

**Theories of Sexual Coercion:
Evolutionary, Feminist, and Biosocial Perspectives**

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Rape is defined as “copulation resisted to the best of the victim’s ability unless such resistance would probably result in death or serious injury to the victim or in death or injury to individuals the victim commonly protects (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000, pg. 1).” More specifically, Minnesota state law defines rape as sexual contact achieved:

1. without consent;
2. with use of physical force, coercion, deception, threat; and/or
3. when the victim is:
 - mentally incapacitated or impaired;
 - physically impaired; and/or
 - asleep or unconscious.

Sexual assault is a broader legal term used to indicate any sexual activity with another person who cannot or does not consent (RAINN, 2001).

Rape is highly prevalent within the United States. Koss et al. (1987) found that more than 15% of the women sampled reported that they had been raped, and 12.1% indicated that they had been victims of attempted rape. An additional 14.4% reported that they had experienced lesser forms of sexual assault. The US Department of Justice (RAINN, 2001) warns that a woman is sexually assaulted every two minutes in America, and a woman has a one in four chance of being a victim of sexual assault at some point in

her lifetime. In 1996, only 31% of rapes were reported to some form of law enforcement, and 75% of female rape victims require medical care after the attack (RAINN, 2001).

Rape is not limited to human societies. Many animal societies show evidence of sexually coercive techniques. Males in these species rely on three main forms of sexual coercion, including forced copulation, harassment, and intimidation. Forced copulation is restricted to animal societies where the males have the strength and ability to restrain the females during copulation (Clutton-Brock and Parker, 1995).

Because rape is not limited to humans and occurs in nearly every culture, various theoretical viewpoints have struggled to identify the causes of rape, as well as effective plans for preventing sexual assaults and treating victims. This paper will present three main theories of sexual assault: evolutionary theory, feminist theory, and a synthesized (biosocial) theory of rape.

Evolutionary Theory

In order to understand the evolutionary theory of sexual coercion, one must understand the theory of natural selection and adaptation. There are two levels of behavior causation: proximate and ultimate. Proximate causes of behavior are short-term, immediate causes. Social scientists are most concerned with this type of behavior, which can include the behavior influence of genes, personality, physiology, and environmental stimuli. Proximate causes attempt to explain how these mechanism lead to behavior, while ultimate causes explain why the proximate causes exist (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

A phenotypic trait with a purposeful design created by past selection that is sufficiently precise as to rule out pure chance as a possible explanation is an adaptation.

In each adaptation is a specific cause, or selected force, that created it (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000). In other words, adaptations are solutions to environmental problems and affected individuals for long periods of time in evolution and caused directional selection. It is not necessary, then, for adaptations to increase reproductive success in current environments, and human behavior is sometimes poorly adapted to these environments. Some adaptations are specific sexual selections, which are selection of traits that increase quantity and quality of an individual's mates rather than the specific individual's survival (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

In most species, including humans, males are typically more eager to mate than females, who are enabled to choose among the males who are competing for them. In rape, however, the female is not given this opportunity to choose and instead is taken by force. This may have evolved from a difficulty for the reproductive success of males due to a female's ability to choose. Because this obstacle may have been significant, males would have had selection pressures leading to an increase in access to mates (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

Further, there exists a large sexual asymmetry in humans in terms of the minimum reproductive effort required to produce offspring. All that is required of a male is enough time to secure a mate and ejaculate, which has a relatively low energetic cost. For females, however, the minimum requirement is nine months of pregnancy, painful childbirth, and a period of lactation. During evolution, this asymmetry causes males who could mate with multiple partners to be favored by sexual selection because they out-produced males who could not gain access to multiple females (Thornhill and Thornhill, 1992).

Females, on the other hand, have been sexually selected to secure a mate with whom they have bonded and can together be responsible for the offspring. Therefore, females have adapted to resist sexual intercourse with an unbonded partner and to be more selective regarding their sexual partners (Thornhill and Thornhill, 1992). If females were selected to be willing to mate with any male under any circumstances, Thornhill and Palmer (2000) argue that rape would not occur.

To support the human rape-adaptation hypothesis, evidence of a phenotypical feature, such as the notal organ of certain male scorpionflies, must exist in humans. Unlike the male scorpionfly, which has a specific organ designed to restrain a female during forced copulation, human males are unequipped with a morphological specialization that is a candidate for rape adaptation (Thornhill and Thornhill, 1992; Thornhill and Palmer, 2000). Therefore, sociobiologists look for a rape-specific psychological adaptation in males - a “mental rape organ.” To find this, they look not at rape behavior, since the behavior itself does not indicate whether or not there is a rape-specific adaptation, but instead at rape psychology, since the act of rape results in psychological changes in areas such as emotions and arousal (Thornhill and Thornhill, 1992).

The evolutionary theory of rape does not reject the notion that learning and socialization may play a role in sexually coercive behaviors. If learning and socialization are important during the ontogeny of rape-specific adaptation, then they would be guided by a special-purpose adaptation that influences learning in a way that is specific to rape behavior (Thornhill and Thornhill, 1992). Not all men rape or find sexually coercive

behaviors arousing. This suggests that there are likely cues in the environment or during development that prohibit rape behavior (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

Though sexually coercive behavior is the result of an adaptation to increase the likelihood of a male to pass on his genes, Thornhill and Thornhill (1992) assert that rape's effect on reproduction currently is not of central importance. An adaptation is characterized by its evolutionary function, and the relationship between reproduction and the rape-adaptation hypothesis depends on the similarity of today's environment with the environmental features that led to the selection that designed the adaptation. In other words, rape behavior today may actually lead to lower rates of reproduction, but this still may be an adaptation (Thornhill and Thornhill, 1992).

The rape-adaptation hypothesis also does not assert that rape is heritable, but implies that males have psychological traits that are fixed and do not vary among the human gene pool. Inclination among men to exhibit rape behavior does not reflect genetic differences, but certain personality features, such as aggression, may be heritable. However, this is not relevant to the rape-adaptation hypothesis because a males rape behavior varies with environmental rather than genetic differences (Thornhill and Thornhill, 1992).

There are currently two likely explanations for ultimate causes of human rape. First, since increasing male partners increases male reproductive success, it may be an adaptation that was directly favored by selection. Secondly, it may instead be a by-product of other adaptations such as a sexual desire of males to have multiple partners without commitment. Either way, the rape-adaptation hypothesis and evolutionary theory help to explain the persistence of rape among human males (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

Not only can evolutionary theory explain why males may be motivated to rape, it also can provide explanations for why rape is perceived as distressing to females based on how it interfered with reproductive success during evolution. Thornhill and Palmer (2000) state that this interference took three forms: it reduced the victim's fitness by not allowing her to choose her mate, it reduced the fitness of her mate by lowering paternity certainty, and it decreased the fitness of relatives of the victim and her mate through a combination of the first two factors.

The evolutionary hypothesis of psychological pain (the mental state of feeling distraught) generally predicts that pain will be experienced when events occur that lowered reproductive success in human evolutionary history, and that the greater the negative effect of an event, the greater the psychological pain experienced. Pain is experienced to varying degrees because the experience of pain itself has reproductive costs. Based on this theory, a victim of rape who is young and fertile will experience more psychological pain than will a victim of a pre- or post-menopausal age (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

Rape causes pain to the victim by reducing her reproductive success due to possible injury and a reduction in her ability to choose the timing, circumstances, and mate for reproduction. Further, rape prevents a female from using sex in order to secure material benefits from males for herself and her offspring. If a female is pair-bonded with a male, rape may lead to a decrease of protection and a lessened involvement in parental care (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

Based on this theory, Thornhill and Palmer (2000) outline several predictions. First, young women are expected to suffer greater psychological pain than girls or older

women due to their increased need for reproductive success. Married women are predicted to suffer more than unmarried women due to the negative effect of rape on paternity certainty. Further, as violence in rape increases, psychological pain is said to decrease. For married women, violence can provide clear evidence that the copulation was non-consensual and add credibility to the rape. The nature of the sexual behavior can also play a role in psychological pain following a rape. According to evolutionary theory, penile penetration of the vagina will lead to greater distress. Since studies show these to predictions to be true, age, mateship status, credibility and violence, and whether or not there was penile penetration can all be considered proximate causes of psychological pain following rape. This pain may be an adaptation that helps to defend against experiencing events that reduce reproductive success in the future. (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

Besides an adaptation involving psychological pain following rape, females may also possess psychological adaptations to prevent rape from occurring in the first place. For example, one study showed that young, fertile women are more fearful of attacks outside their home, and tend to fear sexual assault, while older women tend to fear burglary (Pawson and Banks, 1993). Chavanne and Gallup (1998) found that young women showed a decrease in behaviors with a high rape risk, such as walking alone in the dark, when they were not on the birth control pill or when they were in the fertile stage of the menstrual cycle.

Thornhill and Palmer (2000) suggest that future research is done on female reactions to rape from a Darwinian perspective. Specifically, they would like to examine how female behaviors fit into the psychological pain hypothesis, including a separation of behaviors of women who are married or pair-bonded. It is also hypothesized that women

taking psychotropic medication to alleviate their psychological pain might experience a difficulty with rape-related problems, since psychological pain may be an adaptation that helps to help a person avoid similar events. Ending this pain may lead to an inability to avoid recurrence. Though past findings have indicated that women have an adaptation that processes information regarding events that decrease the probability of reproductive success, more research is needed in the specificity of this adaptation to rape (Thornhill and Palmer 2000).

Rape is costly to females, human and across species. Male rape behavior may increase the male's chances of reproductive success while decreasing the female's probability. It can lead to injury and even death, as occurs among some humans, birds, and non-mammalian reptiles. Because of this, females may have developed counter-adaptations to rape (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

Many non-human females have developed adaptation against rape such as consenting to mating to avoid harassment or injury, forming alliances with both males and females for protection, avoidance, physical resistance. Female scorpionflies resist unwanted mating strongly and sometimes successfully avoiding insemination. In humans, it has been suggested that much of a rapist's ejaculate may be rejected by the absence of an orgasm in females. Since females seldom show arousal and almost never achieve orgasm during forced copulation, this may be evidence that the lack of a capacity to orgasm during rape may be an evolved response to forced sex (Clutton-Brock and Parker, 1995; Thornhill and Palmer, 2000; Thornhill, 1984).

According to the evolutionary theory of rape behavior, humans have thusfar been unable to eradicate rape for two main reasons. First, people are unable to understand why

humans have the desires, motivations, and values that they have because they lack understanding of the evolutionary (ultimate) causes or why humans are the way they are. Because of this, people's knowledge of the immediate (proximate) causes of rape is very limited (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000). Second, attempts to prevent rape have not been based on an evolutionary perspective, and are "designed to make ideological statements rather than to be consistent with scientific knowledge of human behavior (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000, pg. 2)."

Education programs for rape prevention should focus on male sexual impulses, instead of teaching young men that their rape behaviors are based on a desire to control and dominate. Thornhill and Palmer (2000) envision a program that focuses on teaching males how to restrain their sexual impulses by educating them on the evolutionary reasons for their desires and teaching them to be cautious of effects of past Darwinian selection. It should be stressed that rape is not acceptable and that his sexual desires do not provide an excuse for rape behavior. The program should be concluded by outlining in detail the penalties for rape to further dissuade the behavior.

Women can also be educated in rape prevention by being taught the same explanation for male sexual adaptations and that males may read signs of acceptance even when none exist. Women should also be taught the "costs associated with attractiveness (pg. 181)" and that wearing provocative clothing may attract undesirable males. Though no woman's behavior gives a man the right to rape, women should not be encouraged to place themselves in dangerous situations (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

Finally, treatment of female victims of rape should include an understanding of the proximate causes of rape to focus therapy where it is most needed. Current therapy

programs often maintain that rape is not sexually motivated and that rape stems from a collective patriarchal desire to dominate women; evolutionary theory would better explain to a woman why her attacker appeared to be sexually motivated, why her mate may view the attack as an instance of infidelity, why she is experiencing psychological pain that is interfering with her life, and why her family wants to keep the attack secret. Stressing that rape can be sexually motivated and is not simply a violent attack may also help a victim of a nonviolent rape to accept what happened as sexual coercion.

There has been much criticism to this theory from dissenters. Thornhill and Palmer (2000) caution social scientists and feminists against the naturalistic fallacy, the view that what ought to be is what is, and that what is natural is therefore “good” or acceptable. This is compared to natural disasters such as tornadoes and floods - though natural, they are not desirable.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory of sexual coercion holds that all men use rape as a process of intimidation by which all women are kept in a state of fear. During the present and the past, rape and sexual coercion have hindered women’s rights to choice and opportunities, sexually and otherwise. With the findings that one in four women will be victims of forced sexual acts at least once in their lifetime (Koss, 1987), it is not surprising that the feminist movement has focused on rape as one of its main issues (Malamuth, 1996; Brownmiller, 1975).

Susan Brownmiller, one of the first to use feminism to explain sexual coercion, asserts that a key difference in motivation to engage in sexual activity is the lack of an estrous cycle in human females, thus leaving humans open to copulation every day of

every month. Human females do not show visible signs of estrus; they have instead developed a “complex system of psychological signs and urges, and a complex system of pleasure (p. 13).” Without a biological mating system, a male can engage in sexual behavior with a female in a way that is not dependent on biological cycles, and therefore can rape. Males at some time realized they could rape, and proceeded to do it (Brownmiller, 1975).

Most feminists believe sexual coercion is motivated by a desire to exert control over women and not out of lust. Rape, according to feminists, is not necessarily a sexual act, but an act of violence. Violence asserts power, and men use this to dominate women. This theory views rape as emerging from a social framework that emphasizes group conflict. Since males have constructed a patriarchal society in which men are holders of wealth and power, they engage in behaviors that maintain this control, whether consciously or unconsciously. Physically, men are stronger and have sexual anatomy that makes rape possible. Men learned that women could be controlled and traumatized by dominating them using sex (Malamuth, 1996; Brownmiller, 1975; Muelenhard, Danoff-Burg, and Powch, 1996).

This power struggle is inherent in the manner by which the sexes are socialized. Women are taught to be passive and submissive; men are instructed to be active and dominant. Tenderness, sensitivity, and empathy are encourage for women and discouraged in men. Because of this, men are socialized to devalue women and develop masculine self-concepts. Further, males develop hostility towards women and even learn to find sexual arousal from domination. This power structure exists to maintain a hierarchical structure where violence is available and even necessary. Different

socialization accounts for individual differences among men (Brownmiller, 1975; Malamuth, 1996).

Size disparity and women's weaker physical strength makes them further vulnerable to sexual coercion. Their reproductive capacity has selected women for male domination, as this was something men aimed to control. Feminist view that in the past, paternity certainty was important in terms of property ownership, and therefore this control was necessary to maintain power (Brownmiller, 1975).

Though sometimes considered a separate theory, social learning and feminist theories overlap in several ways, most importantly in the belief that sexist attitudes lead to increased motivation to rape. Rapists have been found to hold more violent attitudes toward women, and to be physiologically aroused to the same degree by nonconsensual and consensual sexual behavior. Research also suggests that rape is related to sociopolitical and economic disparities by suggesting that rape actual increases with less disparity, upholding the theory that men rape to maintain a hierarchy (Ellis, 1989).

More recently, feminist theory has shifted from a simplistic view that rape motivated solely by a desire to dominate and not out of lust. Feminists instead claim that they are viewing the act of rape from the victim's perspective and not the perspective of the perpetrator. Rape is, however, sometimes sex from the victim's perspective (Muelenhard, Danoff-Burg, and Powch, 1996). Many women who are raped do not consider themselves to be rape victims, despite that their incident fulfills legal qualifications to be considered sexual assault (Koss, 1987).

Men, whether they rape or not, are subject to the political, economic, and social advantages of a patriarchal society. Men benefit from the preservation of a power

structure that limits the rights of women, and therefore may neglect to take the crime of sexual coercion seriously or fight on women's behalf (Brownmiller, 1975; Muelenhard, Danoff-Burg, and Powch, 1996).

Some feminists take this view further. Rape is a socially constructed concept, and therefore is shaped by society and does not have a true definition. Some feminists feel a woman is raped if she has sex and feels violated, whether due to economic, social, or personal pressures. Rape also might occur each time a man and woman have sex when it was not freely initiated by the woman. Even if a woman initiates sex, the act is still rape if she were acting under social pressures. Perhaps the most radical definition of rape is the assertion that no woman can freely consent to sex in a patriarchal society. Even if she wants or desires sex, this desire was manufactured by a hierarchical culture that aims to oppress women. According to this definition, any act of sex between a male and female in a patriarchal society is rape (Muelenhard, Danoff-Burg, and Powch, 1996).

Despite the disagreement on the definition of rape, most of feminist theory agrees that rape is a pseudosexual act that is violence from the victim's point of view, despite the motivations of her rapist. Sex may be the goal of some rapists, but coercion, domination and violence is often the means of achieving this goal. Brownmiller (1975) succeeded in changing the common assertion that women secretly desire and are aroused by rape, and gave prevention programs a framework through which to aid victim's in understanding the psychological repercussions of the assault. Today, feminists are working on moving rape to a discussion of control, where what is important is free consent to sexual activity (Muelenhard, Danoff-Burg, and Powch, 1996).

Feminist theory asserts that any woman may be a victim of rape, despite her appearance, age, status. Though any woman is a natural target for a rapist simply because she is female, most rapists are the same age as or younger than their attacker, and are especially at risk between the ages of ten and 29. The victim is typically smaller than her attacker in weight and height, and this is both a physical and psychological disadvantage. Because of this, rape prevention programs should focus on girls and young women, those most at risk, and teach self-defense since rapists target those least likely effectively resist (Brownmiller, 1992). Women should be taught to express their desires clearly, keep themselves safe and alert in risky situations, and how the role of power and domination plays into a male's motivation to rape (Brownmiller, 1975).

The laws should be written in a nonsexist manner, treating all sex forced on an unwilling partner equally, whether the perpetrator is a husband, acquaintance, or stranger. Rapists should receive harsher sentences, noting that research finds that where societal regulation and punishment is highest, rape rates are lowest (Brownmiller, 1975).

Hilberman (1976, p. 438) contends that the "ultimate elimination of rape demands a massive restructuring of social values to include a reconsideration of the relations between the sexes." Hilberman and other feminists believe rape will not be eliminated until sex roles are no longer defined by stereotypical expectations based on sex and power motives. Men's self-esteem must not be based on domination of women or rejection of feminist traits in favor of masculine strength. A system that discourages competition and instead encourages a sharing of resources and cooperation will aid in this restructuring (Malamuth, 1996).

Synthesized (Biosocial) Theory

Lee Ellis (1989; 1991) suggests a theory of rape that adds concepts of how sex hormones affect brain functioning to portions of evolution, feminist, and social learning theories of rape to form a biosocial theory. This theory has been designed to incorporate the strengths of the other theories, while avoiding the weaknesses, to create a synthesized theory.

According to Ellis (1989), a major strength of feminist theory is its recognition of the relationship between rape and power/dominance structure between the sexes. Further, feminist and social learning theories introduced the concept that exposure to violent pornography would enhance tendencies of some men to behave aggressively towards women, which is empirically supported. However, the assertion that rape is a pseudosexual act that is motivated by violence is a weakness in these theories as nonsexual motivations may be significant. Evolutionary theory, on the other hand, has strength in recognizing sexual motivation as important in several forms of rape, as well as explaining why women of childbearing age are the most likely targets and the psychological pain following an assault. Evolutionary theory has done a reasonable job in identifying natural selection pressure, but has failed to specify the actual genetic, neurochemical, and other proximate causes of rape (Ellis, 1989).

Though the research in all three theories is relatively new and empirical work is expected, a biosocial theory of rape may better predict what is empirically observed in terms of rape behavior. The theory (Ellis, 1989; Ellis, 1991) rests on four main propositions:

1. That two drives, a sex drive and a drive to possess and control, underlie most rapes (and other forms of sexual behavior);

2. The actual techniques involved in most rapes are mainly learned, though not all males are equally likely to learn these techniques;
3. Evolution has selected males for readily learning methods of securing a large number of mates, including the use of deception and force; and
4. Variance in tendencies to rape can be explained at the level of brain functioning based on differing exposures to high regimens of androgens and other sex hormones.

The first proposition suggests that all sexually reproducing animals have an unlearned sex drive controlled by the limbic system of the brain. A second drive to possess and control is also exhibited in many animals, and this is directed towards numerous things in the environment, particularly food, water, and shelter, but including sexual partners and offspring. In animals, this drive is presented non-linguistically, as in male rats who strongly resist territorial intrusion of an alien male, especially when there is a female present. Primates also exhibit signs of possession and dominance, and it is documented that humans are extremely possessive toward one another in terms of mating behavior (Ellis, 1991).

The biosocial theory differs from the feminist and social learning theories by asserting that rape is largely a sexual act. Ellis (1991) goes on to suggest that, for human beings, the sex and possession/domination drives are closely linked, and that both comprise the motivation behind all sexual behavior. Domination and aggression are tactics rather than goals, a means towards a sexual end. For instance, research on date rapes shows that use of physical force comes after other actions, such as use of alcohol, pressure and arguing, threats to break off the relationship, and ignoring protests, which

suggests a sexual motivation. Self-reports show that even most stranger rapists admit to using only the force necessary to subdue a victim, and that very few men and women view “power and anger” as the main motivation to rape (Ellis, 1991).

The second proposition of this theory suggests that the behavior surrounding sexual coercion is learned, and that the major form of learning is experiential rather than imitative or attitudinal. Some males may be more disposed to rape behavior than others genetically, but no male is a born rapist. Men learn to become rapists through shaping and successive approximation and women may play a role in shaping this behavior. Males are more aroused than females by visual stimuli, and this might. If females initially resist and then give in to a males pressure, he may later generalize that behavior to other women.

The third proposition of the biosocial theory is that, due to natural selection, the sex drive of males is stronger than that of females. As a result, men are more likely to desire a large number of partners than females and will employ a wide variety of tactics to reach this goal. Females, on the other hand, have a tendency to prefer sex with a male with whom they have a committed relationship, where the male would take a part in raising offspring (Ellis, 1991). Because men can pass on genes more readily than can women, they have a lot to gain by copulating with a large number of females. The stronger sex drive of men may be a result of natural selection and lead men to engage in coercive techniques with hesitant women, who are looking for an investment from potential mates in the raising of offspring.

The fourth proposition of the biosocial theory of sexual coercion states that variations in exposure to male-typical sex hormones causes individuals to vary in their sex drives and sensitivity to the threat of punishment and the suffering of others. This

proposition focuses on both the motivation and learning that lead to rape behaviors. Ellis (1989; 1991) suggests that testosterone affects brain processing in ways that alter the propensity to rape in terms of both motivation and learning. This neurohormone may influence the strength of sex drive and the sensitivity of a person to the suffering of others.

Research shows that androgens affect the structure and functioning of the brain, and that testosterone is tied to sexual behavior. In castrated primates, most show dramatically reduced sexual motivation. Studies also show that increased testosterone leads to an increase of sexual behavior and thoughts in both male primates and male humans. The female brain also responds in a similar way to androgens. An increase of testosterone in the brain increases sex drive, and exposure to sexual stimuli also facilitates the production of testosterone (Ellis, 1991).

This research has suggested that the brains of males with a high probability of exhibiting rape behavior differ from those with low probability. This does not say that learning has no influence on sex drive, but does contradict assertions that the intensity of sex drive is learned. Thus, within each sex," individuals are likely to vary in the degree to which they are neurohormonally disposed toward learning sexual aggression (p 636)."

Biosocial theory of rape also differs from the other theories because it predicts that rape behavior is not exhibited exclusively by males; a small amount of rapes should be committed by women. This fits with data that 3-4% of men have been raped by women in the US. The evolutionary theory might provide some explanation for this. Females who have a difficult time securing a mate may use coercive means to copulate with highly desirable male. Also, unlike the feminist and social learning theories, which view

pornography as a major contributor to aggressive sexual behavior, the biosocial theory shows pornography as having some rape-promoting effect, especially for those who have a neurohormonal predisposition for learning and exhibiting rape behaviors (Ellis, 1989; Ellis, 1991).

Analysis

Though little critical analysis of the biosocial theory exists, the publication of Thornhill's and Palmer's A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion in April of 2000 brought much criticism from feminists. Feminist theorists believe the research is at odds with what we know about sexual assault and its perpetrators and victims. Further, by asserting that rape is natural, it increases the likelihood that women will be blamed for their rape by wearing provocative clothing, being in high-risk situations, or even simply being biologically present.

In this country, victims of rape are seldom able to bring their attackers to justice. The victim's past sexual behavior, clothing, and the assault's location have all been used in favor of the perpetrator, and few rapists end up being convicted of their crime. Sexual assault advocates and crisis workers voiced warranted concern that evolutionary theory would further excuse a rapist's behavior, by not just showing it was the victim's fault, but also by scientifically proving that the rapist is not to blame due to natural urges.

This is threatening to people who have worked to eliminate rape and treat its victims because it is completely opposed to what we believe we know about rape: that the victim is not to blame; that rape is due to a male desire to oppress; that it doesn't matter what the victim wore or where the attack took place. Further, evolutionary theory states that *all* men are potential rapists unless societal constraints exist to decrease their

motivation. For women who have been victims the idea that all men may be rapists in the right situation is terrifying. Trust is difficult to rebuild following a rape, and I think it is easier to believe that rapists are the exception and not the rule.

I believe one of the downfalls of the evolutionary theory is that it fails to recognize the role that environment and social influence may play in the occurrence of sexual assault. Feminists believe rape is a social phenomena brought on by a patriarchal society, and that men are not born rapists. On the other hand, evolutionary theory asserts that men are born with the motivation to rape and that society decreases rather than increasing the likelihood of rape.

As a believer in feminist theory, Thornhill and Palmer challenged me to evaluate my own notions on rape. Much of their research does not seem to fit with my own experience and that of other victims. It does not explain gang rapes, incest, extremely violent rapes, rapes where the perpetrator does not penetrate the victim, same-sex rapes, and child molestation. Some of these actions may be best explained by pathology, but evolutionary theory does not discuss this.

One positive outcome of the Thornhill and Palmer research is that it has forced feminists to re-examine their assertion that rape is an act of violence and not of sex. By relaxing this definition to include rapes motivated by sex, victims of violent and relatively nonviolent rapes will be better able to accept that what happened to them was a crime.

I think biosocial theory comes closest to explaining much of what we know about rape with its inclusion of neurohormones and social influences as well as evolutionary adaptations. This theory better explains rapes that do not fit into the models that feminists or sociobiologists present.

New theories should be examined before being accepted as truth. Rape is not a simple act, and there is no simple explanation for it. I do not believe any of these theories are completely accurate in their explanations of rape; they all leave questions unanswered. However, with one in four women at risk of being raped in her lifetime in the United States, something must be done. Rape will not be eliminated, but it can be decreased if it is taken seriously by society. These theories are increasing dialogue and challenging theorists of sexual coercion, and hopefully can be combined into a better understanding rape.

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