LARRY BARON AND
MURRAY A. STRAUS

Four
Theories
of Rape in
American
Society

A STATE-LEVEL ANALYSIS

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Four Theories of RAPE
In American Society
A State-Level Analysis
Larry Baron & Murray A. Straus

Women are in much greater danger of being raped in some American states than in others. Alaska, Nevada, and California, for example, have consistently registered many times more rapes per capita than North Dakota, Maine, and Iowa. In this important book, Larry Baron and Murray A. Straus examine the evidence in support of four seemingly contradictory theories and integrate them into a single sociocultural theory that accounts for these differences in the incidence of rape. Their findings should make a significant contribution toward efforts to mitigate the conditions that make rape likely to occur.

Using innovative data bases, Baron and Straus assess the following theories: that rape reflects patterns of male dominance; that it is promoted by pornographic mate-
rials; that cultural norms approving of violence increase the likelihood of rape; and that it is related to the disorganization of society (poorly integrated and unstable communities). Baron and Straus find that the combination of sexism, social disorganiza-
tion, unemployment, economic inequality, and the alienating conditions of urban life precipitates rape. They urge the implementation of policies that will reduce the root causes of rape. These include constructing a society in which women have equal rights with men; erad-
icating the demoralizing and brutalizing conditions of poverty and economic inequality; strengthening family and community ties to reduce the alienation and stress of urban life; and restructuring male gender roles, in both sexual and nonsexual relationships, to emphasize warmth, equality, and supportiveness rather than aloofness, dominance, and violence.

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