, the exoneration of rapists, the dismissal of rape as “just sex,” and the insistence that survivors are somehow “damaged” or “defiled” by their rape. As readers living within global rape and purity cultures, we surely have a responsibility to contest these discourses, both in the biblical texts and within our own cultural locations. If scholars, clergy, and educators simply refer to biblical rape narratives, such as Genesis 34, as love stories, filled with passion, romance and seduction, or accept unquestioningly the text’s own insistence that Dinah is “defiled” by her rape, then they risk perpetuating the harmful rhetoric that underpins many rape and purity cultures throughout the world today.

Unlike Dinah, the survivor of Brock Turner's sexual assault was empowered with a voice to tell her story. While Dinah's own story would have been very different, separated as it was by space and time, this contemporary testimony invites us to remember the urgent necessity for *all* survivors' narratives (including ancient survivors, such as Dinah) to be heard. For testimonies such as this break the terrible silencing of rape survivors wrought by the shame and blame they so often encounter within rape and purity culture discourses. The letter ends with a powerful message to survivors, who, like Dinah, are denied a space to let their voices be heard:

On nights when you feel alone, I am with you. When people doubt you or dismiss you, I am with you. I fought every day for you. So never stop fighting, I believe you' (cited in Buncombe 2016).

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