

Twelve Reasons Why Rape is Not Sexually Motivated: A Skeptical Examination

CRAIG T. PALMER, Ph.D.

Arizona State University

The most popular current explanation of rape holds that rapists are seeking power, control, violence, and/or domination instead of sex. After reviewing the history of this explanation, this paper examines the evidence that has been used to demonstrate that rapists are not sexually motivated. Twelve specific arguments are examined in light of existing data on rape. All twelve of the arguments are found to be either logically unsound, based on inaccurate definitions, untestable, or inconsistent with the actual behavior of rapists. The implications of these findings are discussed.

KEY WORDS: rape, sex, motivation, feminism

The feminist movement has had a tremendous impact on the issue of rape in the last twenty years. Feminists are largely responsible for the fair and humane treatment of rape victims by police, courts, and the general public. Additionally, the feminist movement has significantly changed the misguided view that rape victims are responsible for the attacks against them. Furthermore, feminists have also had success in making women less vulnerable to sexual assault through general education and self-defense classes. Perhaps most importantly, the feminist movement has made it difficult for anyone to treat rape as a "joke," instead of the heinous offense that it is.

In addition to these major accomplishments, the feminist movement has also had a profound impact on explanations of the rapist's motives. Until the early 1970's, most researchers of rape, while acknowledging that many motivations could be involved in any given rape, assumed that sex was a predominant motive (Amir, 1971; Gebhard et al., 1965; LeVine, 1959; Schultz, 1965; Schiff, 1971). This viewpoint was "significantly altered by the feminist movement" (Sanders, 1980, p. 22). In fact, revealing rape "to be a political act that indicated nothing about male sexuality" (Symons, 1979, p. 104)

The author thanks Reed Wadley, Diane Notarianni, Lyle Steadman, John Alcock, Dorothy Palmer and Frances Palmer for comments on a preliminary draft. All correspondence should be addressed to: Craig T. Palmer, Ph.D., 17 Foote Street, Old Orchard Beach, Maine 04064.

became a "focal point of feminist theory" (Sanders, 1980, p. 22). This paper evaluates twelve specific arguments that have been used to support the claim that rapists are not motivated by sex.

History of the "Not Sex" Explanation of Rape

The view that rape is not a sexually motivated act was first put forth by Millet (1971), Griffin (1971), and Greer (1970; 1973). These authors placed the cause of rape, now seen as a political act of violence and domination, squarely in the patriarchal traditions and sexist socialization patterns of American society. Other writers soon began to incorporate this viewpoint into their writings (Betries, 1972; Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974; Cobb & Schauer, 1974; Cohen et al., 1971; Cohn, 1972; Davis, 1975; Findlay, 1974; LeGrand, 1973; Mehrhof & Kearon, 1972; Russell, 1975; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1974). However, it was not until Susan Brownmiller's 1975 book *Against Our Will* that this "not sex" explanation became widely known and accepted.

Following the publication of *Against Our Will*, the view that sex was not a primary part of the motivation of rape was taken up by feminist and nonfeminist researchers alike. In fact, this view became a "central theme," as Thornhill and Thornhill (1983) call it, in nearly every work written on rape and child sexual abuse in the following years (Baron, 1985; Bart, 1975; Beh-Horin, 1975; Bercovitch et al., in press; Brecher, 1978; Burt, 1980; Cager & Schurr, 1976; Dean & de Bruyn-kopps, 1982; Delin, 1978; Denmark & Friedman, 1985; Dusek, 1984; Frude, 1982; Griffin, 1979; Harding, 1985; Hilberman, 1976; Holmstrom & Burgess, 1980; Kaufman et al., 1980; Kemmer, 1977; Klein & Kress, 1976; Linner, 1976; Malamuth, 1981; Metzger, 1976; Rafter & Natalizia, 1981; Robertson, 1981; Rodabaugh & Austin, 1981; Rose, 1977; Salerno, 1975; Sanford & Fetter, 1979; Scarpitti & Scarpitti, 1977; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1985; Sgroi, 1982; Shields & Shields, 1983; Straus, 1976).

The most influential endorsement of this "not sex" explanation of rape came from Nicholas Groth (Groth, 1979a, 1979b; Groth & Birnbaum, 1978; Groth & Burgess, 1977a, 1977b; Groth, Burgess, & Holmstrom, 1977; Groth & Hobson, 1983; Groth, Hobson, & Gary, 1982). These works, especially the 1979 book *Men Who Rape*, buttressed the new explanation with data on convicted rapists. Groth's endorsement, and the mere repetition of the claim in so many works, made it possible by 1980 for a researcher to rightfully claim that "It is now generally accepted by criminologists, psychologists, and other professionals working with rapists and rape victims that rape is not primarily a sexual crime, it is a crime of violence" (Warner, 1980, p. 94).

Opposition to the "Not Sex" Explanation

Adherence to the "not sex" explanation of rape was not quite unanimous. Several researchers took a more moderate position that proposed sexual, as well as hostile, motivation as contributing to rape (Clark & Lewis, 1977; Finkelhor, 1984; Medea & Thompson, 1974; Rada, 1978a; Sanders, 1980; Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983). Other works implied sexual motivation without explicitly addressing the issue (Abel, 1978; Abel, Blanchard & Becker, 1978; Marshall & Barbare, 1978). Still other works implied sexual motivation even though they explicitly adhered to the new feminist viewpoint. For example, Dr. Charles Hayman follows his statement that "In our opinion, rape has little to do with sexual desire" with the warning that in order to avoid rape, women and girls "should not behave in a sexually provocative manner, especially with strangers" (Zusspan, 1974, pp. 149-150; see also Dean & de Bruyn-kopps, 1982; Sussman & Bordwell, 1981). A few researchers even directly challenged the newly established explanation. Warnings of the potential dangers involved in ignoring the sexual motivation involved in rape were issued by Geis (1977), Smithyman (1978), and Symons (1979). Hagen made the most vehement denial of the "not sex" argument when he called it "silly" (1979, p. 97).

The vast amount of attention this one issue has received has led some researchers to express a desire to move on to other matters. Geis expresses the hope that the "not sex" argument is a "popular trend that may now have run its course" (1980, p. 11). Finkelhor also states that "The debate about the sexual motivation of sexual abuse is something of an unfortunate red herring" (1984, p. 34), and goes on to suggest that "The goal should be to explain how the sexual component fits in" (1984, pp. 34-35). However, the majority of researchers do not share this goal since they remain committed to the "not sex" explanation.

What the Debate is Over

The first step in evaluating the "not sex" explanation of rape is to establish exactly what the debate is over. Thanks to the feminist movement, no one any longer defends the dangerous claim that rape is a sexually arousing or sought-after experience on the part of the *victim*. Neither does anyone deny that male sex organs are necessarily involved in the act. The debate is over the motivation of the rapist in using his sex organs in a way that constitutes rape. Motivation refers to the purpose or goal of a behavior. Proponents of the "not sex" explanation hold that the occurrence of rape cannot be accounted for by

the hypothesis that sexual stimulation is the *goal* of rapists. These authors hold that the occurrence of rape can only be explained by the hypothesis that sex is just a *means* used to attain the goals of power, control, domination, and violence.

Unfortunately, motivation is a covert entity, existing solely in the minds of individuals (either consciously or unconsciously). The problem with viewing motivation as a covert is that such an entity is not externally identifiable. Statements about motivation *in this sense* are completely untestable. No data of any kind could falsify a statement about such a "motivation." Therefore, as an alternative, at least one major researcher on rape has stressed the necessity of inferring motives "only from observed concrete behavior" (Amir, 1971, p. 132; see also Snelling, 1975). In this sense, a statement about the motivation for a given behavior is a prediction about the situations in which it occurs, the people involved, and the other behaviors with which it is found. This makes it possible to compare the actual behavior of someone with what would be expected *if* they were motivated in one way or another.

Vague semantics have also clouded the issue of whether sex is a "means" or an "end" for rapists. For example, Bercovitch et al. state that "Human rape seems to be an outcome of status assertion by males which acts as a form of power domination used to copulate with a female who could not be attained with conventional methods" (Bercovitch et al., in press). This statement appears to imply that sex (i.e., "copulation") is the sought-after goal of rape, since "power" is "used to" accomplish this goal. However, the authors use this statement to support the claim that "Rape is probably not primarily a sexually motivated phenomenon" (ibid.).

While the literature on rape motivation is often clouded by vague semantics and uncheckable claims, the issue "is an important one, and how the verdict is rendered determines whether fundamental matters are obfuscated or come into more useful analytical light" (Geis & Huston, 1980, p. 187). Consequently, the present paper attempts to resolve this controversy by examining 12 arguments given to support the "not sex" explanation.

Supporting Arguments for the "Not Sex" Explanation

Argument 1

When they say sex or sexual, these social scientists and feminists mean the *motivation*, moods, or drives associated with honest courtship and pair bonding. In such situations, males report feelings of tenderness, affection, joy and so on. . . . It is this sort of pleasurable motivation that

the socioculturists (and feminists) denote as sexuality. . . . (Shields & Shields, 1983, p. 122; original emphasis)

The validity of this argument depends on the accuracy of its definition of "sex," and there appears to be considerable evidence that this definition of sex is unduly limiting. First,

it is abundantly self evident . . . that a large percentage of males have no difficulty in divorcing sex from love. Whistles and wolf-calls, attendance at burlesque shows, patronizing of call girls and prostitutes—all of these are probably manifestations of a sexual urge totally or largely bereft of romantic feelings. (Hagen, 1979, pp. 158-159)

More fundamentally, the word "sexual" (but not "tenderness," "affection," or "joy") is routinely used to refer to the motivation of non-human animals involved in reproductive acts.

Argument 2

Rape is not sexually motivated because of the "fact that most rapists have stable sexual partners." (Sanford & Fetter, 1979, p. 8)

This widely mentioned argument (Brownmiller, 1975; Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985; Groth, 1979a; Groth & Hobson, 1983; Medea & Thompson, 1974; Queen's Bench Foundation, 1978; Rada, 1978a; Rodabaugh & Austin, 1981; Shields & Shields, 1983) hinges on the assumption that a male's sexual desire is exhausted by a single "outlet." Symons points out that this does not appear to be true: "Most patrons of prostitutes, adult bookstores, and adult movie theatres are married-men, but this is not considered evidence for lack of sexual motivation" (Symons, 1979, p. 280).

Argument 3

Rape is not sexually motivated because rapes are often "premeditated." (See Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1971.)

The fact that many rapes are premeditated does not nullify that many rapes are also spontaneous. However, this argument presumes that all sexually motivated behavior is spontaneous. Obviously, this is untrue since there are many kinds of consenting sexual acts (affairs, rendezvous, seductions) which are highly planned and still considered to be sexually motivated (see Symons, 1979, p. 279).

Argument 4

The age distribution of rapists demonstrates that rape is a crime of violence and aggression instead of sex:

the violence prone years for males extend from their teenage years into their late forties, this is the age range into which most rapists fall. *Unlike sexuality*, aggression does diminish with age and, therefore, a male's likelihood of committing a rape diminishes with the onset of middle age. (Groth & Hobson, 1983, p. 161; my emphasis.)

It is unfortunate that the authors of this argument do not cite the basis for their claim that the human male sexual drive does *not* decrease with age. There is abundant evidence that numerous types of male sexual activity peak in the late teens and then slowly diminish (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Goethals, 1971). Not only does the age of most rapists fail to disprove that rape is sexually motivated, the general correlation between the age distribution of rapists and the general level of sexual activity of males is very consistent with the view that rape *is* sexually motivated.

Argument 5

The common occurrence of rape in war shows that rape is motivated by hostility instead of sex. (See Brownmiller, 1975, pp. 23-118; Shields & Shields, 1983.)

The prevalence of rape during war has indeed been well documented by Brownmiller and others. However, the writers who see this as evidence of a lack of sexual motivation are often the same ones who stress that vulnerability is a critical variable in victim selection (see Shields & Shields, 1983). Females in war situations are vulnerable to an exceptional degree. While hostility may be involved in any rape, the tremendously high degree of female vulnerability is both a sufficient and more parsimonious explanation of the high frequency of rape in war situations. Thus, the high frequency of rape during war is not evidence for the absence, or even unimportance, of sexual motivation. In fact, Brownmiller herself implies the importance of sexual motivation by reporting that: "In some of the camps, pornographic movies were shown to the soldiers, 'in an obvious attempt to work the men up'" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 83; see also Medea & Thompson, 1974, p. 32).

Argument 6

Instead of being a sexually motivated act, rape is a form of "social control" because it is used as a form of punishment in some societies. (See Brownmiller, 1975, p. 319.)

Symons clearly demonstrates the problem with this argument by pointing out that the use of rape as a punishment "does not prove that sexual feelings are not also involved, any more than the deprivation of property as punishment proves that the property is not valuable to the punisher" (Symons, 1979, p. 280).

Argument 7

"Men have been asked why they raped and many have said it was not out of sexual desire but for power and control over their victims." (Dean

& de Bruyn-kopps, 1982, p. 233; citing evidence from Groth, 1979a; see also Shields & Shields, 1983, p. 121.)

This might appear to be the simplest way to decide the issue—just ask rapists. However, such an approach requires the problematical assumption that one clearly experiences, remembers, and truthfully reports his motives. Such an assumption is especially troublesome when the subjects in question are convicts: "It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the men's conscious attempts to emphasize their correct attitudes and to minimize their sexual impulsiveness were to some extent calculated to foster the impression that they no longer constituted a threat" (Symons, 1979, p. 283).

Even if the truthfulness of rapists' statements could be assumed, there is still the problem of *interpretation*. Symons (1979, pp. 282-283) cites several questionable interpretations present in the literature at that time (also see the Queen's Bench Foundation, 1978). This problem became particularly crucial with the subsequent publication of Groth's influential book *Men Who Rape*. Not only did Groth's interpretations go against other findings such as those by Smithyman (1978, p. iv) in which 84% of the rapists cited sexual motivation "solely or in part" as the cause of their acts (see also Ageton, 1983; Geis, 1977; Katz & Mazur, 1979; Rada, 1978a; Russell, 1975; Sussman & Bordwell, 1981), but even the examples Groth selected to support his argument make his interpretations questionable. One rapist explains his behavior by saying, "She stood there in her nightgown, and you could see right through it—you could see her nipples and breasts and, you know they were just waiting for me, and it was just too much of a temptation to pass up" (Groth, 1979a, p. 38). Another rapist reported that "I just wanted to have sex with her and that was all" (Groth, 1979a, p. 42; see also Groth, 1979a, pp. 50, 55, 93, 159, 161, 181, and 183).

Groth's reasons for not considering such statements as evidence for sexual motivation being primary in rape are interesting in light of some of the previously discredited arguments:

Although the power rapist [by far the most common type in Groth's classification] may report that his offense was prompted by a desire for sexual gratification, careful examination of his behavior typically reveals that efforts to negotiate the sexual encounter or to determine the woman's receptiveness to a sexual approach are noticeably absent, as are any attempts at lovemaking or foreplay. (Groth, 1979a, p. 28)

Here again we see an attempt to re-define "sex." This time it must include concern for the other person's arousal to "really" be sexual. Even if this was true, some of Groth's own examples show evidence of negotiation and foreplay (Groth, 1979a, p. 29). Other studies on

victims have found that many rapes, particularly "date rapes," often involve extensive negotiation and foreplay (e.g., Ageton, 1983; Katz & Mazur, 1979; Kirkpatrick & Kanin, 1957; Rada, 1978a). It appears that the data gathered from the statements of convicted rapists are inconclusive at best. Such "evidence" does not demonstrate the absence of sexual motivation in rape.

Argument 8

"The high incidence (1 out of 3 cases) of sexual dysfunction is further evidence for the relative unimportance of sexual desire in the act of rape." (Groth & Hobson, 1983, p. 171; see also Groth, 1979a; Harding, 1985)

The evidence of dysfunction during rape has been subject to questionable definitions (see Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983) and varies greatly between different studies (see Rada, 1978a). Hence, despite the claims of Harding (1985), sexual dysfunction in rape has not been conclusively shown to be significantly higher in rapes than in consenting acts. Even if a higher rate of actual dysfunction was conclusively demonstrated, it could be easily accounted for by the adverse circumstances under which rape often occurs. Symons (1980) points out that even the most sexually motivated rapist might experience dysfunction due to anxiety over the possibility of severe punishment and the existence of conflicting emotions. There is also the fact that offenders are often under the influence of drugs. Groth reports that 50% of the rapists in his study were drunk or on drugs at the time of the assault (1979a, p. 96). Smithyman reports that 32% of the rapists in his study were intoxicated in some way (1978, p. 60). The Queen's Bench Foundation found that 61.6% of the rapists had consumed alcohol before the rape (1978, p. 773).

Argument 9

Rape is motivated by aggression instead of sex because "changes in number of rapes and assaults showed similar seasonal patterns, suggesting that rape comprised a subcategory of aggressive behavior" (Michael & Zumpe, 1983, p. 883; cited as evidence of the unimportance of sexual motivation in rape by Bercovitch et al., in press.)

Rape and non-sexual assault both appear to occur most frequently in the summer months (Michael & Zumpe, 1983). The conclusion that this is evidence for a lack of sexual motivation in rape is seriously flawed in a number of ways. First, it ignores numerous alternative explanations of why rape might occur most frequently in the summer, such as greater social interaction and greater visual cues, which are quite compatible with the assumption that sex is an important motivation in

rape (see Chappell et al., 1977). Second, if seasonality of occurrence is an indicator of motivation, then all aggressive behaviors should follow the same pattern. The same study that reports a correlation between assault and rape reports a dramatic difference in the seasonal pattern of rape and murder (Michael & Zumppe, 1983). Finally, this argument ignores the drastic differences in other patterns of assault and rape. Many of these patterns, especially the age and sex of victims, are much more likely to be related to the motivation of the offenders than is seasonality (see Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983).

Argument 10

The real motivation in rape is violence instead of sex because castrated rapists just find other ways of doing violence to women. (See Cohen et al., 1971; Dusek, 1984; Groth, 1979a, p. 10; Katz & Mazur, 1979; LeGrand, 1973; MacDonald, 1971; Rada, 1978a.)

All data on the effects of castration must be viewed skeptically because of the many uncontrolled variables involved (Greene, 1979). Existing data suggest that castrated sex offenders have significantly lower recidivism rates in regard to *sexual* offenses (Bremer, 1959; MacDonald, 1971; Rada, 1978b; Sturup, 1960, 1968). Proponents of the "not sex" argument have refused to see this as evidence of rape being sexually motivated. This is because "Those who view rape as primarily an aggressive offense do not believe that castration will cure the rapist's aggressive impulses" (Rada, 1978b, p. 143). People holding this view would predict that castrated offenders would simply replace their "sexual" assaults with "non-sexual" assaults. It is debatable that such a finding would actually be evidence of the unimportance of sexual motivation in rape. However, the existing evidence shows that castrated sex offenders have lower recidivism rates for sexual *and* non-sexual crimes than do non-castrated offenders:

From 1933 to 1951, Herstedvester [an institute in Denmark] received over 200 males sentenced for a sex offense. Of the 147 castrated offenders, 18 have recidivated; 5 suffered relapses and committed new sex offenses, and 13 committed other crimes [8.8%]. Of the 81 non-castrated offenders, 41 recidivated; 24 suffered relapses and committed new sex offenses, and 17 committed other crimes [21.0%]. (Rada, 1978b, p. 144; my emphasis; see also Bremer, 1959; Kopp, 1938; MacDonald, 1971; Sturup, 1960, 1968.)

Argument 11

Rape is clearly an act of aggression. McCahil et al. (1979) in their study of 1,401 rape victims show that: (1) a majority of victims (64%) reported being pushed or held during the incident, (2) victims are often slapped (17%), beaten (22%), and/or choked (20%), and (3) 84% of victims

experienced some kind of nonphysical force during the incident (threat of bodily harm, etc.). (Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983, p. 163)

To determine the significance of data on rapist violence and victim injury, it is crucial to make the distinction between instrumental force used to accomplish the rape (and possibly to influence the female not to resist and/or not to report the rape), and excessive violence that appears to be an end in itself. This distinction is necessary because only excessive force is a possible indication of violent motivation on the part of the rapist.

Harding makes the following claim: "In many cases of rape in humans, assault seems to be the important factor, not sex. . . . [because] . . . In most cases the use of force goes beyond that necessary to compel the victim's compliance with the rapist's demands" (Harding, 1985, p. 51). However, existing evidence, including that cited by Harding (1985, p. 51), indicates that excessive force is actually only used in a minority of cases. Consistent with the previously cited figures by McCahil, Meyer and Fischman (1979), Chappell and Singer found only 15 to 20 percent of rape victims required hospital treatment for physical injuries (1977). Katz and Mazur also report the following: "Although most rape victims encountered some form of physical force, few experienced severe lasting [physical] injuries" (1979, p. 171; see also Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974; Schiff, 1971). Amir even found that "In a large number of cases (87%), only temptation and verbal coercion were used to subdue the victim" (Amir, 1975, p. 7).

Other evidence also indicates that it is only in a minority of cases that violence and injury are even one of the goals of a rapist. Smithyman found that 88% of his respondents reported using force, but did so "instrumentally" (Smithyman, 1978, p. 68). This is consistent with the fact that only 18% of the rapists in Smithyman's study reported "hating" the victim. Gebhard et al. (1965) also found that the vast majority of sex offenders used force only when required. Also consistent with the view that force is primarily used only when it is needed is the finding by Geis (1977) that 78% of the rapists in his study wanted the victim to cooperate. Force is also absent in 87% of child sexual abuse cases (Growth, 1979a). Instead of the conclusion reached by Harding (1985), existing evidence appears to be more consistent with the conclusion reached by Hagen: "If violence is what the rapist is after, he's not very good at it. Certainly he has the victim in a position from which he could do all kinds of physical damage" (Hagen, 1979, p. 87).

The importance of the distinction between violence as a means to an end and violence as an end in itself is demonstrated by the Queen's Bench Foundation's dismissal of statements by rapists in which they reported "sex" to be the goal of their behavior: "Others said 'sex' *but when prodded further, indicated they knew it had to be forcible sex*" (Queen's Bench Foundation, 1978, p. 772; my emphasis). The fact that the rapists were aware that they would probably have to "force compliance" to attain sex is taken by the authors as evidence that the rapists were actually after violence instead of sex. This is in spite of the fact that 71.2% of the rapists stated that they were hoping the victim would comply with their expectations (1978, p. 774), 61.7% said they had *not* intended to use violence (1978, p. 774), and only 22.7% had ended up inflicting "very severe injury" (1978, p. 778). These figures are particularly significant because the study was restricted to only "overly violent rapists" (1978, p. 768).

Contrary to the popular claim that rape is "an act of violence, with sex as the weapon" (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974, p. 1982), the evidence of physical injury suffered by rape victims is actually more consistent with the view that *in most cases* rape is an act aimed at attaining sex, with violence being the means to that end. A minority of rapes do involve violence far beyond that needed to accomplish the rape. However, this does not imply that sexual motivation is absent in these assaults. Even the existence of excessive violence cannot account for why the rapist committed rape instead of nonsexual assault. Sexual motivation always appears to be a necessary ingredient for a rape to occur instead of a nonsexual assault. As Rada states: "If aggression were the sole motive it might be more simply satisfied by a physical beating" (Rada, 1978a, p. 22).

Of course, it has been suggested that the sexual act itself is aimed at attaining a nonsexual goal for the rapist. It has even been claimed that a sex act is the "best" way to attain a nonsexual goal such as "control" (Rada, 1978a). While such claims may be true, they are inherently uncheckable. They do not refer to the rapist's behavior, which is identifiably sexual, but to his nonidentifiable thoughts and feelings which he may or may not report truthfully (see Argument 7). No conceivable behavior on the part of the rapist could disprove any claim about such a "motivation."

Finally, while instances of excessive violence may indicate hostile motivation, this assumption should not be made automatically. Rape victims may be murdered, not because of hostile motivation on the part of the rapist, but because the killing of the victim greatly increases the rapist's chances of escaping punishment by removing the

only witness to the crime (Alexander & Noonan, 1979; Groth, 1979a; Hagen, 1979;). This might be particularly likely when there is little or no difference between the punishment for rape and the punishment for murder (Lyle Steadman, personal communication, May 14, 1984).

Argument 12

"IT IS NOT A CRIME OF LUST BUT OF VIOLENCE AND POWER [because] . . . RAPE VICTIMS ARE NOT ONLY THE 'LOVELY YOUNG BLONDS' OF NEWSPAPER HEADLINES—RAPISTS STRIKE CHILDREN, THE AGED, THE HOMELY—ALL WOMEN." (Brownmiller, 1975, back cover; original emphasis)

It is fitting that Brownmiller chose this argument to place in bold type on the cover of her milestone book. Whether rapists prefer sexually attractive victims, or only select victims who are most vulnerable, forms a major argument of those on both sides of the debate (e.g., Alcock, 1983; Brownmiller, 1975; Dean & de Bruyn-kopps, 1982; Denmark & Friedman, 1985; Groth, 1979a; Groth & Hobson, 1983; Rodabaugh & Austin, 1981; Symons, 1979).

The argument that rape is not sexually motivated because rapists allegedly do not prefer attractive victims begins with the accurate observation that "Any female may become a victim of rape" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 388). This is then taken as evidence that the sexual attractiveness of victims is unimportant: "I already knew that the rapist chooses his victim with a striking disregard for conventional 'sex appeal'—she may be seventy-four and senile or twelve and a half with braces on her teeth" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 376). This alleged unimportance of attractiveness is then understandably assumed to demonstrate the unimportance of sexual motivation in the act of rape: "Only young attractive women are raped. This myth is another that stems from the belief that rape is a crime of passion and sex rather than what it is: a crime of violence" (Dean & de Bruyn-kopps, 1983, p. 36; see also Brownmiller, 1975, pp. 131-132).

The weak link in this argument is the assumption that the rape of unattractive females implies that rapists lack a preference for attractive victims. This conclusion is unjustified because it ignores the fact that rape victims are not a representative cross-section of all women. It also ignores the possibility that victim selection is based on *both attractiveness and vulnerability*.

Perhaps the most consistent finding of studies on rape, and one not likely to be merely the result of reporting bias (see Hindelang, 1977), is that women in their teens and early twenties are vastly overrepresented among rape victims (Amir, 1971; Hindeland & Davis, 1977;

Kramer, 1987; MacDonald, 1971; Miyazawa, 1976; Svalastoga, 1962; Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983). This fact is crucial because age can be used as at least a rough indicator of female attractiveness: "Physical characteristics that vary systematically with age appear to be universal criteria of female physical attractiveness; Williams (1975), in fact, remarks that age probably is the most important determinant of human female attractiveness" (Symons, 1979, p. 188). It also appears reasonably certain that "Judgments of female physical attractiveness will correspond in females closely to the age of maximum reproductive value or fertility, which peaks in the mid-teens and early 20's respectively and drops off sharply in the late 30's" (Buss, 1987, p. 342; see also Shields & Shields, 1983; Symons, 1979, 1987; Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983; Williams, 1975). This means there is a strong correlation between attractiveness and the likelihood of becoming a rape victim.

The existence of such a correlation would appear to be conclusive evidence that rapists prefer attractive victims (see Alcock, 1983; Symons, 1979). However, backers of the "not sex" explanation continue to claim that rapists do not prefer attractive victims. For example, Groth states: ". . . vulnerability and accessibility play a more significant role in determining victim selection than does physical attractiveness or alleged provocativeness. Rape is far more an issue of hostility than of sexual desire" (Groth, 1979a, p. 173). There is, however, a drastic inconsistency in attempts to account for the age distribution of rape victims on the basis of vulnerability. This is the fact that supporters of the "not sex" explanation of rape state that vulnerability to rape "may be a function simply of the age of the victim, *with both the very young and the very old at high risk because of their inability to resist*" (Robabaugh & Austin, 1981, p. 44; my emphasis; see also Abel, 1978; Dean & de Bruyn-kopps, 1982; Groth, 1979a; Groth & Hobson, 1983; Warner, 1980). Groth also points out that "Advanced age and the related life situation (for example living alone) make them [the elderly] particularly vulnerable . . ." (Groth, 1979a, p. 173; emphasis added).

The high vulnerability of the elderly is indeed reflected in their high susceptibility to a number of types of violent crimes (Hindelang, 1977). However, contrary to the claims of Katz and Mazur (1979), the age distribution of rape victims is vastly different from the age distributions of victims of nonsexual violent crimes (Lennington, 1985; Thornhill & Thornhill, 1983). In fact, the age distributions are so different that studies, including Groth's own study, consistently find that *less than five percent of rape victims are over the age of fifty*. The fact that

elderly women are very rarely raped *despite* being "particularly vulnerable" is strong evidence that rapists have a very definite preference for younger (and therefore more attractive) victims.

This does not mean that vulnerability is irrelevant to victim selection. It only means that vulnerability must be combined with attractiveness in order to account for the age distribution of rape victims. Numerous studies have found evidence that both attractiveness and vulnerability are important aspects of victim selection (Abel, 1978; Ageton, 1983; Queens Bench Foundation, 1978; Smithyman, 1978). A clue to the likely interaction between these two variables in victim selection is provided by Geis (1977) in his summary of a study by Chappell and James (1976).

Asked to describe the kinds of victims they 'prefer,' the respondents [convicted rapists] portrayed the 'American dream ideal'—a nice, friendly, young, pretty, middle-class, white female. . . . [However], on the basis of inventories of [actual] victim characteristics, it is likely that the offenders actually raped in a more indiscriminate manner than their responses would indicate (Geis, 1977, p. 27).

Therefore, it appears that the vulnerability distinguishes the preferred from actual victims. While attractiveness maximizes the sought-after sexual goal that supplies the motivation for the act, vulnerability maximizes the chances of escaping injury and punishment for the act. This could account for why very old and very young females are raped more often than would be expected on the basis of their attractiveness, *but at a rate far below what would be expected if vulnerability was the only factor involved.*

Conclusion

Public awareness of the violence and horror of the act of rape *as experienced by the victim* has been crucial to facilitating social change. However, at present, the evidence does not justify the denial of sexual motivation on behalf of the *rapist*. This point is significant since adherence to the "not sex" explanation may have the unintended consequence of hindering attempts to prevent rape. For example, the effectiveness of instruction manuals on how to avoid rape (see Crook, 1980), treatment programs for rapists (see Brecher, 1978), and public policy perspectives are potentially compromised by the denial of the sexual aspect of the crime.

Although there may be evidence of the unimportance of sexual motivation in the act of rape, such evidence cannot be unskeptically adopted. Rape is prevented by accurate knowledge about its causes, and accurate knowledge can only be obtained by the objective exami-

nation of evidence and the skeptical evaluation of conclusions based on that evidence. The preceding twelve arguments have gone unquestioned for nearly twenty years, suggesting that skepticism has been noticeably absent from recent research on rape.

Perhaps the reason for this lack of skepticism and accurate knowledge about rape is that "rape" the behavior has become obscured by the politics of "rape" the "master symbol of women's oppression" (Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1985, p. 93). An objective and accurate approach to the prevention of rape requires that the subject of rape be "de-politicized." Unfortunately, many researchers on rape fear such an objective approach: "To use the word *rape* in a de-politicized context functions to undermine ten years of feminist consciousness-raising" (Blackman, 1985, p. 118; original emphasis). Surely such fears are unfounded. "Consciousness-raising" is the act of falsifying unsupported dogma. Adherence to unsupported dogma like the "not sex" explanation of rape not only prohibits true "consciousness-raising" but potentially does so at the expense of an increased number of rape victims.

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