

## **Sex by Force**

### **CHAPTER 9**

**By Baumeister and Tice**

To a social scientist, a centrally fascinating feature of sex is that one simple act can represent anything from the best to the worst of human nature. At the ideal, sex is "making love". It enables two people to express their deepest positive feelings for each other and cement their commitment to treat each with value and respect, to support and help each other for a lifetime. But at its worst, sex can be a means by which one person seeks his (or, less often, her) own pleasure at another's expense and even expresses his or her contempt and hate for another by inflicting psychological harm as well as physical dominance.

This chapter is concerned with the dark side of sex. The term *rape* has long been used to refer to sex acts that are forced upon someone against her (or sometimes his) will. Because the word has become encumbered with important legal, emotional, and moral layers of meaning, many researchers now avoid it and prefer to use other terms, such as sexual coercion or forcible sex. (We shall generally use all these terms interchangeably.)

The vagueness of the terms has made it difficult to assess the scope of the problem. Some researchers have been eager to conclude that rape and sexual coercion are widespread, and so they have adopted relatively loose criteria to include such acts as "stealing a kiss" from a woman who has not consented to being kissed. In fact, some studies have concluded that one out of every four American female college students has been raped, leading critics such as Roiphe (1993) to simply refuse to believe them: "If 25 percent of my female friends were really being raped, wouldn't I know it?" (p. 52). Surveys of university women have sometimes yielded such high numbers that schools began opening rape crisis hot lines, and in some cases the administrations were then surprised when these hot lines receive only a handful of calls in an entire year. Roiphe reported, for example, that Princeton University had only two rapes reported to campus security in the ten years prior to her book. At the University of California at Berkeley, which has fourteen thousand female students, only two rapes were reported to the police in one recent year (1990), and only forty to eighty women had called the campus rape-counseling service (Gilbert, 1992).

Undoubtedly some of the researchers who publicize exaggerated statistics are well intentioned. They hope that by presenting the highest possible numbers of so-called rape victims, they can accomplish two praiseworthy goals. First, they hope to gain the attention of the general public and the lawmakers so that stronger efforts can be made to curtail rape. After all, regardless of the actual prevalence, rape remains a terrible crime, and any rape at all is too much. If a little hype in the form of inflated numbers is necessary to get more action to prevent rape, then it may be worth it. Second, they hope to reassure individual rape victims that they are not alone and should not blame themselves nor refuse to take action. To depict rape as a common crime that most women suffer is, the researchers hope, to replace the shame that an individual victim might feel with a feeling of solidarity across the gender. (Male rape victims are not usually included in this concern, and until recently relatively few studies even sought to ascertain how many men have been subjected to sexual coercion, by men or women.)

Other researchers dispute the strategy as well as the high numbers. They contend that exaggerated claims simply elicit disbelief and ultimately discredit the efforts to improve the situation. To claim that the majority of American women are rape victims is implausible, and so perhaps many people will simply refuse to believe that a serious problem exists. Furthermore, they say, it is ultimately unfair and inappropriate to put a woman who has been beaten and forced at gunpoint to have intercourse, for example in the same category as a woman whose date kissed her before she was ready to be kissed, or with another woman who had to pull her boyfriend's hands away from the front of her sweater when they were necking. What they went through may have been unpleasant and morally objectionable, but it was not on the same level as being raped.

Like most serious researchers, we have relied on the NHSLS (Laumann et al., 1994) for the most precise estimates of sexual activity. Hence that is the logical place to look for a general estimate about how common rape is. When we turn to that task, however, we find three obstacles prevent us from coming away with a clear and definite answer.

The first obstacle is a technical problem. The researchers goofed, as they themselves admit. Their research included both a written survey and a face-to-face interview. On the written survey, the crucial item was "Have you ever been forced by a man to do something that you did not want to do?" (Laumann et al., 1994, p. 334). They forgot to include the word *sexual*. The literal meaning of the question would therefore refer to any sort of coercion, such as if the man forced the woman to wake up earlier than she wanted to, or to watch a television show that she did not want to see, or to visit his relatives. Twenty percent of women answered yes to this question. The researchers noted

that most women probably did understand the question to refer to sex, because most of the questions on the questionnaire referred to sex. People are strongly swayed by context.

In the face-to-face interview, the researchers did explicitly specify the sexual nature of being forced to do something, and 15 percent of women said they had been forced. The researchers decided that for their further analyses they would count all women who answered yes to the force question either on the questionnaire or in the face-to-face interview, and this yielded a total of 22 percent of women. This is the figure usually used from that study, but it may be a little high given the ambiguity of the question. The 15 percent figure (relying on the face-to-face interview only, which asked unambiguously about being forced to do something sexual) would be the lowest estimate. As the researchers also pointed out, the face-to-face interviews yielded lower numbers than the written questionnaire on a variety of issues, probably because some people are reluctant to admit certain things aloud that they may be willing to acknowledge when answering written questions in an anonymous fashion.

Thus, the first obstacle to getting a clear estimate of the prevalence of rape from the NHSLs is the technical problem caused by the mistake in the questionnaire. The number of women surveyed who said they had been forced to do something sexual is apparently between 15 percent and 22 percent. Although this estimate is not nearly as high as some surveys have claimed, it is still shockingly high. Each percentage point refers to about a million American women, and so the survey suggests that somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty million women have been victimized.

The second obstacle to using the NHSLs data involves the extent of victimization. The questionnaire item referred to "something that you did not want to do," and in the face-to-face interview the specification of something sexual was added, but still the extent of sexual contact remained unclear. In general, the NHSLs defined sex as including vaginal or anal intercourse, oral intercourse, and hand-to-genital contact, with or without orgasm. Touching a woman's vagina without her permission would therefore count as forcible sex, whereas touching her breasts without her permission would not. This definition is reasonable, but we should keep in mind that it does not necessarily yield numbers that refer to forcible intercourse. The authors of the study noted that legal definitions of rape do not include hand-to-genital contact, and so the 22 percent figure of sexual victimization does not necessarily mean 22 percent of women were raped in a legal sense. The 22 percent probably also includes some lesser things, depending on how liberally the interviewees interpreted the question about having been forced to do something sexual.

The third obstacle to use of the data is the real stumper, however. The NHSLs researchers asked men whether they had ever forced a woman to do something sexual. Less than 3 percent of men said yes (2.8 percent, to be precise). At first glance, this number is far out of synchrony with the female responses. The problem is reminiscent of the discrepancy in number of sex partners, which we discussed in Chapter 2. How can 22 percent of women have been forced sexually, if only 3 percent of men forced women?

The obvious answer would be that a handful of men perpetrate all these acts. If each rapist raped seven different women, on average, and there was no overlap, then 3 percent of men could accomplish the rape of 21 percent of women. But the "obvious" answer does not appear to be correct. The seven-to-one ratio might apply in principle if these men were going around raping strangers. As we shall see, however, most of these acts of forcible sex involved partners in close, long-term relationships. In plain terms, the women were forced by men they loved or married. Because people do not usually have such long-term sexual relationships with so many different people, these numbers would not be able to add up properly to account for the seven-to-one discrepancy.

Again, we are inclined to conclude that the huge discrepancy between men and women in reports of forcible sex arise because men and women are processing information differently. They may differ in how they label, how they count, or how they remember events. In Chapter 2, we suggested that different rules for counting sex helped explain why men claim to have had more sex partners than women. Men count as sex certain acts which women do not.

Unfortunately that difference works against us here (at least for the purposes of understanding the discrepancy in rape reports). If men count more acts as sex than women, then one would expect more men to claim to have forced a woman to perform sex acts than women would claim to have been forced—exactly the opposite of what has been found. This makes the problem worse. Some other discrepancy in how information is processed must be at work here. The next section will provide one plausible basis.

### **Victims and Perpetrators think Differently**

One of the earliest ideas in social psychology was that people's perceptions are shaped by their biases and expectations. In an influential early study (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954), students from two universities viewed identical footage of a controversial, dirty football game between their schools and counted the numbers of rule violations

each team made. Students from Dartmouth counted about equal numbers of violations by both teams, whereas Princeton students counted almost twice as many violations by Dartmouth. Students also tended to rate their own team's violations as minor and the other team's violations as flagrant. The implication was that students identified with their own university and were therefore predisposed to see their own side as relatively benevolent and their opponents as malicious and dangerous. In other words, their identification with their school biased their perceptions.

Recent work has explored how some other roles likewise can bias how people process information and draw conclusions. In particular, victims and perpetrators appear to think and understand events in different ways. To victims, transgressions are severe, have lasting consequences, are unquestionably immoral, and often occur in repeated patterns. To perpetrators, the same kinds of events seem less severe, have temporary consequences, fall into morally gray areas, and tend to be isolated and one-time events. Perpetrators seem unable or unwilling to understand the suffering of victims. Victims seem unable or unwilling to understand the motives and concerns of perpetrators (see Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Gordon & Miller, in press; Mikula, Athenstaedt, Heschgl, & Heimgartner, in press). Each group seems to see its own feelings and reactions in clear, vivid ways, while the experience of the other role is hazy and vague. It seems likely that these differences reflect differences in both how the events are processed while they are happening and how biased memory can reconstruct them.

There are several other aspects of sex that contain victim-perpetrator discrepancies. With regard to infidelity, for example, victims and perpetrators see things quite differently. Hansen (1987) found that people rated their own infidelities as doing less damage to the relationship than their partner's infidelities. The maximum response of saying that the unfaithful act "hurt a great deal" was endorsed by only 9 percent of men and 14 percent of women, when they were talking about how their own acts hurt their partner. When talking about how their partner's acts had hurt them, however, 45 percent of men and 30 percent of women endorsed that response of maximum hurt. Spanier and Margolis (1983) found that people said their own extramarital activity was a result, not a cause, of problems in the relationship, but that their spouse's extramarital activity was a direct cause of relationship problems. Gordon (1999) also found that people assigned to identify with the victim of a partner infidelity had more negative judgments of the perpetrator than people who had been assigned to identify with the perpetrator.

These discrepancies may well contribute to the gender gap in perceptions of sexual coercion. Sexual coercion, especially as studied in the NHLSL, is something that men do to women. Women are thus the victims, while men are the perpetrators. Perpetrators tend to downplay the events and see them as morally ambiguous, whereas victims may see clear moral lines. That would be a major reason that women perceive rape where men do not. As victims, women are more aware of what is being done to them (particularly in terms of their lack of consent) and of stark moral lines being crossed, whereas such things are much hazier in the men's view. Likewise, if the man does not intend to force the woman and simply applies a little extra pressure to go farther when they are already engaged in heavy petting, he might conceivably fail to count this as an act of force, while to the woman, the man's intentions may seem less clear than her own sense of being violated.

Who is correct? This question is quite difficult to answer in any victim-perpetrator discrepancy, because one needs an objective standard against which to measure victims and perpetrators. The fact that victims and perpetrators differ from each other merely guarantees that one or the other is distorting the effects, but it is difficult to establish which one. The usual assumption is that the victim tells the truth, because the perpetrator might be lying to escape his guilt. But if we are dealing with biased information processing, rather than outright lying, then either or both could be distorting the facts.

A laboratory test of distortions was conducted by Stillwell and Baumeister (1997). They furnished people with an objective account of a transgression, and people were supposed to identify with either the victim or the perpetrator (randomly assigned by the experimenter) and then tell the story in their own words as if it had happened to them. The stories people furnished were consistent with the victim-perpetrator differences found in other studies, and so these experiments were consistent with the general patterns. What was important, though, was that the researchers could then compare these stories against the original text to count errors. They could thus tell who was making errors.

The results were somewhat surprising. Victims and perpetrators made almost exactly the same number of errors. Both victims and perpetrators made more errors than the control group (who was simply assigned to tell the story in its original form, as if it had happened to someone else), so the results do not reflect ordinary difficulties of learning and remembering. Bias was clearly at work. Both victims and perpetrators were biasing the story, and with about the same degree.

But of course victims and perpetrators made systematically different kinds of errors. Victims tended to exaggerate the severity of the consequences and to downplay extenuating circumstances that reduced the perpetrators' guilt, whereas perpetrators tended to do the opposite.

These results suggest that both victims and perpetrators are biased. Applied to the rape statistics, these results suggest that the true incidence of rape may lie somewhere between the men's figure of 3 percent and the women's of 22 percent. There is, however, one qualification: Stillwell and Baumeister found that most of the errors made by both victims and perpetrators involved deleting things that had happened, rather than fabricating things that had not happened. It is easier to forget than to invent, apparently (or at least it is more common). This line of reasoning would point toward the women being more accurate in regard to whether rape occurred. Hence we shall assume that the "true" incidence of sexual coercion is closer to the figures derived from women's reports than from men's reports.

Before we apply the findings of victim-perpetrator bias to the gender difference in perception of rape, however, we should consider other explanations based in gender differences. As we have seen, we can rule out one area of difference, because men perceive more events as sex than women: This event would push in the opposite direction. Still, some might argue that men are simply more insensitive than women to their partner's wants and needs (Byers & O'Sullivan, 1988), and so male insensitivity is mainly responsible for the differences in consent. Another possibility, to which we shall return later, is the belief that women say no when they mean yes, and that men thus sometimes disregard women's protests or refusals and push ahead to force sex on women who do not want it (e.g., Muehlenhard & Hallabaugh, 1988).

These questions can be resolved by seeing whether the same victim-perpetrator difference is found when women are the perpetrators and men are the victims. If so, then there is nothing special about gender in this regard, and the victim and perpetrator roles are the culprits. In contrast if there is only a difference when men force women and not when women force men, then we should invoke gender alone to explain the discrepancy.

Relevant data were furnished by O'Sullivan, Byers, and Finkelman (1998; see also Byers & O'Sullivan, 1988). They surveyed male and female college students about sexual coercion, including questions about both victim and perpetrator experiences. The gap was almost identical for men and women. Episodes in which men coerced women into sexual activity were reported by about twice as many women (43.5 percent) as men (20.0 percent). Likewise, episodes in which women coerced men into sexual activity were reported by about twice as many men (18.5 percent) as women (8.8 percent). To be sure, those numbers suggest that men coerce women more than women coerce men, and both genders agree on that. But female coercion of males does reveal the same role bias in that far more men say they are victimized than women admit to coercing men. The victim-perpetrator gap appears to be independent of gender.

## **The Typical Rape**

The word *rape* conjures up a familiar stereotype. A woman is out walking alone at night, especially in a deserted place such as a dark street or parking lot. A strange man attacks and overpowers her, with either physical strength or a weapon. He forces her to submit to his wishes and then disappears, never to be seen again. In another scenario, a man breaks into a woman's apartment, finds her there alone, and forces her to have sex, again using either physical force or a weapon.

In the previous section, we mentioned the finding from the NHSLS that most rapes follow a very different scenario. Although the stereotype does correspond to some real events (and moreover ones that may be especially traumatic for the victims), the rapist as the violent stranger is the distinct minority. In fact, Laumann et al. (1994) concluded that only about 4 percent of incidents of sexual coercion (of men forcing women) involve strangers.

Instead of strangers, it appears to be lovers and boyfriends who are mainly responsible for sexual coercion. When women were asked to indicate who had forced them into sexual activity against their will, almost half said that the man was someone with whom they had once been in love. Another 9 percent identified the spouse as the culprit. Combining those categories, therefore, we can conclude that over half the incidents of sexual coercion involve lovers and husbands. (The remainder of cases were about equally divided between well-known and casual acquaintances, plus the 4 percent by strangers.)

These data change the way we must think about sexual coercion (and rape prevention too). Women are at a greater risk from their husbands and lovers than from strangers. It is necessary to understand sexual coercion as typically occurring in the context of a developing or ongoing romantic relationship. This picture is confirmed by the study by O'Sullivan et al. (1998), which found that almost three out of every five (58.7 percent) victimized women said they had engaged in consensual sex with the same person on a previous occasion. Two out of five (38 percent) had in fact been coerced by the same man on a previous occasion, suggesting that (1) the sexual coercion was to some extent a repeating pattern in the relationship, and (2) women do not necessarily stop interacting with men who rape or coerce them. The latter conclusion is confirmed by other data showing that 42 percent of rape victims later

engage in consensual sex with men who had raped them (Koss, 1988), and that only about a quarter of women refuse to have any further contact with the man after an incident of sexual coercion (Murnen, Perot, & Byrne, 1988). Many women (25-30 percent) said they were friends with men who had on a previous occasion sexually attacked and raped them, and some (11 percent) said that the man who had attacked and raped them was still their current boyfriend (Murnen et al., 1989).

An important study by the respected sex researcher Eugene Kanin (1985) compiled results from seventy-one men who admitted having committed date rape. Naturally there is no way to tell how typical these men are of rapists in general. The simple fact that they admitted engaging in date rape is enough to set them apart from the many men who deny their actions (although some of the men in the study had initially denied their rape but had come forward after hearing Kanin lecture about date rape). Moreover, Kanin reported that only a few of the incidents had been reported to the police, and in every case the charges had been dropped later, so the men did not show up in any official statistics about rape. Still, their accounts are relevant and fascinating.

Kanin found that most of the date rapes occurred between a man and a woman who had had two to five previous dates with each other. Most of the men had had some degree of consensual sexual contact with the victim on the earlier dates. More importantly, most had had some amount of consenting sexual contact on the date that involved the rape. The most common pattern, apparently, was that the couple was involved in heavy petting and oral sex. The woman wanted to stop at that point, but the man forced her to engage in vaginal intercourse.

Such episodes raise substantial practical problems. A woman (or a man) has every right to refuse to have intercourse even after consenting to oral sex, but juries are often suspicious of women who claim to have been raped when they admit to consenting to oral sex. These rapists admitted, at least by the time of the study, that they knew the woman did not want to have genital intercourse and thus were consenting to only the oral sex, but under those circumstances a woman is both physically *and* legally vulnerable. Oral sex requires partially removing someone's clothes as well as finding a relatively secluded setting. (Very few couples have their first oral sex in a restaurant, for example.) In such a compromising situation, it is not difficult for a man to force a reluctant woman to have intercourse.

We shall return to Kanin's findings at several points in this chapter, because his study provided a rich glimpse into the minds of men who admit to perpetrating date rape. For now, however, the key point is to incorporate the scenes it described into our image of rape. The violent stranger in the dark alley may well commit one kind of especially dangerous and traumatic rape. A far more common kind occurs, however, when the woman has consented to engage in lightly arousing sexual activity with the man but wants to stop short of full intercourse.

This is not to say that women can never refuse to go all the way once they have begun. Ample evidence indicates that most men stop at whatever point the woman refuses (e.g., Byers, 1988), as of course they should. But limited sexual contact does make some men want to continue no matter what, and so it puts the woman at risk for being raped if he forces the issue.

This view of sexual coercion also fits well with the social exchange analysis of sexuality that we have featured at various points in this book. Sex is something that men get from women, according to this view. Rape is thus a violation of the rules of exchange. The man takes more than the woman wants to give. Rape is to normal (consenting) sex like stealing is to purchasing. Metaphors of theft or looting may be apt to depict what happens in rape: A man uses force or threat to get something that he wants but cannot legally or properly obtain. (Cases in which women force men to have sex complicate this analysis, however.)

Before we continue with this discussion, however, we must face up to another view of rape that is undoubtedly familiar to many readers. The scenario that emerges from the NHSLS and the work by Kanin and others depicts rape in the context of sexual activity. The social exchange theory represents rape as an illicit approach to getting sex. Yet is rape really about sex at all? Isn't it basically a matter of power, aggression, and dominance?

### **The Radical Feminist Theory of Rape**

Rape has long been classed as a sex crime, and all definitions (including legal) featured sexual activity as a key part of it. This does not necessarily mean that sex is the main goal or point of rape, but for a long time that was the basic assumption. Indeed, early thinking about rape depicted it as something done by men who cannot obtain sex another way, perhaps because they were unattractive to women or lacked the social skills to persuade women to consent to sex.

These early theories about rape ran into problems and contradictions, however. For one thing, as we shall see, rapists typically have had more sex than other men, or at least they claim to have more. That is, rapists have had more partners and more frequent sexual activity than other men (Kanin, 1965). Moreover, although single men figure prominently in the ranks of rapists, there is no denying that many rapists are married, and moreover that other

rapists have girlfriends with whom they engage in consensual sex. Their deficits in social skills were also difficult to prove, and many studies concluded that rapists did indeed have suitable social skills (e.g., Koralewski & Conger, 1992). Certainly at least the rapists who had wives and girlfriends had proven that they had sufficient social skills and other assets to persuade someone to have sex with them.

Around 1970, feminist theorists began to put forward a radically different theory of rape. The best known of these works was Brownmiller's (1975) book *Against Our Will*. Although other writers had anticipated her views to some extent (e.g., Millet, 1971; Griffin, 1971; Greer, 1970, 1973), Brownmiller's work became a widely known bestseller and featured a forceful, persuasive statement of the new theory. Several key features deserve to be noted.

First and foremost, Brownmiller proposed that rape is not really about sex at all. In her view, rape is an act of power and violence. It is something men do to dominate women and keep them in a fearful, inferior position in society. (Clearly, Brownmiller was dismissing cases in which women rape or coerce men.) In an important sense rape is thus a political act rather than a sexual one, because the goal is to enforce men's power over women.

Second, Brownmiller argued that rape is rooted in culture, especially the patriarchal (male-dominated) culture of North America and Western Europe. According to this view, rape is something men learn from socialization in a culture that was created and run by men for their own benefit. Rape is a means to sustain the political status quo and the awareness of it as a tool has been passed along from father to son. She used the term *rape culture* to describe how society teaches its young men to rape.

Brownmiller's third point addressed a seeming problem in the first two, since fathers do not actually teach their sons to rape, and most men never come close to raping a woman. In fact, most men claim that they would not rape and that such force or violence would be a sexual turn-off. To remedy this problem, Brownmiller (1975) said that rape is essentially a conspiracy that "is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (p. 5). Only some men actually commit rape, but all men benefit by their acts, because the actual incidents of rape are common enough to intimidate all women into remaining politically subservient to men. All men who have not actually raped thus share the guilt for rape and are in fact supporters of a "rape culture." Moreover, Brownmiller insisted that all men consciously and deliberately support rapists.

The theory that rape was not about sex but rather power and domination was rapidly embraced by many writers, and it is fair to say it had become the leading position on the issue by about 1980. Although a few dissenting voices were heard, Brownmiller's theory dominated the field among experts and laypersons alike. This probably reflected the ascendancy of radical feminist thinking at the time rather than any firm basis in the data, which were not actually very strong. Tedeschi and Felson (1994) summarized the dominance of Brownmiller's view thus: "We can think of no other assertion in the social sciences that has achieved such wide acceptance on the basis of so little evidence" (p. 313).

To be sure, some facts were taken as support for the radical feminist view. For example, as noted, many rapists already had sex partners, so the feminists thought it was obvious that for these men, rape was a means of asserting power over women rather than a way of obtaining more sex.

An influential work by Groth (1979) followed the radical feminist line in analyzing rape as driven by concerns of power and sadistic pleasure rather than sexual satisfaction. Groth reported that a fair number of rapists experienced sexual dysfunctions during the rape, particularly an inability to get or sustain an erection. Although such cases were a minority of rapes, they were far more common than the typical incidence of sexual dysfunctions among the average men of comparable age and background. This was taken to indicate that rape was not really about sex, because some rapists showed failures of sexual arousal.

Central to Brownmiller's argument was the assumption that rape reflects an implicit conspiracy by all men. Toward this end, it was necessary to find some evidence that the majority of nonrapist men might rape under some circumstances. Considerable excitement therefore accompanied the publication of works by Malamuth and his colleagues (1980, 1983), who used a procedure that asked young men whether they would they engage in rape if they could be assured of not getting caught or punished. In various studies between one-third and two-thirds of the young men said yes. Actually, although it was reported that way, they did not really say yes. The procedure was to have the man rate the likelihood that he might ever rape on a 5-point scale, and any response except the lowest extreme was taken as a yes. "Probably not," for example, was defined as a yes, because the man did not absolutely and permanently rule it out.

The high willingness of young men—in some cases a majority of them—to say they might rape a woman under ideal circumstances was taken as evidence in support of the male conspiracy theory that Brownmiller supported. It converged with her accounts of rape during wartime: In some cases, victorious armies follow the military conquest of a city with widespread raping of its women. Because the soldiers are presumably ordinary young men rather than seasoned rapists, the military rapes support the view that any man could become a rapist (or

at least many men; it is not clear what percent of soldiers actually take part in military rapes, and some soldiers object strenuously to the practice.)

The meaning of these findings about willingness to rape was questioned by Martin and Kerwin (1991). They noted that many of the studies yielding the highest rates of such willingness relied on getting the men sexually aroused. Malamuth and Check (1980), for example, exposed men to sexual stimulation until they reached a full erection, whereupon their willingness to rape was measured. This yielded one of the highest rates of favorable answers (69 percent). In another study, men read sexually arousing passages from a sex-oriented magazine before responding to the rape question. Martin and Kerwin noted that if sexual arousal yielded high rates of willingness to rape, then perhaps rape was about sex after all.

On the basis of their reading of the literature, Martin and Kerwin concluded that men in such studies tend to take a sexual attitude in answering the question about whether they might ever rape someone. This of course violated the central assumption of Brownmiller's theory, which is that rape is not about sex but rather violent dominance. This theory relies on the well-established concept of priming, which holds that once a thought is activated in someone's mind, it tends to influence the person's subsequent thinking (Bargh, 1989, 1994; Bower, 1986; Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977; Wyer & Srull, 1980). Priming, which is a process of "mental leftovers," is a surprisingly powerful and common effect.

Martin and Kerwin then went on to conduct their own experiment on willingness to rape. They asked each man the crucial question of whether he might be willing to rape someone if he were sure he could get away with it. Before the question was asked, however, the men received one or another set of questions. For half the men, these questions focused on sex, such as whether the man enjoyed casual sex and how much foreplay he liked to have before intercourse. The questions were designed to prime the men with sexual thoughts so that the rape question would have a sexual context. The other men were asked questions about violent behavior, such as whether they would use force to get what they want or whether they would hit a woman. These questions were intended to prime thoughts of violence rather than sex.

The context of the rape question had a dramatic effect. When it was presented after the questions about various sexual activities, 29 percent of the men expressed at least a minimal willingness to rape. In contrast, when it was presented after the questions about violence, only 12 percent expressed any such willingness. (The man's response was counted as indicating some willingness if he gave any answer other than the extreme and absolute no, which undoubtedly helped to boost the percentage of positive responses.) The rape item was rated by a 5-point scale with end points marked "not at all likely" and "extremely likely," so any response except—"not at all likely"—was counted as indicating some willingness to rape.

Thus, the statistics on willingness to rape probably reflect context. Men are thinking about rape as a sexual fantasy, not as a violent act. The favorable responses by men are thus parallel to the fantasy of being raped expressed relatively frequently by women. Although a fair number of women enjoy that as an occasional sexual fantasy, few or none of them really want to be raped. In fact, there are more women who claim to enjoy the fantasy of being forced or raped than there are men who report being willing to consider ever doing it, although both are large minorities. Probably the two patterns are similar in their psychological meaning, and neither has any known relation to actual participation in rape. Greenlinger and Byrne (1987) specifically found that men's reported willingness to commit rape (as measured with such a scale) had no correlation with actually engaging in any coercive sexual behavior.

Are women any different in their willingness to rape? Clements-Schreiber, Rempel, and Desmerais (1998) found that a majority of women said they would use overt pressure to get sex from a reluctant man under some conditions, suggesting again that women are quite similar to men in many respects, both will say, at least hypothetically, that they might use force to get what they want.

A more general study of this issue was conducted by Ellis and Beattie (1983), and indeed their article was entitled "The Feminist Explanation for Rape: An Empirical Test." If rape results from male domination, they argued, then rape should be most common when men are most dominant. By the same token, increasing gender equality should reduce rape. Across twenty-six U.S. cities, Ellis and Beattie looked for correlations between rape rates and fourteen different indexes of gender equality. The results were disappointing for the feminist theory. Of the fourteen possible correlations with rape rates, ten failed to reach significance, indicating that most measure of gender equality show no relation to rape. Of the remaining four that were significantly related to rape, three were in the direction opposite to the feminist theory—in other words, more gender equality was associated with more rape, not less. When more sophisticated statistical analyses that employed corrections for the various effects were used, only one of the fourteen correlations remained significant, and that one was opposite to the feminist view that male domination leads to rape.

Thus, there was never a strong basis in the research findings for the view that rape is not about sex. Still, Brownmiller's work and the supporting voices of many radical feminist authors were widely influential. In particular, the forces of political correctness supported the feminist position, and researchers had to tread very carefully if they wanted to disagree. Nonetheless, research findings began to accumulate that raised serious doubts about the theory that rape is not about sex. For example, the study by Kanin (1985) is difficult to reconcile with this view. The incidents in his sample occurred in the midst of heavy petting or oral sex. The men were involved in sexual activity at the time, and the main thing they wanted was to have intercourse; when the women refused, the men forced them. To depict those acts as part of a deliberate conspiracy to intimidate women, and to deny that sex was uppermost in the men's minds at the time, seems scarcely plausible. They wanted sex right then, and they weren't above using a little extra muscle to get their date to comply.

In 1988, Palmer published an influential paper that carefully examined and rejected the radical feminist view that rape was not sexually motivated. He was clear in acknowledging that feminism had made many important and meaningful contributions to society, including improvements in the way rape victims are treated by the legal system. He was not an antifeminist by any means, but he could not accept the theory that rape is not about sex.

Palmer first laid out twelve key arguments that had been used to buttress the claim that rape was not sexually motivated and then rejected each one as either illogical or inconsistent with the evidence. For example, one argument was that rape cannot be about sex because many rapists have other, consenting sex partners. But the fact of having one sex partner does not guarantee that a man has no desire for other women. Palmer pointed out that many men who use pornography or go to prostitutes are married, but that no one claims that pornography and prostitution are not about sex. Obviously, marital infidelity is committed by people who have regular sex partners (by definition), but it is generally assumed to be centrally motivated by sex.

Another argument was that rape is often premeditated, to which Palmer replied, "So what?" It is true that some sexual behavior is spontaneous, but other sex (including much consensual sex) is premeditated. People arrange to meet with their lovers at motels, or they plan to try to seduce a desired partner, and so forth.

Another argument was that rapists are relatively young, with few men past the age of fifty committing rape. This view assumed that men continue to desire sex into old age, whereas their aggressive tendencies diminish. As Palmer contended, however, there is plenty of evidence that the sex drive diminishes too as men get older.

We noted that the relatively high rate of sexual dysfunction experienced by men during rape had been used to argue that rape does not arise from sexual desire. In Palmer's view, such evidence is ambiguous. If a man were only interested in having sex and therefore tried to rape someone, he might well have difficulty sustaining an erection because of fear of getting caught, guilt, anxiety, of other emotions. Rapes also tend to occur when a man is intoxicated or on drugs, and such substances interfere with sexual response.

A final argument was the one Brownmiller (1975) printed in capital letters on the cover of her book "Rape victims are not only the lovely young blondes' of newspaper headlines—rapists strike children, the aged, the homely—all women." Yet Brownmiller was wrong. Obviously, not "all women" are raped. Furthermore, multiple studies show that rape victims are disproportionately selected from attractive young women in their teens and early twenties. True, there are some older and younger victims, but Palmer said that it seems reasonable to propose that rapists choose their targets based on a combination of attractiveness and vulnerability as opposed to attractiveness alone. Old and very young victims may be less desirable sexually to the average person (although some men do exhibit sexual preferences for these categories of women), but their physical vulnerability may make up for that: A child or old woman presumably cannot fight off a would-be attacker as well as a young adult woman in her prime could. Even so, Palmer cited several studies that concluded that less than 5 percent of rape victims are past the age of fifty.

Another review published several years later by Tedeschi and Felson (1994) came to similar conclusions: In countries where convicted rapists are castrated, they are afterward less likely to commit rape or other crimes against women. Since castration has its primary impact on a man's sexuality, this finding points to a strong sexual component of rape.

Also, rapists have high sex drives as well as peer groups that put pressure on them to have sex (Kanin, 1985; Lisak & Roth, 1988). Rapists typically report that sex was their goal. They also report that they would have preferred not to use force and wished the victim had simply acquiesced to sex, which runs precisely counter to the view that rapists mainly want to commit acts of violence and regard the sex part as secondary. Such facts led Tedeschi and Felson to conclude that rape is precisely what it appears to be: a man's attempt to obtain sex by any means necessary, including force.

A similar conclusion was reached by Ghiglieri (1999), who quoted some remarks from a serial rapist that he claimed are typical of the sentiments of such men. When asked the difference between sex with a woman who consented and one who refused consent, the rapist said, "There was no difference at all." He said all he wanted was

sex. Some women had to be forced "but I didn't enjoy doing it. It wasn't a turn-on." He "wanted things as easy as I could get them." If she consented, that was perfect. If she didn't consent, "I would threaten or exert any kind of violence." To do so, however, "was nothing for me then, but I didn't like it" (p. 98). The rapist's position was thus quite clear: Using force was a hassle, it held no attraction for him, and he would only resort to it if it were required to obtain sex.

The role of the rapist's peer group is relevant. As we said, rapists and other sexually coercive men have peer groups who put a great deal of pressure on them to have sex (Kanin, 1985; Lisak & Roth, 1988). Supporters of Brownmiller's (1975) view might see this as a sign of the rape culture—men encourage other men to rape. Yet the peer groups draw the line at coercion. Heilbrun and Loftus (1986) found that peer pressure reduced rather than increased sexual aggression by male college students. Apparently, peer groups encourage men to seek consensual sex but discourage them from obtaining it by force.

Small events point toward the same conclusion. After South Africa ended its apartheid and black Africans took over the government, the official tolerance for sexual activities was greatly liberalized. Homosexuality was tolerated, brothels and massage parlors were permitted, and so forth. One enterprising farmer came up with a scheme that seems straight out of Brownmiller: Male tourists and locals would pay for a "hooker hunt" out in the *bushveld* ("From Calvinism to Cruising," 1999). The gist of this activity was that a naked woman (in fact a prostitute) would hide out in the wild as the men would track and "shoot" her with the sort of gun that is used in the popular North American sport of paintball, whose "bullets" leave a splotch of paint (and often a bruise) that furnish proof that the victim has indeed been shot.

Thus, the scheme had just the mix of sex and violence that the radical feminist theory warned about. The woman's nudity indicated her vulnerability rather than any explicit intention of love-making. Groups of men pursued her and shot her, and their conquest of her was established as victory in the competition. This, supposedly, was precisely what rape was all about: violence with a thin veneer of sexual titillation.

But the business failed. Not enough customers were attracted by this prospect. The failure contrasted sharply with the flourishing success of other parts of the South African sex industry. Apparently, plenty of men are willing to pay to have sex with a woman, but hardly any will pay to shoot her. Once again, it appears that sex, not violence, is what men want from women.

Before we completely discard the radical feminist view that rape is not sex, however, we think it is useful to refer once more to the discrepant perspectives of victims and perpetrators. Feminist theories were explicitly based on women's experiences, and most women know rape mainly from the victim's perspective if at all. The view that rape is not about sex may be inaccurate as an account of men's motives for raping, but then it seems unfair to expect that a theory based in women's experiences would furnish a valid account of why men commit acts against women. Even if Brownmiller's theory is completely wrong about why men commit rape, it may still be correct about how victims experience rape. Whatever it may be to its perpetrators, rape is certainly not sex to its victims.

Indeed, even the seemingly most outlandish aspect of Brownmiller's theory makes some sense as an account of the victim's view. She proposed that rape was part of a conscious conspiracy by which all men intimidate all women and keep them in a state of fear and submission. This view is indefensible on many counts, as can be seen by the facts that most men do not rape, that most men do not find rape appealing, that many men prosecute and punish rapists, and so forth. If Brownmiller were correct, even non-raping men would be happy to hear about acts of rape, because these supposedly advance the male cause of keeping women in their place. Whenever the television news reported a rape, the men in the room would give each other high fives. Taken literally Brownmiller's thesis says that men are deliberately complicit in getting their own daughters or girlfriends raped, whereas in fact most men are extremely upset when a woman they love is victimized. As a theory about all men, this is plainly wrong.

Such conspiracy theories do not fit the facts about perpetrators. They do, however correspond somewhat to what some victims experience. The basis for this may be what Baumeister (1997) called the *magnitude gap* as a general principle of evil and violent behavior: The transgression is much more important to the victim than to the perpetrator. For the victim to understand the perpetrator, therefore, it is necessary to face up to the heartbreaking realization of how little the act meant to the person who committed it. Many victims refuse to accept this and prefer to believe that what they suffered was part of some evil conspiracy or other grand pattern. The victim, in other words, prefers to think that the perpetrator was as heavily involved and deeply affected as the victim was.

That sort of conspiracy thinking is not limited to rape. As Baumeister and Catanese (in press) discuss, similar patterns of bogus conspiracies have been postulated by other groups of victims. Many African Americans, for example, believe that AIDS, crack cocaine, poverty, and gang violence are part of a conspiracy by the white American majority; and the federal government to destroy the black population. This may be easier for them to accept than the idea that mere indifference is responsible. Likewise, many Jewish writers on the Holocaust have insisted that killing Jews was the overriding goal of Hitler and the Nazis, and that fighting the war and establishing

their own vision of an ideal society were secondary. This sort of conspiracy thinking is an understandable response to the immense suffering of many victims and their expectation that only something immensely evil and deliberate could be responsible for it.

In other words, rape is not a conspiracy by all men to instill fear in all women, but some victims may feel as if it were. A victim of rape may well start to fear all men, or at least a large number of them. As we have seen, many men who commit rape do not even seem to remember doing so, and probably this reflects on the relatively trivial importance that their use of force had for them. It cannot, however, be trivial to the victim, and so to her it seems more plausible that there is a male master plan.

### **Understanding the Rapist**

The preceding section rejected one of the main theories about why men commit rape, namely as a broad public strategy for subjugating women. If that view is wrong, what can replace it? Unfortunately the present state of knowledge does not include an established consensus on a single correct theory about the causes of sexual coercion, although there have been various suggestions.

Not surprisingly, evolutionary psychologists have come forward to propose that rape may have evolved as a way by which some men can pass along their genes, especially men who are not likely to enjoy the privileges of the alpha male. These theories are, however, difficult to evaluate rigorously, and they leave plenty of questions about exactly which men will commit rape. We think that sociocultural and situational factors seem more promising than biological ones for explaining rape.

In this section, we shall draw on some influential theories in social and personality psychology to offer a novel theory about rape (based on Baumeister, Catanese, & Wallace, 1999). This theory is firmly based in what is known about general principles of human behavior and about rape in particular but of course as a new theory it has not been directly tested, and so it must be regarded as just a plausible idea. Still, for the field of rape, no established and proven theory *is* available, and so a speculative possible theory is all we are likely to be able to get at this point.

### **Reactance Theory**

The first idea we shall borrow is the concept of reactance. This theory, and even the word itself, were introduced in 1966 by Brehm who proposed that people have a basic drive to maintain their freedom to do what they want. When someone tells them they may not do something, they react negatively and sometimes angrily against that person. The concept of reactance is thus somewhat similar to the lay concept of "reverse psychology" by which supposedly you can make your child want to wash the dishes and clean his room by telling him not to do so. j

Brehm proposed that people have any or all of three responses when they see their freedoms being taken away. First, they feel an increased desire for whatever is forbidden to them. Second, they tend to initiate behaviors to try to reassert their freedom by doing what they have been told they cannot do. Third, they may attack or otherwise behave aggressively toward the person who told them not to do whatever it was.

Hence, if a teacher tells a child that she may not play with a certain toy, the child can exhibit any of three responses. First, she may find the toy more interesting and appealing than she did previously. Second, she may try to play with the forbidden toy after all. Third, she may hit or yell at the teacher.

### **Reactance and Rape**

Now let us apply Brehm's theory to rape. The context is one in which a man wants to have sex with a woman but the woman refuses. (To be sure, in some cases women coerce or rape men. Because these cases are rarer, we shall focus on male rape of females. It is possible that similar processes apply when the genders are reversed, but that is a complex question.) She thus takes away his opportunity to do something that he wants, namely to have sex.

This context of men wanting sex from women is certainly a plausible and common one. We have reviewed ample evidence that men want sex more often than women, and that particular women often refuse men's offers of sex, particularly when this is outside of a current, ongoing, good sexual relationship.

The scenario that emerged from Kanin's (1985) study of admitted rapists is particularly relevant. In the most common case, the man and the woman had already had several dates and were engaging in some sexual activity at the time of the rape. Oral sex may well lead a man to think that the woman will consent to full intercourse. When she refuses, he may feel as if something he wanted and even expected is taken away from him. He may react negatively.

All three of the reactance responses may be involved in rape. First, the man may feel increased desire to have sex with her when she refuses. There is some evidence to support the idea that women who are not available for sex are desired more strongly than others. Many men report, for example, that they experience strong sexual desires for their wives just when they are going through a divorce: The woman who has become unavailable to him is suddenly more appealing.

One study documented the increased desire for women who become unavailable. The context is totally different, but the principle is the same. Pennebaker et al. (1979) got the idea from a country music song that claimed the "girls get prettier at closing time," referring to the alleged enhancement of attractiveness of women in a bar when the bar was about to close (because the women are about to go home and become unavailable). He had male bar patrons rate the attractiveness of female patrons at various times during the evening, and sure enough the women received higher marks just as the bar was about to close. (He did not, however, control for any possibility that the men themselves might have been more intoxicated at closing time, which conceivably could have an independent effect on how appealing they found the women to be.)

The second consequence of reactance was that the person should try to do what is forbidden. This of course is the essence of rape. The man tries to force the woman to have sex after she refuses to do so willingly. Several studies have documented that the risk of rape is especially high among ex-spouses and former dating partners. These fit the reactance pattern especially well, because the man formerly did enjoy the opportunity to have sex with the woman, but now that opportunity is denied to him, and so he tries to reassert it by force. In the study by O'Sullivan, Byers, and Finkelman (1998), for example, over half the rape victims had formerly had consensual sex with the perpetrator. The pattern of stalking is also related here: Many stalkers are former husbands or boyfriends who try to remain present in the lives of women who have rejected them (Nicastro, Cousins, & Spitzberg, 1999).

This view also puts a slightly different slant on the rapist's goal. To be sure, in a broad sense his goal is sexual. In the reactance view, the rapist's goal is to possess the woman sexually, and this conquest is perhaps primarily symbolized by penetration rather than orgasm. She says no, and he stakes his claim to her by entering her. His pleasure and orgasm may be of secondary importance, although naturally he would prefer to have them.

Putting the emphasis on penetration rather than orgasm helps explain several surprising facts about rape. For one thing, as several studies show, a fair number of rapes do not culminate in orgasm for the man (e.g., Groth, 1979). Groth's studies with convicted rapists found that one out of every three rapists experienced some form of sexual dysfunction during the rape, with the largest category including erectile dysfunction (impotence) and retarded ejaculation (inability to reach orgasm). These rates are much higher than young men of a comparable age report in consensual sexual intercourse.

Even more surprisingly, studies have found that rapists do not report that they received a great deal of sexual pleasure from the rape. In a series of interviews with convicted rapists in prison, Scully (1990) asked them to rate their degree of sexual pleasure on a 10-point scale. The average response was about 3, indicating fairly low pleasure. (This finding has also been seen as fitting the view that rape is not about sex, although the low yield of sexual pleasure does not prove that the men were not looking for pleasure. In many cases, they expected the rape to be more sexually satisfying than it turned out to be.) To be sure, convicted rapists may differ in important ways from the more common date rapist, and it is plausible that rape occurring in the dating and oral sex scenario described by Kanin (1985) would yield more pleasure. Still, the point is that the pleasure from forcible sex is not nearly as high as the pleasure from consenting sex. The reactance theory can explain that the man's immediate goal is to demonstrate sexual possession of the woman by entering her.

The third consequence of reactance is to act aggressively toward the person who has restricted your freedom. In rape, the woman would be the target, because she is the one who refused the man's advances. He may well become angry at her for denying him the sex he wanted or expected, and he may use more than the minimum amount of force necessary to make her comply with his wishes. There is in fact some evidence that sexually coercive men believe more strongly than other men that it is all right to use force if a woman leads a man on and then refuses sex (Berkowitz, Burkhart, & Bourg 1994).

The aggressive consequence of reactance helps explain findings that women who resist rape are often injured more severely than other victims. In fact, one of the consequences of Brownmiller's (1975) book was a change in policy. Brownmiller claimed that rape occurred in part because girls and women were taught to be passive and to submit to men, and she encouraged women to take self-defense lessons and to defend themselves against rape by fighting back. When these suggestions were broadly implemented, however, the net result was not so much the reduction in rape but an alarming increase in the cases in which women were not only raped but also severely beaten and injured. Rape prevention advice for girls and women has therefore shifted away from advocating the use of physical force to resist rape.

A further clarification is necessary. Part of the reactance theory says that the rape occurs in part because the woman refuses the man's sexual advances. This view is not intended to shift blame off the rapist and on to the woman. In our view, both men and women have every right to refuse any sexual activity, including saying no to intercourse after consenting to other sexual acts. Some men (especially sexually coercive men) do in fact think that the use of force is justified where a woman refuses sex after getting a man aroused, but in our view they are completely wrong. The use of force to obtain sex is never justified.

Thus there is at least some broad plausibility to the idea that reactance theory can help explain rape. In order for the theory to be satisfactory, however, it would have to be modified to address several clear and obvious problems.

For one thing, sexual refusal is common but rape is rare. If women's sexual refusals engendered reactance that caused men to rape them, then many dates and other interactions would end in rape. Clearly, however, most men accept a woman's right to refuse, and in fact most men so they would stop all efforts to initiate sex as soon as a woman makes a clear refusal (Byers, 1988).

Another question is whether men do in fact see women's refusals as a threat to their freedom. Men may want or hope for sex, but they do not necessarily expect it. In many cases, they probably do not. Under such circumstances, a woman's refusal would not lead to reactance. This could in principle solve the first problem we mentioned (that refusal is common but rape is rare), but only if it could be shown that rapes occur when men do in fact expect sex and hence see women's refusals as threats to their freedom.

The broader issue, however, is how any man could believe he has a right to have sex with a woman when she refuses. Nearly all moral theories hold that one person's rights end where another person's body begins. How could any man feel that one of his freedoms is being taken away when a woman tells him that she does not want to have sex with him?

Reactance alone thus cannot provide a full explanation of sexual coercion, at least not without substantial clarification. Hence we turn now to a second line of work that may help solve these problems.

### **Narcissism, the Dark Side of High Self Esteem**

The crux of the problems with the reactance theory is that rape grows out of a fairly common situation but that only a few men resort to force. The theoretical challenge is therefore to identify what sort of men will do this. What type of personality traits set sexually coercive men apart from others?

In our view, a leading candidate is the trait of narcissism, which has emerged as an object of study in recent years as researchers have begun to search for the dark side of high self-esteem. It is named for a man in Greek mythology who fell in love with his own image as reflected in a pond; he became indifferent to the love of other people and cared only about himself. The term *narcissism* is also linguistically related to the word *narcotic*, implying perhaps that people sometimes become addicted to loving themselves.

Clinical psychologists began using the term *narcissism* in Freud's day to refer to self-love and in particular to a personality disorder that is defined in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1994) as characterized by at least five of the following patterns: a grandiose sense of self-importance; frequent fantasies of enjoying great power, success, wealth, beauty, or brilliance; belief that oneself is special and unique and hence can only be understood by other elite individuals; arrogance or haughtiness; excessive quest for admiration; envy, either as a tendency to envy others or to believe that oneself is the target of others' envy; exaggerated or unrealistic sense of entitlement; willingness to exploit others; and lack of empathy toward others. In more recent editions of the *Manual*, the last criterion (empathy) shifted from regarding these people as unable to empathize with others to being simply unwilling to empathize. Thus, the narcissist is capable of seeing and appreciating others' views, but he or she does not always make the effort.

Although these criteria were devised for the sake of diagnosing clinical patients, probably most readers can think of people who fit them. Sure enough, research psychologists picked up on the ideas of narcissism and began to think in terms of a personality pattern that is spread through the so-called normal population. A measure was devised to assess people from all walks of life in terms of their degree of narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988).

This application of the trait of narcissism quickly proved useful. In one relevant context, it helped resolve a long-standing debate about the link between self-esteem and aggression. For decades, psychologists had believed that low self-esteem caused aggression, but a review of studies on violent individuals showed that they tended to have quite favorable opinions of themselves, contrary to the low self-esteem theory (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). Yet the opposite view, that high self-esteem causes aggression, was not tenable either, because plenty of people with high self-esteem are not aggressive. Laboratory research confirmed that pure measures of self-esteem

have little or no relation to aggression, but that narcissists are prone to lash out at others, especially when the others have criticized or disrespected them (Bushman & Baumeister 1998). Violent offenders who have been convicted of murder, rape, robbery, assault, and similar crimes score above average in narcissism, as compare to other men of their same age (Bushman, Baumeister, Phillips, & Gilligan, 1999).

Applied to rape, the concept of narcissism therefore seems quite promising as a way of sorting the men who will respect a woman's refusal from those who press ahead and use force on her. Narcissists do in fact exhibit higher rates of reactance than other people (Catanese & Yost, 1999). Meanwhile, rapists also show various patterns that suggest narcissism. For one thing, many of them tend to be quite conceited. When interviewing convicted rapists in prison, Scully (1990) was surprised to find that they described themselves as "multi-talented super-achievers" and boasted about their many wonderful traits, including the love-making skills.

Narcissists want to think well of themselves and want others to think well of them. Rapists likewise show such patterns. In the prison study, many rapists told Scully that they believed their victims regarded them favorably, which is absurd in the face of actual statistics—especially because the victim had to press charges and testify in order to put the man in prison!

Along the same lines, several studies have found that sexually coercive men tend to have male peer groups that put pressure on them to have sex (Kanin, 1985; Lisak & Roth, 1988). The rapists feel they must have sexual conquests to boast about in order to maintain their status in the group. These men tend to use plenty of legal and marginal methods to convince women to have sex, such as claiming to be in love with them or trying to get them drunk. The use of force is often one of the last resorts when lesser methods fail to seduce the woman.

The victim-perpetrator discrepancy in reporting of rape makes sense when viewed in the context of narcissism. As we concluded earlier, the discrepancy is mainly caused by men's failure to remember or acknowledge that they used force to pressure a woman into sex. If rape were primarily about force rather than sex, it is unlikely that men would forget using force, but if rapists are narcissists seeking sex, then they would be highly inclined to forget their use of force. After all, a man who has to force women to have sex with him does not sound like an admirable or skilled lover but more like a desperate person. The narcissist wants to regard his sexual escapades as tributes to his sex appeal and charm, and he wants to boast about them to his friends. Therefore he wants to erase any fact that he had to force the woman. The way he'd prefer to tell it, the woman thought he was so wonderful that she was happy to give him sex.

A key part of narcissism is the inflated sense of entitlement. Narcissists believe that they are special and therefore deserve to have others treat them preferentially. Consistent with this emphasis, Bushman and his colleagues (1999) found that the entitlement section of the narcissism scale was the one that produced the biggest and most reliable differences between violent prisoners and college students. This helps resolve another of the problems we noted in applying reactance theory to rape, namely the question of whether the rapists might really feel that the woman owed them sex or that they had a right to pursue their pleasure even by coercive means.

The exaggerated sense of entitlement is related to several types of sexual coercion. In one category, a couple has been dating for a period of time and are already in love. (Remember, the NHSL found that the largest single category of rapes was committed by someone the woman was in love with at the time.) In these cases, the woman is not ready to have intercourse. Most men will wait more or less patiently until their partner is ready (McCabe, 1987), but a narcissist may feel that the woman owes him sex after a certain amount of time, effort, and money have been expended. The narcissist may also feel that if he fails to obtain sex from his girlfriend after a certain number of dates, he will lose face in front of his pals, and so he uses force to give him the conquest he thinks he deserves.

In other cases, the narcissistic man may have just begun dating a woman but believes he is entitled to have sex with her anyway. Possibly he thinks he is charming, or perhaps other women have permitted him to have sex early in the relationship, and so he thinks each new partner owes it to him.

In recent years, there have been increasing reports that successful athletes perpetrate acts of sexual violence against women (Benedict, 1997). These do not seem to emerge from any general pattern of violence or hatred of women on the part of the men. But athletes are celebrities in our society, which can well increase their narcissism. Moreover, there are many women who do have sex with athletes on a relatively casual basis, without asking for much in return. If an athlete succumbs to the temptation to start regarding himself as a special being who is entitled to such treatment, he may grow angry at a woman who fails to give him what he expects and may therefore force her. The highly publicized rape conviction of boxing champion Mike Tyson was an example of this pattern. He did not prowl a dark alley and leap upon an innocent victim. Rather, he believed he was dating her, and she agreed to come to his hotel room, where he raped her. We are not offering any justification for his action, and we reiterate that a woman (or a man) has a right to refuse sex at any point. But to a narcissistic male accustomed to getting what he wants, a woman's refusal may provoke anger and the use of force.

The inflated sense of entitlement helps explain one other surprising pattern among rapists: In her prison interviews with rapists, Scully (1990) reported that many of the men told her their victim was known to be sexually loose in the sense that she had had sex with many men. These claims are plausible, because having a higher than usual number of lifetime sex partners is a risk factor for rape (Laumann et al., 1994). But it is surprising that the men would describe their victims in those terms. Morally, of course, her prior acts are irrelevant, and legally it would seem to put the man in a worse position. After all, if she has consented to have sex with many previous men, she certainly knows what consent is, and so her accusation of rape should gain in credibility. It seems self-defeating for rapists to claim that their accusers were known to have consented to sex with other men.

Yet to a narcissist, there may be a certain twisted logic to claiming that the victim was promiscuous. The narcissist believes he is better than other men, and so he cannot easily accept the fact that a woman might say yes to other men but no to him. If the woman is known to be a sexual being, then the Narcissist feels entitled to have sex with her if he wants. Her refusal seems unreasonable to him.

The other features of narcissism are likewise reflected in sexual coercion. Narcissists tend to have an exploitative attitude toward others, and of course sexual coercion exploits a woman for the man's pleasure. As we noted, sexually coercive men tend to use a broad range of illicit techniques for obtaining sex, such as trying to get the woman drunk or making false promises of love.

The narcissist's lack of empathy is particularly helpful in understanding rapists. Several researchers have asked rapists what they/ thought their victim was experiencing during the rape. One category of answers is that they thought the woman was enjoying it, which already indicates low empathy, because approximately 0 percent of rape victims report any pleasure at all. (In fact, Scully [1990] reported that some convicted rapists continued to believe that the woman had really wanted to have sex with them, even though the men had had to use a knife or gun to coerce them!)

Another, even more common answer was that the rapists had simply not thought about what the victim was experiencing and did not know what she felt at all. This seems astonishing: How can someone engage in such an intimate contact as sex without even having some idea of what one's partner is feeling? But narcissists can turn off their empathy and be indifferent to what their victims feel.

The empathy point is also relevant to another interesting line of work. Researchers had begun fairly early to measure the reactions of rapists versus noncoercive men to violent pornography. Not surprisingly, the rapists were more aroused by such films, and this was taken as supporting various theories (including the radical feminist view that rape is about violence). When critics objected that it might simply reflect a high sex drive, researchers responded by comparing how the two groups reacted to nonviolent erotica. Typically there was no difference between the groups: Both rapists and nonrapists found nonviolent sex films arousing. There, said the researchers, sexual violence clearly has a special appeal to rapists.

But that conclusion is misleading too. If violent sex had a special appeal to rapists then they should exhibit higher arousal to violent sex films than to nonviolent sex films but that is not what generally happened. Instead, rapists showed high arousal to both kinds of films. To normal men, however, any hint of force or violence was a severe turn-off. The implication was that rapists simply liked to look at all sex films and did not care very much whether the woman was depicted as consenting or objecting, which is consistent with the theory that these men have low empathy.

Let us sum up the findings. It is quite true that the current state of knowledge does not yield a single clear explanation for why men commit rape. Over the past three decades, theories about rape have been dominated by the radical feminist view that it is not sexual, which no longer fits the data, and to a lesser degree by evolutionary arguments that are somewhat plausible but that do not offer a very thorough explanation. We have proposed a theory that seems to fit the current facts, although it must be regarded as far from a proven truth. Borrowing from social and personality psychology, we propose that many acts of rape conform to a pattern of narcissistic reactance. Certain highly conceited, exploitative men respond aggressively when a woman refuses to have sex with them and force her to submit to their wishes.

### **The Victim's Dilemmas**

The previous section was devoted to trying to understand the motives and inner processes that enable men to engage in sexual coercion. Yet even if the rapist were fully understood, that might not be of much practical help for rape victims (although a thorough understanding of its causes might help efforts to reduce or prevent rape). Helping victims must continue to be our society's primary concern with regard to sexual coercion, and so in this section we refocus on the victim.

Contrary to stereotypes there is no single pattern that defines all victims of sexual coercion. The research literature contains vastly different portraits. Some evidence that rape has lasting harmful effects is available from various sources. For example, a well-known study of women who were sexually coerced during childhood found that many of them were still groping painfully for an explanation and continued to suffer even two or three decades after the fact (Silver, Boon, & Stones, 1983). And Rynd (1988) found that rape victims reported loss of enjoyment of sex after the rape. Apparently the victimization led to a lasting decrease in their capacity to find sexual satisfaction. The victims also reported various somatic (physical health) complaints that increased after the rape.

On the other hand, a study by Murnen et al. (1989) found that most victims "communicated varying degrees of acceptance of the unwanted sex" (p. 101), and that "some seemed eager to label this person [the rapist] a friend" (p. 104). The authors also concluded that the low rate of reporting of these incidents of sexual coercion, along with the woman's subsequent continued friendship with the man who had coerced her, reflected the victim's belief that the event was not important. Similar variability emerged from the NHLSL and follow-up analyses (Laumann et al., 1994, 1999), which found that although many victims of sexual coercion suffered long-term impairments of health, well-being, and sexuality, plenty of others showed no signs of lasting harm.

The wide variability in responses can be ascribed to at least two factors. First, incidents of sexual coercion span a wide continuum, and some are dearly much more traumatic than others. Second, women (and men) differ substantially in their ability to cope with sexual victimization, as with any kind of trauma or misfortune, and so even identical episodes may cause pasting distress to some women while having relatively brief and minimal effects on others.

The variation in the effects of the incidents is easy to see. We noted that estimates of the incidence of victimization vary widely from one study to another, because some count only severe traumas involving forced intercourse, whereas others count even a quick unwanted kiss as sexual coercion. Even with forced intercourse, there may be wide variation depending on the circumstances. In some incidents, women are attacked and brutally beaten by strangers, leaving them fearing for their lives. In other cases, the woman was in love with the man and consented to undress and engage in foreplay or oral sex, and thus the coercion involved him pushing her beyond a limit she had set. In both of these situations, the man is morally in the wrong and the coercion is unjustifiable, but it is hard to doubt that the average woman would suffer more in the former than in the latter case.

The variation in the impact of rape on women was the focus of an investigation by Meyer and Taylor (1985), who began by reviewing existing evidence about how women adjust to rape: Many victims suffer lasting fear and anxiety, sexual dissatisfaction, depression, and other problems, whereas others are virtually free of any symptoms past the first month or two after the incident Meyer and Taylor wanted to understand how victims' own inner coping processes could help mediate these different outcomes. They surveyed victims contacted through a rape crisis center, a method that probably screened out both the mildest reactions (by people who would never even call the crisis center) and the most severe (by those whom counselors and therapists might shield from participation in such a study). Indeed, 83 percent of their sample had been raped by strangers which is far out of line with the NHLSL conclusion that only 4 percent of incidents of sexual coercion involve strangers.

Self-blame was one focus of Meyer and Taylor's investigation. An earlier, influential study of people who were paralyzed in traffic accidents and other mishaps had found that people who blamed themselves adjusted *better* than those who did not (Bulman & Wortman, 1977). This finding created a stir, because the general assumption had been that victims are better off when they do not blame themselves. The new interpretation, however, argued that blaming yourself restores some sense of control. If I brought this on myself, such as by taking a foolish chance, then I can prevent future misfortunes by changing my behavior. In contrast, if I could have done nothing to prevent this misfortune, then I cannot prevent further disasters.

Subsequent work failed to find that self-blame was consistently associated with better adjustment among various groups of victims. Janoff-Bulman (1979, 1992) concluded that there are two types of self-blame, which have very different effects. *Behavioral self-blame*, which means attributing your misfortune to your own actions, may be beneficial because it restores a sense of control. In contrast, *characterological self-blame*, which means attributing your misfortune to the type of person you are (for example, "This happened because I'm a bad person who deserves to suffer"), is not constructive and may even impair recovery. You cannot change the type of person you are, and so seeing your troubles as rooted in your unchanging essential nature implies that more disasters are likely to come your way and that there is nothing you can do about them.

Both kinds of self-blame were found among Meyer and Taylor's (1986) sample. Indeed, they concluded that about half the victims blamed themselves for the rape incident, at least in part. (Janoff-Bulman's [1979] study had yielded an even higher figure. She concluded that three out of four rape victims engage in self-blame.) Yet the distinction between behavioral and characterological self-blame failed to differentiate the women who coped well

from those who did not. On the contrary, Meyer and Taylor found that both types of self-blame were associated with poor adjustment.

Other aspects of how the victims coped with rape were correlated with good versus bad adjustment, although it is impossible to tell from such data what is the cause and what is the effect. Women who engaged in stress reduction practices, such as thinking positive thoughts and seeking calm through meditation, adjusted better than other victims. Meanwhile, women who withdrew from others and stayed home much of the time tended to fare worse than others. The victims themselves often mentioned receiving counseling and talking to friends and family (as well as taking more precautions to prevent further victimization) as the most helpful strategies for coping with the rape.

Thus, it appears that self-blame does not contribute to coping with rape by strangers. Yet as we have seen most forcible sex does not occur between strangers. Even if stranger rape could be completely eliminated, it would make only a small dent in the total amount of sexual coercion in the United States (although it would have a bigger effect on official rape statistics, which tend to emphasize stranger rapes because coercion within romantic couples generally goes unreported to police).

Victims of coercion by romantic partners and acquaintances may face a different set of adjustment challenges. In general, these episodes may be less traumatic than stranger rapes, particularly because they are less likely to include physical violence. For them, repairing the relationship *may* be a significant aspect of the adjustment process. A man who forces sex on a woman has already violated her trust to some degree, and the future of the relationship may be jeopardized. Murnen et al. (1989) found that the man's attitude made a substantial difference: Women were far more willing to forgive him if he apologized for the incident.

### **The Dilemma of Reporting**

Until recently, our society treated rape victims rather harshly. Police and other investigators were suspicious of many rape charges. If a rape case went to trial, the lawyer for the defense would often question the victim's motives and behavior as a way of creating a doubt in the jury's minds as to whether she had in fact consented. The common suggestion that the victim had "asked for it," such as by wearing sexy clothing, often ended up making the victim feel like she was responsible for the incident and led some to discuss the legal investigation as a "second victimization" of the woman.

Why have people been inclined to blame the victim? One reason undoubtedly has to do with the belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980). The essence of this belief is that people get what they deserve in life, and so by implication they must deserve whatever they get. The ideal of a fair and just society was one of the main foundations of the American nation, and people want to believe that it has been realized (by and large). Certainly from the start America was far fairer to more people than other countries were at the time the Constitution was written, and it continues to be among the world leaders in fairness and justice by most measures.

The theory about belief in a just world extends beyond societal ideals, however, to include important personal motives. As we saw in Chapter 2, most people believe ourselves to be good, respectable, deserving individuals, and so it is comforting to them to believe that the world is largely just and fair, because if it is, then their own goodness will be rewarded.

These idealistic and personally comforting beliefs work to the disadvantage of rape victims (and other crime victims), however. If the world is fair and people get what they deserve, then rape victims must have somehow deserved to be raped, possibly because their own actions caused the rape to happen. Although such sentiments are generally wrong and quite unfair to the victim, they may appeal to the public and in particular to the jury, who will think that if the woman was raped because of her own actions or character, then other people have nothing to fear. In contrast, if they conclude that her behavior was perfectly normal and proper but that she was raped anyway, this implies that rape can happen to anyone, including to them or their families. In such cases, the truth is quite distressing, and people may prefer to believe that the event was in some way the victim's fault.

These patterns create a serious dilemma for the victim. On the one hand, she may want to report the crime and have the rapist prosecuted. Even apart from her own feelings, she may feel that it is her civic duty to report the crime to prevent the rapist from victimizing other women in the future. The laws cannot be enforced unless victims press charges, and society cannot afford to let rape laws go unenforced.

Yet for her to report the crime is to expose herself to the questions and even attacks that a rape victim must often face. To dwell on the crime is undoubtedly to prolong her own suffering. As Meyer and Taylor (1986) showed, many victims tend to blame themselves for rape anyway, and facing a jury who tends to blame them would reinforce and intensify those beliefs and the accompanying distress.

To some extent, the patterns of blaming the rape victim have subsided. The feminist movement of the 1970s deserves substantial credit for altering society's attitudes about rape and for creating the need for a more sensitive,

supportive understanding of the rape victim. The legal process has undoubtedly gotten better for victims, although it is still far from easy.

Ultimately, recovery from any sort of trauma requires putting the episode behind oneself and facing the future. Roxanne Silver, who has spent her life studying many forms of trauma and victimization, has summarized one general conclusion this way: People who are oriented toward the future tend to do well and recover effectively, whereas those who remain focused on the past (particularly the episode) tend to adjust poorly (e.g., Holman & Silver, 1998). Thus, if a rape victim presses charges, she remains focused on the trauma (possibly for several years, depending on the legal process), which may impair her ability to recover and get on with her life.

### **The Dilemma of Consent**

Unfortunately the legal system still contains a serious flaw that works to the disadvantage of rape victims: In many trials, the jury's verdict depends on evaluating the conflicting accounts of the rapist and the victim—and the biggest conflict concerns whether the victim consented to sex. Because the American legal system is set up to protect the innocent, any reasonable doubt is officially enough to produce a not guilty verdict. In rape trials, the accused rapist is the defendant, and so he benefits from those reasonable doubts. In other words, the burden of proof is often on the woman: She must prove that she did not consent to sex. Such proof is difficult under any circumstances, but it is especially difficult given the conditions under which much sexual coercion occurs.

Take a typical case of the sort that Kanin (1985) found common among the men who admitted to engaging in date rape. The man and the woman go out on several dates. On one date, the woman invited him up to her apartment (or accompanies him willingly to his). They kiss and stroke each other. She takes off some or all of her clothes, and they have oral sex. He wants to have vaginal intercourse. She says no. He forces her.

Kanin reported that none of the cases in his sample went to trial, and it is understandable why: What chance would the woman have had? If she told the exact truth, while the man insisted that she had consented to the vaginal intercourse, how could she prove him wrong? The defense lawyer would ask why she had taken off her clothes if she did not want to have sex with him? The jury would almost certainly entertain some reasonable doubt.

It is difficult to design a social system that is free of that problem. The goal would be to shift the burden of proof off the victim and onto the perpetrator, without ultimately sending innocent men to prison. Social psychology has, however, found solutions to problems of consent in its own practices. In the wake of revelations that medical researchers had occasionally performed experiments without their subjects' consent, psychologists have adopted guidelines to protect both the participants and researchers from the problems that might ensue if someone felt harmed by research procedures. Central to these guidelines is the practice of informed consent: The research participant typically signs some statement indicating that he or she has been informed of what will take place and willingly agrees to complete the procedure.

Could such a practice work with sex? States would pass laws requiring men to obtain a signed consent form from the woman before intercourse. (A gender-neutral form of this law would require both parties to give each other a signed form.) Presumably a one-sentence statement would be enough. Copies of this form could be distributed in condom packages and made available in other ways.

Obviously the exchange of legal documents, even brief ones, would complicate certain aspects of sex. Seduction would become more difficult, because instead of gradually persuading someone to go each step farther, it would be necessary to stop and sign forms, which means that the target of the seduction could stop and consider whether the encounter was really a good idea.

Another obstacle would be that many people would not want to know that other people possessed documents that they had signed to consent to sexual intercourse. This may be particularly true for women (and even more so for famous women). After all, imagine owning a form signed by Marilyn Monroe, or Madonna, or Hillary Clinton. Decades later, these could prove to be an embarrassment to the woman, and they might fetch high prices at public auctions even years after her death. Probably some law to protect the confidentiality of signees would be necessary (as it is with research participants now).

Adultery would also be affected. For a woman to have sex outside of marriage is always a risk, because if her infidelity is discovered by her husband, she might suffer personal and legal penalties. This does not necessarily speak against the idea, though. A procedure that reduced marital infidelity, which a consent form for sex would surely do, would be considered by many to be a good thing, because most people regard extramarital sex as immoral.

But although requiring a signed consent form for sex would probably create some problems for various women (and possibly men), it would at least offer strong protection to rape victims. The signed consent form would make life easier for the victim and harder for the adulterer, but they are not on the same footing, and our society's first obligation would seemingly be to protect the rape victim rather than the adulterer.

Naturally any couple could go ahead and have sex without signing the consent forms. Those cases might continue much as they do now. The difference would be that the man would be taking the risk. The legal rule would be as follows: If the woman came back and accused him of rape, and if sexual intercourse between them were established, then he would be presumed guilty unless he had a signed consent form. He might prove his innocence in some other way, but still the burden of proof would be on him, not on her, as it generally has been throughout world history. If there is no other proof, and it comes down to his word against hers, the rule could be that he must produce the signed form or lose.

The sexual experience itself might be changed by requiring a consent form. For one thing, as a general principle an explicit act of consent tends to make people enjoy what they are doing somewhat more. Research on cognitive dissonance, for example, has shown that people hold more positive attitudes toward various actions if their own consent to them is made salient beforehand (Linder, Cooper, & Jones, 1967).

Sex might also change even among couples who decide to skip the consent form. Because the man would be the one taking the risk, he would have an extra incentive for making sure that the experience was good one for the woman. He would probably feel some need to treat her more positively, lest she accuse him of rape afterward—a charge from which he could then not well defend himself, because he had failed to get her signature.

Putting the man at risk in that way would certainly alter some of the balance of power and other interaction contingencies between men and women. But probably those shifts would be generally to the good. Men, after all, are larger and stronger than women, and so giving men an extra incentive to be nice to women is probably a good idea by and large,

One could in fact question whether the informed consent law would actually affect the majority of cases of sex (even between unmarried people). Probably men would still be willing to take their chances if a woman refused. The lack of a consent form would really only become a problem for a man who found himself on trial for rape. And such rape trials are extremely rare in proportion to the number of incidents of sexual intercourse that take place throughout society every day.

Is it plausible that our society will begin requiring proof of consent to sex? It would certainly be consistent with the shift toward greater legal regulation of everyday life as well as with trends regarding proof of consent. Once upon a time, business deals were sealed with little more than a handshake, and research participants were simply run through procedures without any legal documents. Now the laws are increasingly present. Still, requiring legal documents to be signed prior to sexual intercourse seem like a big step, and getting people to actually use them on a regular basis is an even bigger one.

Without some such procedure, however, the burden of proof remains on the rape victim, and it is generally a very difficult burden to handle. Throughout history, most sexual activities have taken place in private. That very privacy ensures that different accounts come down to his word against hers. The way the system is set up now, the reasonable doubt requirement means that his word is likely to prevail. If our society is to make rape trials more sympathetic to the victim, something must be changed to let the woman sometimes get the benefit of the doubt.