
BACKGROUND

▼ Historical Perspectives

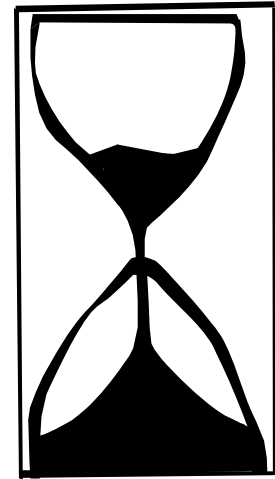
▼ Mythology

▼ Socialization

Section**1**

BACKGROUND

Among life's many ironies, one of the most socially damaging is that humankind, with all its so-called intelligence, cannot see the devastating effect rape has on all its members, male and female. Less intelligent life forms are caught up in the wondrous cycles of nature and mate according to its intricate dictates. So, one can only imagine the realizations conceived in the prehistoric minds of the first sexual assault victim and the first rapist. However, after eons, those revelations have not evolved right along with Homo sapiens into knowledge of immense importance and subsequent enlightenment. But based upon the rape statistics of today, the old adage “the only thing you can count on is change” is laughable. The sexual assault survivor of today very likely feels no different than her prehistoric sister; the prehistoric rapist and today’s rapist share the same motive: power.



Historical Perspectives of Rape

Our prehistoric sisters learned early on that they could not protect themselves or each other from many dangers. So they sought male protection. Though crucial to survival, the idea of the male protector also may have sprouted the concept that this powerful man could own the women and children. That bent seedling of an idea flourished into a strong tree through the centuries. This great tree has far-reaching limbs under which the societal acceptance of rape has remained protected to this day.

Ancient Babylonian and Mosaic law was codified on tablets centuries after the rise of formal tribal hierarchies and the permanent settlements known as city-states. Slavery, private property and the subjugation of women were facts of life, and the earliest written law that has come down to us reflects this stratified life. The capture of females by force remained perfectly acceptable outside the tribe or city as one of the ready fruits of warfare, but clearly within the social order, such happenstance would lead to chaos. A payment of money to the father of the house was a much more civilized and less dangerous way of acquiring a wife. And so the bride price was codified, at fifty pieces of silver. It was here that the first concept of criminal rape sneaked its tortuous way into man’s definition of law. Criminal rape...was a violation of the new way of doing business. It was, in a phrase, the theft of virginity, an embezzlement of a daughter’s fair price on the market. (Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 8–9)

The Hammurabi Code, established 4,000 years ago, made it a crime to rape a virgin, thus legitimizing the unstated fact that it was the unruptured hymen that was being sold, a piece of property wholly owned and controlled by the male head of the household. Rape was a **property** crime between men. It was the theft of the hymen and bride price. Perhaps in these ancient times, the myth began of rape being the fault of the survivor. These men of property and unruptured hymens saw it this way: if the virgin was raped within the city walls,

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she was considered to be as equally guilty as the rapist. After all, they were inside the city walls, and if she had screamed she would have been heard and rescued. If, on the other hand, she was raped outside the city walls, the woman was not punished. She had only to marry the rapist after he had paid full bride price to gain ownership of the damaged goods.

The rape of a married woman was considered a crime committed by both the woman and the rapist. The punishment required throwing both into a river, although the husband could save his wife if he so desired. The king, if he wished, could set the rapist free. It took until 13th century England before it was finally considered a crime to rape a sexually experienced woman. However, it only applied to non-virgins of noble birth. It was legal for a nobleman to rape a “common” woman. The myth held today, that a prostitute or promiscuous woman cannot be raped, had its start here.

RAPE AND WAR

“In modern times, rape is outlawed as a criminal act under the international rules of war.” (Brownmiller, p. 24) Specific prohibition arose because the concept of women and children as property makes them a prime target in disputes among men.

“To the victor belong the spoils,” has applied to women since Helen of Troy, but the sheer property worth of women was replaced in time by a far more subtle system of values. Through the ages, triumph over women by rape became a way to measure victory, part of a soldier’s proof of masculinity and success, a tangible reward for services rendered. Stemming from the days when women were property, access to a woman’s body has been considered an actual reward of war.” (Brownmiller, p. 28) Brownmiller further expounds upon this point. “Defense of women has long been a hallmark of masculine pride, as possession of women has been a hallmark of masculine success. Rape by a conquering soldier destroys all remaining illusions of power and property for men of the defeated side. The body of a raped woman becomes a ceremonial battlefield, a parade ground for the victor’s trooping of the colors. The act that is played out upon her is a message passed between men—vivid proof of victory for one and loss and defeat for the other.” (Brownmiller, p. 31)

RAPE TODAY

“You’ve come a long way, baby,” quips a popular advertising slogan referring to the advancement of women. There can be no doubt that women have made significant progress over the years. There also can be no doubt that there is still a long way to go. “The more things change, the more they stay the same,” applies well to the issue of rape. Rape is a consummate example of the lack of value and respect allotted to the women of our society. It is the only crime where society judges the offense not by the perpetrator, but by the victim. Rapists are practically given permission by our “system” to perpetrate. Our society sends a message to rapists, loud and clear. Consider this: in 1990, 102,555 rapes were reported. Of those, 18,024 (less than one in five) resulted in convictions. The average time served? Less than three years.

Alice Vachss, a former assistant district attorney specializing in sex crimes, spoke to the collaboration of our society with sexual assault offenders:

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Collaboration is a hate crime. When a jury in Florida acquits because the victim was not wearing underpants, when a grand jury in Texas refuses to indict because an AIDS-fearing victim begged the rapist to use a condom, when a judge in Manhattan imposes a lenient sentence because the rape of a retarded, previously victimized teenager wasn't 'violent,' when an appellate defense attorney vilifies a young woman on national TV for the 'crime' of having successfully prosecuted a rape complaint, when a judge in Wisconsin calls a 5-year-old 'seductive'—all that is collaboration, and it is antipathy towards victims so virulent that it subjects us all to risk. (Vachss, Sex Crimes)

The question is "How do we stop rape?" As long as each of us lets a sexist comment pass, as long as we smile but say nothing when we observe sexist treatment of another human being, as long as we smirk when someone tells a sexist joke, as long as we accept what we know to be morally wrong, we will have a society that accepts rape. We, as individuals, make up the society in which we live, and we have the ability to influence it.

Stopping rape means challenging not only our own perceptions but those of the people around us. It requires speaking up and taking a stand when it would be easier to remain silent. For as long as we accept the attitudes and behaviors that promote rape, we will have rape. The answer is simple: do not accept the unacceptable. The important things in life are often simple, but do not ever mistake simple for being easy.

REFERENCES

Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape, Brownmiller, Susan. Simon and Schuster: October, 1975.

"We Need to Go to War," Parade Magazine" June 27, 1993, pp. 4-6-. Excerpt from Sex Crimes, Vachss, Alice. Random House, Inc.: 1993.

Mythology

It is very important to look at the many myths surrounding sexual assault and to dispel them with factual information in order to work more effectively with the real issues.

What is a myth? Relevant definitions for this discussion include: "a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon. 2.a: a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone, especially: one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society. 2.b: an unfounded or false notion. (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary)

WHY DO MYTHS ARISE?

Most people find it difficult to deal with the intellectual tension of "I don't know" as an answer to important questions. Mythology relieves that tension with anecdotal information meant to illustrate or support a desired belief. These myths and partial truths are a way to make sense out of a question and the discomfort of the unknown. People may even manipulate their perceptions to make answers seem more reasonable. They bend perceptions, to fit the circumstances.

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Another way to make sense out of the world, to give it order and stability, is to look for patterns in experiences and observations. These narrowed variables keep people from having to view each new event from a totally new perspective. However, when encountering something totally new, people tend to say, "Ah ha! That's the way it always is." For instance, after interviewing a hysterical victim, a patrolman stated he felt more assured about helping other victims. But when she was totally calm and collected, he wondered whether she had been assaulted, and he was at a loss because he had based his assumptions on one event.

Assumptions, generalizations, and preconceived notions can severely damage advocates' abilities to provide support to survivors and those who work with survivors. Be very careful about expectations and the "way it is supposed to be." To harbor these myths will support you in spending useless time trying to bend your perceptions to fit the expectation, or by overlooking what is actually happening to the detriment of the survivor with whom you are working and your coworkers.

Do you remember the first time you saw a sex offender, drug addict or perhaps a child molester? What happened the first time you observed one such person who did not fit your idea of what he or she was "supposed to look like?" There is an actual account of a child who had been sexually abused by a nice looking man who had picked him up from school. When asked by his mother if she had not told him repeatedly to avoid strangers, the child replied that he had not gone with a stranger. An intuitive crisis advocate then asked the boy to describe what "stranger" means. He said strangers wore "big, black, tall hats and large overcoats...and they looked scary." The child victim had determined this abuser to be non-dangerous because he did not conform to the child's pre-conceived idea of a stranger.

HANDLING MYTHS AND FAULTY ASSUMPTIONS

Dealing effectively with myths involves putting aside assumptions and being open to learning new information. Particularly when dealing with sexual assault situations, it is imperative to learn the truth about faulty beliefs, avoid pre-conceived notions about people and events, use factual general information and deal with each new situation on its own merit.

SEXUAL ASSAULT: MYTHS VS. FACTS

Here are examples of myths about sexual assault that may have impeded sexual assault avoidance and intervention. With each myth are the truths refuting it.

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| MYTH | FACT |
|--|---|
| The primary motive for sexual assault is sexual. People who commit sexual assault do not have any other outlet for their sexual needs. | The major motive for sexual assault is power—to overpower and control another person. Rape is not about sex. It is sexualized violence, not violent sex. Three out of five offenders also are in consenting sexual relationships. The myth can allow shifting blame for sexual assault from the offender to the victim. |
| The victim provokes sexual assault. | Someone's actions or dress cannot send a message "asking" for sexual assault. In fact, studies demonstrate that 71% of sexual assaults are planned in advance, making irrelevant the survivor's demeanor or apparel at the time of the sexual assault. It is preposterous to believe someone would ask for or enjoy a physical attack involving risks that include venereal disease, pregnancy, injury, or even death. |
| Sexual assault is an impulsive act. | In 71% of sexual assaults, the offender made plan to sexually assault a person or a specific person. The offender often takes advantage of a person in a vulnerable situation. |
| Sexual assault occurs only among strangers. | Over 50% of all sexual assaults involve acquaintances or friends. A close personal friend, family member, or family friend is the offender in 14% of cases reported (a person is less likely to report sexual assault by a friend or relative). |
| Anyone can prevent sexual assault if he/she really wants to. | This myth asserts that no one can be forced to have sex. In fact, since nearly 90% of all sexual assaults involve threats of physical harm or the actual use of physical force, it follows that a person might submit to a sexual assault to prevent more severe bodily injury or death. Vulnerability to assault also increases because most women are not brought up to be physically aggressive, and they are not as strong as most men. |

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| Offenders are "perverts." | This myth assumes that only "sick" or "insane" people are offenders and, again, that obtaining sex is the primary motive for sexual assault. Believing this myth may cause us to expect the offender to be a marked person with particular characteristics. If the accused appears and acts normal, it is very hard to believe he/she could have committed the crime. |
| Women frequently make false accusations of sexual assault. | Sexual assault and other felonies have the same false report rate (2 – 4%). Survivors, who are aware that many other people believe the myth, may be afraid to report and may be hesitant to tell anyone, for fear that no one will believe them. |
| Most women secretly think it would be exciting to be taken “by a man who will show her he is master.” | Much fiction and fantasy writing promotes this idea. Regardless, there is a difference between fiction and real life. In a fantasy, the person fantasizing is in control; in a sexual assault, the survivor is not in control and fears being killed. Few women wish for a situation so terrifying that they will do anything to prevent being beaten and/or killed. |
| It cannot happen to me. | Anyone may be sexually assaulted. Studies show that victims include 6-month old babies to 99-year-old women, people of color, lesbians/gays, people with disabilities and persons from every racial, ethnic, religious, economic and social background. The National Victims Center says a sexual assault occurs every 6 minutes in the U.S. Approximately 25%–35% of all women will be sexually assaulted. And approximately 20%–30% of all men will be victims before they are 18. Only 1 out of 10 sexual assaults are ever reported to law enforcement. |
| Most sexual assault offenders are African-American. | In 1994, Bureau of Justice, estimated that out of 33,800 imprisoned raped offenders 52.2% were white, 43.7% were black and 4.1% were other. |

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Banning pornographic and obscene literature would stop sexual assault.

Although a sex offender might find some pornography sexually stimulating, the motivation for sexually assaultive behavior is fear and anger, not sexual arousal, because offenders act out unresolved personal insecurities. In a study of convicted sex offenders, they were shown films containing both sexually explicit and graphically violent material. The offenders reported experiencing reactions similar to those aroused in assaultive situations. Offenders then viewed sexually explicit films that had no violence, and they reported no increase in the desire to assault. Then offenders saw films containing no erotic material but which did contain violence. The offenders reported a definite identification with the power and anger displayed on film.

Banning all pornographic material will not stop sexual assault. Violence plays a much greater part in motivations for sexual assault than erotic materials do. However, pornography should not be encouraged because some material contributes to the humiliation and degradation of humanity. Child pornography is strictly outlawed and does play a big part in the sexual exploitation of children. However, a child molester may even find children's clothing advertisements stimulating.

Socialization

Sexual socialization is defined as: the set of expectations about attitudes and behaviors that are culturally assigned according to one's gender; the process by which individuals incorporate within themselves the behaviors, attitudes and values of their culture.

Socialization is a root of our identity and behavior patterns. While animals behave instinctively, most human behavior is learned. Socialization strongly influences a person's gender identity in society. Someone born female traditionally learns how to "act like a girl," and a male learns to "act like a man." Eventually, they internalize these teachings. They accept the behaviors, attitudes, and values of the culture as their own. Here are some troublesome attitudes widely held in modern society.

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WHAT BOYS LEARN

- ♂ Boys may learn to view sexual activity as an end in itself, and a "relationship" as a means to that end. By the time they reach college, 55 percent of boys say a good sexual relationship is the most desirable thing in a date, while 79 percent of girls say they most want a good intellectual relationship.
- ♂ Boys tend to view the completion of sexual action, whether a kiss or an orgasm in intercourse, as more important than the process.
- ♂ Boys learn a concept of ownership of females or "male sexual access rights" (Mahoney, 1980) that make them think they have a right to demand sexual "favors" from a girl.
- ♂ Boys learn it is their responsibility to verbally and/or nonverbally initiate every interaction with girls, from asking them for dates to any affectionate touching or sexual activity. This allows them to reinforce their sense of control in dating.
- ♂ Boys learn to see girls as "sexual objects," to be commented upon, discussed, and touched anonymously.

GIRLS LEARN

- ♀ Girls learn it is important to have a boyfriend.
- ♀ While girls learn a relationship entails more than just sexual interaction, they also learn that boys are probably more interested in sex than they are. So, some girls learn that by submitting easily they can trade sex for a relationship.
- ♀ Girls learn that boys may get angry if they do not get their way. Girls also learn that because of their anger, boys might end the relationship, circulate rumors about them, or hurt them physically.
- ♀ Girls learn to equate these behaviors with the prized label of "feminine."

To help prevent sexual assault, it is important to change, as much as possible, these causal patterns and values.

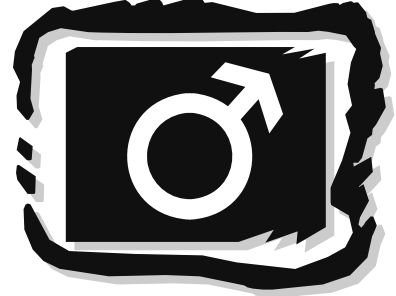
MALE SEXUAL ACCESS RIGHTS

It is "all right if a male holds down a female and physically forces her to engage in intercourse" under some conditions, according to some respondents in a study E.R. Mahoney at Western Washington University, during the winter of 1979-80. Mahoney discussed these results in terms of "male sexual access rights."

He said that many in our society believe men "have sexual access rights to females under varying conditions." This belief, he hypothesized, is supported by social conditioning and learning. Note that generalizations about male and female social conditions will not hold true for the entire population.

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The concept of male sexual access rights simply reflects two things. First, it reflects "normal" male sexual socialization, male sexual gender role learning—that is, how men learn to be males. And second, it shows that sexual assault is nothing more than those components of learning carried to varying extreme degrees. In other words, males learn they need sex, should seek sex, and are supposed to be the initiators. They learn that a good male is aggressive in many areas of life. Males learn that physical violence and physical force are acceptable forms of expression for them. Males learn that if they want something, whether it is a job, a promotion, or sex, they can get it one way or another. The point is to get it. They strive, they fight and they dig, whether working in a major corporation or a sexual relationship.



In relatively normal sex-role socialization, the three components of power, anger and sexuality simply occupy various locations on a continuum. Power, anger and rape are simply parts of the traditional male role, taken to the extreme.

Males in this society learn they have the right to sexual access to females under certain conditions. For example, it is widely known that males can purchase sexual access through prostitutes and the commercial sex industry. This concept has been transformed into the idea of "noncommercial sex:" He spends a lot of money on her and then expects to be compensated with sex.

Four conditions are too often accepted as automatically granting males sexual access. The first is sexual arousal. In other words, males (and evidently numerous females) believe that if the male is sexually aroused, he is then granted the right to complete the arousal through sexual activity...even if that activity is forced. If he is "turned on and can't stop," if she has "led him on," or if she "gets him sexually excited," a fairly high percentage of the respondents believed it is okay for him to have forcible sex with her.

The second condition that seems to mandate sexual access rights is the woman's previous sexual activity. In studies of attribution of responsibility to rape survivors, it is very clear that if by occupation, innuendo, or behavior, the survivor has granted any kind of access rights (such as visual access), then she is perceived to have granted all sexual access rights. Therefore, if a topless dancer becomes a rape survivor, the chances of her succeeding in any legal action are very slim.

The third condition exists if the woman is stoned or drunk. If she has given up her responsibility for the situation by losing control, she also gives up her right to refuse intercourse or to be selective about her role as sexual "gatekeeper" in this society.

The fourth condition exists if the woman grants a male any sexual access rights whatsoever. For example, if she lets him touch her above the waist, 36 percent of men and 12 percent of women responded that he is not in the wrong if he then forces her to have sex. If she granted him some access, she granted him all access.

One important idea in all of these cases is the concept of property, specifically the idea of women as sexual property. This idea has a long tradition throughout history and is one reason why it has been so difficult to convince people marital rape is even possible. In the

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study, 42 percent of males and 16 percent of females approved of sexual intercourse in long-term dating relationships. The farther the relationship moves from marriage, the less automatic is the sanctioning of sexual access rights. For example, if the couple is separated, the numbers drop to 21 percent and 5 percent, respectively; if divorced, 6 percent and zero. Addressing the Real Problem

One of the ways prevention programs can be more effective initially is to sensitize people to the kinds of socialization discussed here. For example, some men's magazines, including some considered respectable, devote significant time to the idea that male sexual access to females is normal and expected. This attitude is such an integral part of our society that it is seen as humorous. Sensitization will help by changing the definition of relationships between men and women. Men and women need to understand that no human being is property to be possessed or used by another.

MALE SEXUAL ACCESS RIGHTS

It is sexual assault for a male to hold down a female and physically force her to engage in sexual intercourse under any condition(s).

- ♣ He spends a lot of money on her = No sexual access rights
- ♣ He is so turned on he (allegedly) cannot stop = No sexual access rights
- ♣ She has had sexual intercourse with others = No sexual access rights
- ♣ She is stoned or drunk = No sexual access rights
- ♣ She let him touch her above the waist = No sexual access rights
- ♣ She is going to have sex with him and then changes her mind = No sexual access rights
- ♣ They have dated for a long time = No sexual access rights
- ♣ She has led him on = No sexual access rights
- ♣ She gets him sexually excited = No sexual access rights
- ♣ They are married to each other = No sexual access rights
- ♣ They are separated from each other = No sexual access rights
- ♣ They are divorced from each other = No sexual access rights

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CONTINUUM OF SEXUAL AGGRESSION

Sexual assault is not an isolated act; it is on a continuum with and related to other common events/activities, both legal and illegal. Offenders may act out the whole continuum, which has a common denominator: lack of respect.

Suggestive looks

Sexist comments, jokes

Verbal harassment

PHYSICAL HARASSMENT

OBSCENE PHONE CALLS

PEEPING

INDECENT EXPOSURE

FROTTAGE

Sexual Assault

Aggravated Sexual Assault

SEXUAL ASSAULT/MURDER

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