

THE RAPIST LOOKS AT HIS CRIME

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INTRODUCTION In literature on rapists, causal explanations fall in three categories: 1) classing rapists as clinical types or variant personalities, most commonly as the assaultive rapist, characterized by a strong sadist element and pronounced hostility toward women (Guttmacher & Weihofen 1952; Kopp 1962; Gebhard 1965; Cohen 1971); 2) a sociological basis, using socioeconomic factors, such as "a subculture of violence", urban poverty, and "cultural deprivation", mainly based on police offense reports and characteristics of arrestees (MacDonald 1971; Amir 1971); 3) describing the rapist as "everyman" responding to circumstances or opportunity, and to his own sex role socialization. This includes the so-called "normal rapist" responding to what is interpreted as seductive female behavior or a "come-on". It also includes the sexist who sees women as wanting to be dominated, as meaning "Yes" when in fact, they say "No". Support for this view is prominent in the feminist literature (Griffins 1971; Brownmiller 1975; Gager & Schurr 1976 205-255).

Not much has been revealed on how rapists view their offense or their victim, what they see as the consequence of their behavior, how they view rape, or how they feel about women in general. We hope to provide insight into these aspects of rape, as seen and expressed by men incarcerated for that crime.

METHOD The research is based on interviews with 33 inmates in the Texas Department of Corrections. The subjects do not constitute a representative sample of rapists as a class or as incarcerated rapists. Not only is the universe of rapists unknown, but

even the population of convicted rapists is artificial since many offenders plead guilty to a lesser offense, to be convicted of other crimes.

The Texas Department of Corrections provided a list of 80 inmates in one designated research unit who were serving time for sex offenses including sodomy, child molestation, and forcible rape. The investigator elected to see as many of these men as the staff could send, contingent on prison work assignments, school, and illness of inmates. In 8 working days, 48 men appeared before the interviewer. Each was asked: 1) "Are you serving a sentence for rape?" and if the answer was positive, 2) "Are you willing to participate in this research?" Based on these criteria and the availability of the men, 33 interviews were completed.

Interviews were conducted in one end of the inmates visiting room, a setting less than ideal, because privacy was often impossible. Of the 48 men given passes, 15 did not produce interviews. Ten were ended because the subject declined, or was not cooperative. Three were ended when it was found that the men were not sentenced for rape. One interview was ended due to a language barrier, and one man did not appear. Refusals to participate from the outset, or failure to cooperate in the interview after agreement derived from several factors: 1) suspicion that the interviewer was working for the Parole Board, which was thought to be in session; 2) resentment that the interviewer offered no help or reward for the interview; 3) the subject received his half-day off, regardless of the interview.

The research included individual interviews, group interviews, and assessment of offense records. In the individual interview, the respondent had a copy of the interview schedule, showing how the answers were recorded, in order to reduce suspicion. At the end of the interview the respondent was

invited to participate in a group session to discuss rape. Only 7 men volunteered. The majority refused because they did not want other inmates to know their crime category. "Rapos", according to these men, were at the very bottom of the acceptance ladder of the prisoners.

SOCIAL PROFILES Of these men, 36 percent had at least one non-sex felony conviction prior to the current rape offense. Twelve percent had prior convictions for sex-related offenses, and another 39 percent had at least one arrest for a sex-related offense. At least one prison sentence had been previously served by 30 percent of the respondents. Ten consistently maintained innocence, apparently based on their own definition of rape.

The men ranged in age from 21 to 64 years, with a median age of 33 years. Forty-six percent were Anglo, 36 percent were black, and 18 percent were Mexican-American. Of the rape victims, 76 percent were Anglo, 9 percent were black, and 9 percent were Mexican-Americans. Six percent were not classified. Sixty seven percent claimed Protestant religious preference and 21 percent Catholic. Education ranged from 3 to 15 years with a median or 10 years. According to the last job held, 39 percent were unskilled labor or service workers, and 42 percent were operatives.

Over half of the men were married, only 4 were divorced or separated, and 11 were single. The 33 men reported a total of 44 children, averaging nearly three children per man for the 16 who had children.

Most of the men came from homes where the father had less than a high school education and had been employed as an unskilled or semiskilled laborer. Seventy percent described their family's economic situation when they were growing up as "about average", but 42 percent called their early

family life unstable. This could be due to the marital status of the parents, affected in 70 percent of the cases by divorce, separation, or death. Half reported that their parents were divorced or separated, and 21 percent reported the death of one or both parents in most cases, when the subject was less than 10. Despite these dramatic changes in the family, half of the men described their childhood discipline as "very strict", and most of the others described it as "about right".

The age of these respondents' first sex experience ranged from 5 to 19 years, with a mean of 14 years, and three were victims of sexual abuse before age 16. When asked for a one-word description of themselves as a lover, three used very positive terms, 5 used slightly positive terms, 20 used neutral terms, and three used very negative terms, such as "bad", "immature", and "terrible".

THE OFFENSE AND ITS AFTERMATH

According to the rapists, their victims were classified according to Table 2. Eighty five percent said that they did not plan the rape. A weapon (a knife) was used in 5 cases. Almost half stated that they were under the influence of alcohol or a combination of drugs and alcohol at the time of the rape. Six cases involved group rape or more than one male. The choice of victim and incidental causes of rape are detailed in Tables 2 and 3. When the men were asked to try to recall what they were thinking while the rape was in progress, no central theme emerged, although "sex" was the most frequent. Some said they were confused or could not remember the rape, and some said that they had no thoughts. Only 2 men thought about the consequences while the rape was underway. One said he compared the victim with his wife, and another claimed to be proving he could have a het-

erosexual relation. Others refused to answer or denied guilt of the rape offense.

There was more consensus on what the men thought was going on in the victim's head during the rape. Twenty seven percent did not know or care; 24 percent thought the woman was just scared; 24 percent thought the woman was enjoying herself; and 9 percent thought she had revenge or hostility in mind.

When asked what they saw as the worst consequence of the rape, aside from prison, 33 percent mentioned loss to family, wife, and children, and lost freedom, respect, and possessions; 24 percent reported mental and emotional stress from being in prison and being labeled "rapist"; and 15 percent cited specific family problems. Thirty percent expected to be "looked down on" and distrusted after prison, 18 percent expected to have to prove themselves, 27 percent expected no change in others' reactions, and 15 percent expected acceptance.

ATTITUDES ABOUT RAPE Responding to a question about what they see as the main reason men rape women, 48 percent focused on some problem in the men; others mentioned mental problems, reactions to rejection, or to prove one's masculinity. Twenty one percent blamed women for initiating or inviting sex which they later defined as rape. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "Rape makes a man feel strong and masculine.", 79 percent disagreed. When asked to define rape simply in terms of its personal meaning, 45 percent gave negative descriptions, like "animalistic", or "awful", or described it in terms of brutality or force. Twenty one percent gave a legal definition of rape. Responses to the question on the mixture of sex and violence in rape included 61 percent to the effect that rape includes both, and 30 percent that rape is purely sexual.

TABLE 1 Victim's relation to rapist. %

Total stranger	58
Relative	15
Friend or acquaintance	15
Former lover or ex-wife	12

TABLE 2 Why pick this victim? %

She was available	28
Prior relationship	15
Physical attraction	12
Victim caused it	12
Peer activity	9
Don't know	9
It wasn't rape	15

TABLE 3 What caused the rape? %

The female	21
Alcohol or drugs	18
Fate or circumstances	15
Rape secondary to other crime	9
House break-in for rape	9
Pick-up, then rape	6
Mental problems	3
It wasn't rape	18

TABLE 4 What if your daughter were raped? %

Would investigate	24
Negative feeling for male	21
Positive feeling for daughter	18
Concern for daughter	12
Egoistic reaction	12
Negative reaction to daughter	6
Don't know	6

TABLE 5 What if your son raped someone? %

Seek help for him	34
Negative reaction to son	24
May be girl's fault	12
See that he is punished	12
Feel compassion	9
Egoistic reaction	6
Don't know	3

Of the rapists, 76 percent thought that women who become rape victims are not different from other women. But 8 did see a difference, perceived in terms of provocative and inviting female behavior. Despite the predominant-

ly positive feelings toward women and the feeling that rape victims are generally not different from other women, 55 percent agreed with the statement that "Some women really want to be raped."

Most men felt that the woman they victimized had suffered as a result of the rape. Some 30 percent described their victim as having adjustment difficulty after the rape; 15 percent felt that the woman had suffered from the public knowledge that she was a rape victim; 12 percent said treatment received from police, medical examiners, and prosecutors was the worst consequence for the victims; 18 percent said that the victim had no negative consequences, and 24 percent did not know.

It can be assumed that parents do not want to pass on their mistakes to their children, but would like to protect them from these mistakes. As an indirect means of probing the attitudes of these convicted rapists, they were asked two hypothetical questions: 1) "If your had a daughter and she were raped, how would you feel?", and 2) "If you had a son and he raped a woman, how would your feel?" The responses, as shown in Tables 4 and 5 are more supportive for the son than for the daughter.

GROUP DISCUSSION Three questions were posed in the group interview: 1) What is rape? 2) What causes rape? and 3) How can rape be prevented?

The men classified rape as either "real" or "false". Estimates on the proportion of "real" rapes varied from none to 50 percent. False rapes were classed in two types: 1) "come-ons" where women were seen as encouraging or initiating sex then attempting to back out; 2) an after-the-fact cry of rape out of revenge or guilt on the part of the woman who had in fact voluntarily participated in the sex act. All acts of sexual intercourse were seen by the men as potential false rapes.

Most of the discussants felt that all rapes are false, "... because if a woman don't want to be raped, you are not going to rape her." Most did acknowledge that a few rapes are "potential homicides". These were seen as violent, premeditated stranger-to-stranger type rapes where the need for sex was the driving force. One man defined rape succinctly: "Rape is when a woman says "No, you're not going to get it and you're going to have to kill me to get it, or you're going to have to beat me senseless to where I can't fight you."

There was obvious ambivalence regarding the "cause" of rape, as well as to the question of why men rape. Some viewed "real rapists", from whom they excluded themselves, as sick men whose problems stemmed back to childhood. Others did a reverse question, asking: "What is it that causes the woman to say rape?" One man speculated "that you did not satisfy her."

The men did not deal with rape as a legally defined concept. Instead, they dealt with a woman's "claim" of rape -- largely seen as false. They also seemed to suggest that underlying the rape problem is the more fundamental problem of societal sex-role expectations. Some asserted that society socializes women to barter with their bodies, thereby creating hostility and frustration in men. One said: "Women are whores who learned from childhood to use this clout (sex) as their buying power, and men get caught up in the whole game women play." They also recognized a double standard for males and females in society somehow feeds into the problem of rape. They mentioned women's "antiquated moral upbringing", the fact that they were often socialized to think that sex is unclean or dirty, which frustrates men. Yet the discussants themselves indicated an adherence to the double standard in male-female sex roles. They seemed to portray a

typical rapist as the frustrated husband, rejected by his wife or girl friend, driven by a need for sex. One man's rape was explained as evolving from a loser's evening, when he tried unsuccessfully to have sex with his wife, then his girl friend, and then with a prostitute; finally, he broke into a house and raped a stranger. In this situation some agreed that rape was not preventable, but represented a potential homicide to which women might as well consent. Others continued to argue that a woman could not be raped if she did not want to be.

The men clearly failed to understand the significance of rape to women. One felt that it was foolish for women to risk homicide if threatened with rape. One man asked: "Why fight for that one thing that you would have done with the other guy that you know, willingly?" They did not recognize a woman's need to control her body and her choice of sex partners, nor realize that rape may be more a violation of one's self and one's personhood than of one's body. One man showed incredulity that women make so much of rape by asking, "Does she put that much value on her body?"

CONCLUSION The main theme emerging from the group discussion was one of frustration focused on women and their behavior, and on society in general in terms of male-female sex role expectations. These imposed sex roles were seen as contributing to hostility and fomenting frustration which sometimes finds expression in rape. The attitudes expressed in the group revealed a total lack of sensitivity to a woman's need to exercise control on her choice of sexual partners. The men expressed a view of woman as playing a temptation game, bartering their bodies for the favors of men. All women, in a sense, were seen as potential rape victims, in that they are socialized to behave in

ways conducive to inviting or alleging rape. Consequently, the rapists saw all men as potential rapists.

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ERRATA: HYNAM, 7,1, May 1979

p. 63, col. 1, line 6 should read: With regard to Criterion 5, Self-help toward maximizing the use of indigenous resources, there are those who claim that the Colonial Office granted Prescod's plea for the retention of representative government as they did, feeling sure that it would be only temporary, confident that the Barbados government would, sooner or later, have to apply to the mother country for a grant-in-aid.

p. 63, col. 2, line 18 should read: The Island has had representative government directly under the British Crown from 1639 to 1966, when it became a sovereign state and a member of the Commonwealth.