

The mindset of intimate partner sexual violence perpetrators

Motivations and myths

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In this chapter we look at intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV) perpetrators' motivations and the myths that they may subscribe to in order to justify their sexual violence and avoid taking responsibility. By exploring the psychological and social factors that contribute to the mindset of men who rape, we aim to reduce victim-blaming and increase the understanding that is required to underpin prevention. Our aim in the chapter is also to challenge myths about who are "real" rapists.

Motivation

First, while many people do not consider the partner rapist to be a "real" rapist in the same sense as a stranger rapist, as we see in the table below, the motivations for rape are remarkably similar whether the victim is a stranger or a partner.

Through some examples reported by survivors, we now look more closely at motives of rapists, and partner rapists in particular. Please bear in mind also that just because a perpetrator of IPSV may be motivated by anger on some occasions, for example, that does not mean this is always his motivation. Motivations may change due to the circumstances. For example, a man who forces his partner into sexual activity without additional physical violence with the aim of establishing control over her, may, at another time, beat her severely in the course of a rape because the aim is punishment (Easteal & McOrmond-Plummer, 2006).

Power/control

IPSV is often a manifestation of intimate coercion (Leone, Johnson, & Cohan, 2007). A subtext is evident in this type of family violence: domination, intimidation, and control (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). It is far easier to exert power over someone who has been emotionally degraded and feels worthless. Sexual assault is one means the offender may use to disempower and humiliate. The ability to subjugate a woman with his penis may give a man a sense of mastery

Table 4.1 Reasons given for rape

Reasons given for rape	The partners	The strangers
Power	"It gave me a certain feeling of power over her because I knew she found it unpleasurable. It was one of the only times I could best her" (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985, p. 65).	"At that time, it gave me a sense of power. A sense of accomplishing something that I felt I didn't have the ability to get" (Russell, 1975, p. 244).
Anger/retaliation	"I guess I was angry at her. It was a way of getting even" (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985, p. 80).	"I met a girl at a party . . . she irritated me . . . I took her home to her apartment and I raped her" (Russell, 1975, p. 253).
Insecurity/sense of inadequacy	"She was a stronger person than I was in many ways, and I had an inferiority complex about it" (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985, p. 79).	"I raped about four chicks . . . they all had a certain self-assurance . . . it used to be threatening to me" (Russell, 1975, p. 252).
Sexually aroused by causing pain/fear	"I had the best erection I'd had in years. It was very stimulating. I walked around with a smile on my face for three days. You could say, I suppose, that I raped her" (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985, p. 66).	"Interviewer: Did her fear turn you on? Rapist: Yes. Interviewer: How did you feel about her being hurt? Rapist: That was exciting" (Russell, 1975, p. 246).
Preference for coercive sex over consensual sex	"I get this satisfaction from a feeling of some dominance – a man over woman thing" (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985, p. 81).	"Making a girl wouldn't do it . . . it was the unattainable I wanted" (Russell, 1975, p. 245).
Sense of entitlement	"I have a right to this" (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985, p. 76).	"You want this, and you don't see why you can't have it so you take it" (Russell, 1975, p. 245).

Source: Easta & McOrmond-Plummer, 2006, p. 66. Reproduced with permission of Hybrid

over feelings of inadequacy and weakness; it reaffirms his masculinity (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979).

The rapist motivated by power, particularly in the context of IPSV, may negate consent with emotional coercion:

The best way I can describe it is that there was an unspoken threat that if I didn't have sex with him he would emotionally abuse me. He would throw a tantrum if I said no, guilt trip me. Ignore me, reject me, and because he had convinced me that I was in love with him and couldn't live without him these things hurt me a lot so in a way, I submitted to sex because it was the only way to avoid emotional/mental pain.

(Easteal & McOrmond-Plummer, 2006, p. 67)

Verbal badgering is not a legitimate request for sex that permits the victim to say no without unpleasant consequences – the perpetrator's intention is "Give me sex or I'll take it."

If verbal coercion is unsuccessful, physical force is likely to be used (Englander, 2003). The rapist driven by the need for power uses whatever force may be necessary to achieve sexual intercourse. He may sometimes use slapping or weapons to show his victim he means "business"; yet, according to Groth & Birnbaum (1979), sexual possession of the woman to satisfy his need for power is his main aim, rather than hurting her physically.

Because rape motivated by power may lack the physical violence of more stereotypical "violent" rape, victims are often confused and angry with themselves, believing that they could have done more to stop it. The perpetrator, both nonverbally and through speech, may try to make the victim feel complicit:

I told him no, that I didn't want to do it – he kept going, when I kept saying no he stopped briefly, he started abusing me (verbally) telling me that it was all my fault and that I kept leading him on.

(Easteal & McOrmond-Plummer, 2006, p. 67)

The rapist who is motivated primarily by a need for power (labeled as the "power rapist" in Groth's 1979 typology) may not see any harm in his actions, or he has no empathy or regard for the victim's feelings: "During the worst incident I did cry and he was aware of this, despite the fact that I was doing my best to conceal my tears. He did not stop" (Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 68).

Indeed, as opposed to seeing his behavior from the victim's point of view, the rapist motivated by power often needs to convince himself that his victim has enjoyed his attention: "He would say that I wanted it; he would say that I wouldn't be here if I didn't want it" (Easteal & McOrmond-Plummer, 2006, p. 106). With IPSV, rape might occur as a means of glossing over an argument or other types of violence that he has inflicted:

And after the physical pain, always came the demands for intimacy. I hated it. I hated it all. In my experience it is used to re-affirm their "love" of the victim and that "now everything is back to normal." As if nothing has happened. As if the sexual act itself wipes out all unpleasantness.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 68)

As with other expressions of intimate terrorism, when the perpetrator's control of his partner is challenged by her leaving the relationship, he may respond with violence. Rape might be an act of "repossession" (Russell, 1990, p.153). Therefore, not surprisingly, it is not unusual for sexual assaults to take place or even to begin following separation (DeKeseredy, 2014).

Sexual assault is still continuing. He is always kissing me. Feeling my breasts, in between my legs – "just as friends." He has had sex with me twice in 4 weeks, even though I have told him I don't want to. He has stayed at my house the past 3 nights and although I have managed to stop him having sex, he always tries. Again, according to him, this is just being good friends. I have told him that I feel as though he is still trying to control me.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 68)

Anger/punishment

Much rape contains elements of anger, and in rape largely fueled by anger there are power and control issues too. Anger, though, may be the primary motivator:

But I felt so dirty all the time. I spent hours in the shower, even when the water was running freezing, even when there was no more soap, I used cleaning products. My time in the shower angered him. Sometimes he was so angry that he had sex with me when I got out. He demanded I leave the bathroom door unlocked, as he felt he should be able to look at me any time he wanted.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 69)

The rapist mainly motivated by anger commonly uses rape to punish and humiliate a woman (Holmes & Holmes, 2002). Because retribution is the primary aim, rape may include particularly humiliating acts such as ejaculating on the victim's face or in her hair (Shapcott, 1988). These rapes thus commonly include forced oral and anal sex as the perpetrator perceives that his victim will find them painful and degrading (Easteal & McOrmond-Plummer, 2006).

He said, "I am going to come on your face, I can't wait to come on your face." I was silent for a bit, and he repeated himself . . . "I can't wait to come all over your fucking face." . . . I turned around and soon, in that

deep voice he said, "I am going to fuck you up the ass. Yeah, fuck you right up the ass. You're going to like it, bitch"

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 114)

When anger is at the core of the act, the rapist is likely to use other physical violence such as slapping or biting (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979): "He was sometimes very violent during sex. He would hit, pinch, or beat me during or prior to intercourse, or for refusing to submit" (Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 69).

Unlike the rapist who is motivated primarily by power who forces sex on his partner after beating her in order to manipulate her feelings, for the partner who is primarily motivated by anger, the beating is *part* of the rape: "He often wanted sex after beating me. The battering seemed part punishment and part foreplay" (Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 69).

Eventually he couldn't have sex with me unless he hurt me first. He would explode, scream and yell and break things, batter my heart and my body and then want to make love to make it all better. Sex itself was not violent just all that led up to it.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 28)

I was woken late at night or early hours of the morning and slapped across the face whilst I was in a half-dazed state because I refused his demands and asked not to be woken.

One time he positioned himself behind me and held my chin, head and shoulders. He proceeded to pull my head to the side as if to break my neck. He then pushed me to the ground and straddled me, he placed his knees on my arms pinning them to the floor, and with one hand he held his hand over my nose and mouth to stop me screaming in pain and horror. He had his other hand around my throat, strangling me, whilst he told me that he wished I were dead.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 69)

In Shapcott's (1988) typology, in anger rape, the victim may be coerced into playing a role in the degradation.

I was forced to take my clothes off while he sat in a chair in front of me with a knife in his hand. He wanted me to take my clothes off slowly and when he felt that it wasn't slow enough he would get up and hit me again and tell me that I better "start fucking listening."

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer 2006, p. 70)

In addition, men who rape in anger may show a tendency to "snap" suddenly, changing from relatively pleasant to angry and violent (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979).

Just when I thought I could predict him, he would react to something in a way completely apart from what I expected . . . He had been wonderful that night – sweet and charming and why I started dating him in the first place. Then, halfway into the movie, he became moody and said it was time to go. He was angry at me and hit me and raped me that night.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 70)

Anger rapists may act tough and overtly appear very “macho.” However, their self-image is likely to be quite fragile. Perhaps due to this inner sense of fragility, the anger rapist may release rage onto women he sees as having belittled or bested him in some way. Sex is his weapon of contempt. He uses it to “make hate” to his victim (Shapcott, 1988, p. 39): “Looking back, I can see that when he felt inferior or upset was when he tended to be more abusive towards me (like when he would fail an exam or get a speeding ticket)” (Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 71).

Accordingly, threat to his sense of sexual ownership may be a precursor to rape. Rape may be punishment for her behavior:

The thing I will never forget is when we went to watch Robbie Williams in concert . . . When we got home, he flew into one of his rages, screaming that I fancied Robbie more than him . . . accusing me of wanting to do this . . . and he went down on me, biting my vagina with such force that he lifted my bottom half off the bed with his teeth.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 71)

It may be retribution for daring to end the relationship:

I was raped vaginally, anally and was also forced to perform oral sex. He was armed with a knife that was held against me at various times throughout the rape. I was beaten very badly with a closed fist as well as an open hand. I was also held tightly around my throat, which was restricting my ability to breathe. I was also knocked into a filing cabinet which caused bleeding. He was also banging my head against the filing cabinet and the floor. I bled quite a bit from being raped anally. I was left quite bruised and bloody from the rape and the beating.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 72)

Sadism

Although rape motivated primarily by anger often does contain sadistic acts, the difference between anger rape and sadistic rape is that where the anger rapist hurts his victim to punish her, the sadistic rapist causes her pain and terror in order to arouse *himself* (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979). Despite the apparent

rarity of sadistically motivated rape, it is clear that it does happen within the IPSV context (Frances & Wollert, 2012).

The rapist finds the intentional maltreatment of his victim intensely gratifying, and takes pleasure in her torment, anguish, distress, helplessness, and suffering. The assault usually involves bondage and torture, and frequently has a bizarre or ritualistic quality to it with the insertion of objects into the victim, together with extra tortures such as biting, burning, or cutting her body (Hucker, 1997).

He bit and pinched my breasts and told me to roll over. When I resisted he acted as though he was going to put the blade into me and so I rolled onto my stomach. He then proceeded to penetrate me anally, punching me in the back, calling me a whore and a little cry-baby. I tried to get up, but he would punch me right in the center of my back, it was taking my breath away. He then rolled me over and went down on me, biting the inside of my thighs and squeezing my breasts so hard, he left bruises . . . He had the switchblade at my breasts and kept asking if he could “slice one for a souvenir” . . .

. . . He stood straddling me and urinated up and down my body, to “warm me up.” I threw up and he turned my face over into it and penetrated me anally again, pressing my face into the vomit. I didn’t have to hold my breath that time. I just passed out from sheer terror.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 73)

Obsession

The obsessive rapist shares similar aspects with the sadist, but his arousal is fueled less by causing suffering and torment, and more by specific perverse acts he forces his partner to engage in (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985; Martin et al., 2007). Perpetrators are preoccupied with certain types of sex acts that may be bizarre or unusual. They may read and/or watch pornography and write or talk extensively about their obsession:

. . . he had this pinup on the wall above our bed, and he turned around and ripped my clothes off and all the rest of it, and raped me . . . There were heaps of pinups but this one particular one he looked at and he would turn around and get the biggest carrots that he could get, like at the supermarket or cucumbers or the salamis and he would be ramming them up me . . .

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 75)

It is unimportant to an obsessive rapist if his partner is willing to participate in fantasy play. And he may be completely unperturbed by the pain his actions have caused. One woman, anally raped so frequently that she developed health problems, says:

I had explained to him that the act itself did nothing for me sexually, nor emotionally, and that physically it had awful side-effects. And it never changed his actions towards me. His preference and pleasure came before concern for me.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 76)

Myths that perpetrators may act out

IPSV perpetrators may be acting out false beliefs about masculinity, male sexuality, and rape. They may also be using them to justify their violence. We review a few of these myths in order to help the reader to be able to confront or penetrate their denial.

Men who rape their partner are out of control

Carol Adams writes, "Men who abuse and rape their partners are men who seek to control others. In being abusive they are not out of control; rather, they establish control" (Adams, 1993, p. 68). Yet, there persists the common belief that rape is the act of a man out of control of his emotions or sexual urges. Understanding that perpetrators do choose to rape, and that they have control over their deeds, contradicts that myth (McOrmond-Plummer, 2014).

My awareness of his intent to use rape in a deliberate way became clearer as I allowed myself to reflect on how he spoke to me in the course of sexual violence: "I am going to hurt you," "There's only one way to teach you not to be a whore;" "Just try and stop me, you bitch." . . . a specific outcome in mind by somebody who knew he was using sex in a controlling and controlled way.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 77)

The partner who uses verbal coercion to maneuver his partner into unwanted sex is also behaving with awareness. He hears, "No," or some other signal of unwillingness, but proceeds to manipulate the emotions of his partner until he gets what he wants. He knows that she has fears or other vulnerabilities and he capitalizes on them. Consider the following words of a man who admitted to the emotional coercion of his wife: "I would act like I was mad at her and she would give in. It works every time" (Hite, 1981, p. 749). This is not the behavior of a man out of control; it is a man taking control.

Rape is part of "manhood"

From Greek mythology of raping gods, to wars in which the prize for the victorious is the right to rape the women on the conquered side, and on to

present-day videogames that award points to players who capture and rape an electronic "victim," rape is depicted as the act of conquerors and heroes.

Some men think rape equates with virility and power. It may be seen as a means of putting women "in their place" – that is, beneath men. For example, a woman whose partner raped her while a friend of his was present, says,

[He] had needed to prove himself as a real man, one worthy of membership in his friend's group. My violation was his proof of who wore the trousers. I don't think I will ever forgive the culture of masculinity for working against me and other women in the terrible way it has.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 78)

Sex is the normal entitlement of men in a relationship

Some women report that following IPSV, their partner may behave as if he has not done anything wrong – perhaps due to a belief that it is his right to have sex with his partner: "I think he saw it as a part of our relationship that was normal. Being entitled to sex with me as his girlfriend played a role definitely" (Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 80). There are persisting sexist social values that support such beliefs: "Macho" men were also more likely to believe in the concept of "wifely duty" and that men were justified in using force (Martin, Taft & Ressick, 2007, p. 339).

Sex with a partner is seen as the *entitlement* of men (Pence & Paymar, 1993). This myth is widely supported; one man was advised by a psychiatrist to rape a wife who withheld sex (Russell, 1990). According to this view, women who withhold sex from their partners should interpret rape as a natural outcome of nonconsent. He'd say, "Your body's my body and I want to look at my body so I'm quite entitled" (Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 35).

See Chapter 5 for more on entitlement.

Rape is a type of making love

Diana Russell (1975, pp. 110–111) writes, "Some rapists think they're lovers." These men are likely to subscribe to myths that women want a forceful lover, or that women like being raped. "No" isn't heard as withdrawing consent, but is seen as part of a game the perpetrator has every intention of winning – in fact the word "No" may be heard as "No, I want you to force me." There might be initial attempts at verbally persuading a woman to have sex, but the underlying intention is to do it anyway. To these men, consent is nice but not a necessity.

Some survivors of IPSV describe their partners as treating the rapes as legitimate sexual encounters. Rape may be normalized by the perpetrator as "making love"; afterwards, he may be attentive and affectionate.

He stripped me naked in the lounge and raped me, having picked me up by my breasts from behind and dragged/carried me to the settee. Afterward, while I was getting dressed, and trying to light a cigarette with shaking hands, he made me a cup of coffee, then sat down next to me to drink his, as though we had just made love.

(Easteal & McOrmond Plummer, 2006, p. 81)

Conclusion

We hope to have shed light in this chapter upon common motivations for sexual assault and rape, and myths that men who rape their partners may subscribe to. Challenge to notions of who rapes and why is essential, particularly since partner rape is often wrongly conflated with sex, rather than the act of violence that it is (McOrmond-Plummer, 2014). It is most important that the partner rapist is not given a free pass because he may have had a consensual relationship with his victim. An understanding of the mindset that underpins IPSV will also be an asset to those working with abusers.

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