

Cure Emanates from Cause: Understanding Rapist's Psyche

Talmeez Fatma Naqvi

Maulana Azad National Urdu University, College of Teacher Education Bhopal,
Madhya Pradesh

Email: talmeeznaqvi@rediffmail.com

Abstract

Alarming increase in crime against women particularly in the rape cases coupled with brutality and sadism continue to pose the question: why it happens and how it may be eradicated, or at least may be minimised. In this one has to know the mind of the rapist, which remains one of the darkest territories of human sexuality. The scientists focus their research on the psychological forces that drive sexual violence and brutality. But researchers think that there is no single psychological formula to explain every rapist's psyche. However, the personality characteristics of rapists divulge that lack of empathy, hostile masculinity, aggressive and dominant and controlling personalities, impulsivity, emotional constriction, underlying anger and power issues with women are governing forces in the acts of rape. The important question is how to prevent such brutal crime? Of course, improving the law and order machinery is essential indeed but one can not deny that society as a whole needs to put in greater efforts for gender sensitisation and creating awareness about the equality of women and their rights to free movement.

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The 23-year-old girl's gang rape and four years old baby's brutal rape provoked protests and much needed national debate about violence against women in India. Social activists, media, public, religious dignitaries and politicians are on their toes, perceiving the issue, making statements, and analyzing the complex problem in their own ways. "But blaming the politicians and the police comes most easily to us whenever something goes wrong in our society, as with the prevailing epidemic of rape. The media and the opposition parties go in attacking mode, the government takes some steps and assures many more to soothe tempers of the impatient public and it is soon back to normal till the next crisis hits us".

Let us first look into the motive of a rapist. To begin with, no two sex offenders are exactly alike. However, they often exhibit some similar characteristics. James Tedeschi and Richard Felson (1994) believe that the primary cause of rape is an aggressive desire to dominate the victim rather than an attempt to achieve sexual

fulfilment. Rape is as such considered an act of violence rather than principally a sexual encounter. Research states that some men do not ejaculate during rape. This is taken to indicate that whatever is driving this section of men to rape is more than the sexual drive.

As opposed to the feminist philosophy about rape, rather men would rape for power and not for sex. If we think in a logical way ‘if power and anger were the prime motives in an assault, why not simply harm, hurt or kill the woman, child or man?’ There are number of crimes in which motivation is anger and an expression of dominance and power. But rape has an additional and significantly unique component of sex. This means, specifically, that the rapist gets sexual pleasure from the sexual act, usually through ejaculation, which comprises a dopamine reward system (Dopamine is a neurotransmitter. A neurotransmitter transmits info from one neuron to another via synapses. Dopamine will send a message from neuron to neuron connecting different parts of the brain. Dopamine is largely associated with the reward system, as it’s the neurotransmitter that makes our brain get us moving to achieve actions that will bring us pleasure, satisfaction or some kind of “reward”). If we intend to understand the psychology of rapist and really want to prevent it, we should not politicize our interpretation of rape by removing sex from it. Rape, by common sense, is the use of force to obtain sexual pleasure, despite its adverse impact upon the sex object (not partner), and perhaps even because of its adverse impact. ‘In either case . . . we can’t take the sex out of it.’

The mind of the rapist, one of the darkest territories of human sexuality, is being mapped with a new precision as scientists focus their research on the psychological forces that drive sexual violence.

Researchers caution that there is no single psychological formula that explains every rapist. “There is a huge variety among men jailed for rape,” said Dr. Robert Prentky, a Professor of Psychology at Boston University Medical School. Dr. Prentky has developed a typology based on an advanced computer analysis of the characteristics of close to 300 rapists. Early results were published in 1988 in *The Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*.

Men are more likely to commit sexual violence in communities where sexual violence goes unpunished. Malamuth (1981) validated a rape proclivity measure on various samples of college men and found that an average of 21-35 per cent of males indicated some likelihood of raping if they could be assured of not being caught. Besides, alcohol abuse has been identified as a strong correlate of college rape (Abby, 1991; Abby *et al.*, 1996; Frintner and Rubinson, 1993; Koss and Gaines, 1993; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Norris and Cubbins, 1992; Prentky and Knight, 1991; Presley *et al.*, 1998). The relationship between alcohol and rape is multifaceted, and alcohol may be both a precipitant of and an excuse for sexually aggressive behaviour by men (Abbey *et al.*, 2001; Berkowitz, 1992; Larimer *et al.*, 1999; Richardson & Hammock, 1991).

Serial rapist and killer Ted Bundy who was accused of killing many women after raping them underwent multiple psychiatric examinations; the experts' conclusions varied. Dorothy Otnow Lewis, Professor of Psychiatry at the New York University School of Medicine and an authority on violent behaviour, initially made a diagnosis of bipolar disorder but later changed her impression more than once. Some evidence supported a diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder, some psychoses and some antisocial personality disorder and so on.

The afternoon before he was executed, Bundy granted an interview to Dr. James Dobson, a psychologist. Bundy used the opportunity to underline violence in the media and the pornographic "roots" of his crimes. "It happened in stages, gradually," he said. "My experience with ... pornography that deals on a violent level with sexuality, is once you become addicted to it ... I would keep looking for more potent, more explicit, more graphic kinds of material... until you reach a point where the pornography only goes so far ... where you begin to wonder if may be actually doing it would give that which is beyond just reading it or looking at it." Bundy asserted that violence in the media "particularly sexualized violence," sent boys "down the road to being Ted Bundys." He opined that the FBI should stake out adult movie houses, and follow the patrons as they left. "You are going to kill me," he said, "and that will protect society from me. But out there are many, many more people who are addicted to pornography, and you are doing nothing about that."

It almost goes without saying that today's consumers are exposed to more sex in films and advertising than ever before. This trend towards the increasing depiction of sexually-oriented themes in films and advertising is evident even in the most casual inspection of print and broadcast media. In general, our filmmakers and advertising copywriters use nudity, romantic themes, or suggestiveness to draw attention to specific advertisements and their sponsoring products. Our films usually do 100-crore, or may be 200- crore business through the item songs and dance visuals which are by and large provocative, vulgar and raunchy. These are simply an attempt, may be inadvertently, to stir up the male libido through the suggestive lyrics and postures.

Turning to television, the most-studied medium, content analyses have shown that, although the sex on network television is not usually explicit, sexual talk and innuendoes are rampant, most often occurring in a humorous context. Sexually oriented media may encompass a wide variety of sources. Some materials in magazines, videos, films, and Internet websites have labels like "erotic," "pornographic," "X-rated," or "sexually explicit." These days even Newspapers are also having additional page devoted to erotic and sexually explicit pictures. Although the association between rape and pornography remains controversial, a number of studies have linked violent pornography and sexual arousal to rape depictions, violent sexual fantasies, rape callousness, and woman abuse (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 1998; Malamuth, 1984; Malamuth and Check, 1983). Malamuth and Check (1983) exposed college men to violent pornography and found an increase in their scores on Acceptance of Interpersonal Violence.

We are being served sex from morning newspaper to late night movies. By most measures, men are typically more aroused by sexual media than are women, especially in response to sexually violent or dehumanizing materials (Malamuth, 1996; Murnen and Stockton, 1997). Sexual violence may be particularly arousing to sex offenders and other violence-prone men and even to “normal” men if the victim is portrayed as being aroused by the assault. Sexually coercive men are more physiologically aroused by slides or verbal descriptions of coercive sex than the “normal” men, who may have developed the ability to inhibit a sexual response in the presence of coercive cues (Lohr, Adams, and Davis, 1997).

Since the 1960s many Western nations have experienced a large increase both in the availability of sexually explicit media and in the rise in the reported rapes. The relationship between the two, however, has been difficult to clarify and hard to establish beyond doubt. There are many studies looking at correlations of rates of crimes like rape, sexual assault, exhibitionism, and child molestation, relative to sexual media consumption and changes in the availability of pornography in many different countries (see Bauserman, 1996, for a review). Results have sometimes shown an increase in availability of sexually explicit media associated with an increase in rape rates (e.g., Court, 1984; Jaffee and Straus, 1987) and other times a decrease or no difference in rates of rape and other crimes (e.g., Kutchinsky, 1973, 1991).

Where does the solution to such a social aberration lie? Does it entirely lie with the police or the politicians? Men are aroused because of this and that. How it gets transformed into aggressive or violent sexual behaviour? A view of the personality characteristics of rapists reveals that it happens because of the lack of empathy, hostile masculinity, macho/aggressive and dominant and controlling personalities, impulsivity, emotional constriction, underlying anger and power issues with women (Berkowitz, 1992; Check *et al.*, 1985; Lisak and Roth, 1990; Mehrabian and Epstein, 1972). When men are taught to be dominant and aggressive, this often leads to hyper-masculinity, male peer support for sexual aggression, and adversarial sexual beliefs (Kilmartin, 2000; Rozee and Koss, 2001). Promoting a culture of free and easy sex as is done by the advertisers, filmmakers and the media at large can only be counter-productive with a violent reaction from those who do not have access to such a culture. Predators remain in search of easy prey, chance and opportunity and get emboldened by relative surety of non-reporting and thus evading legal action.

What is needed is a deeper introspection about what’s going wrong. Improving the law and order machinery is part of the solution; the remaining rests with each one of us. One can not deny that society as a whole needs to put in greater efforts towards better education, gender sensitisation and creating awareness about the equality of women and their rights to free movement.

Undoubtedly, apart from correction in legal procedures and societal norms, values and inter-personal behaviours need to be looked into in depth.

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