

Investigating the relationship between self-esteem and rape

Sociology



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Within this tiny island, lies an alarmingly high rate of reported rape cases and a probably equally high rate of unreported cases. Incidences of rape where once a hushed, have now become blatant. Even news reports show gunmen dragging young girls out of school and raping them. Gang rapes and other types seem to be just as frequent

Rationale

There have been many theories on rape and its causes. These theories range from biological to social causes of rape. But what is to be noted is that all these theories (it seems) with the exception of one- seem to be indirectly link the issue self-esteem. All theorise however seem to agree on one thing; the problem of rape lies not on the outside (social conditions) but rather on the inside (within the mind of a rapist). Only when one understands the unconscious motives of a rapist can one hope to change his actions. It is on this basis that this research has been carried out.

Hypothesis

There is a direct, inverse relationship between self-esteem and the number of rape cases. The lower the level of self-esteem in a Jamaican man: the higher the likelihood that he will rape.

Variables

Independent Variable: Self -esteem

Dependent Variable: Rape

Conceptualisation/ Operationalisation of Variables

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For this study self-esteem will be defined (by the Shorter Oxford Dictionary) as " Favourable appreciation or opinion of ones self". Rape will be defined as the act of unlawful sexual intercourse (limited to female victims in this case). This concept will include four categories of rape:

- * Forcible rape -when committed against the victims will by the use of threats or force.
- * Date rape- here the victim has agreed to some intimacy but has not agreed to sexual intercourse, which occurs by force or under threat of force.
- * Marital rape- when the victim of forced intercourse is the spouse.
- * Rape by instrumentation (a relatively new legal concept) - this refers to any intrusion of the male penis of any part of the persons body that could be interpreted for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification or an act of violence; or the forced intrusion of any object into the genital or anal openings of another persons body.

Among the many theories and views of rape and its perpetrators, three stand out: the feminist theory, the evolutionary theory and the biosocial theory (other wise known as the synthesized theory). Through this review a summary of all three theories will be presented along with other views; after which there will be a discussion to determine the actual motive of a rapist.

Looking firstly, at the Feminist theory, we find that Susan Brownmiller was one of the first to use feminism to explain sexual coercion. She asserts that a key interspecies difference in motivation to engage in sexual activity is the

lack of an estrous cycle in human females, thus leaving humans open to copulation every day of every month. Human females do not show visible signs of estrus; they have instead developed a " complex system of psychological signs and urges, and a complex system of pleasure." Without a biological mating system, a male can engage in sexual behaviour with a female in a way that is not dependent on biological cycles, and therefore can rape.

A quick synopsis of the Feminist theory emphasizes five major points:

1. Feminist theory of sexual coercion holds that all men use rape as a process of intimidation by which all women are kept in a state of fear.

During the present and the past, rape and sexual coercion have hindered women's rights to choice and opportunities, sexually and otherwise. If a woman is kept in a state of fear she is more likely to submit to her intimidator and less likely to make decisions which conflict with those made by her 'oppressor'. It stands therefore that if men are to retain control over decision making they must achieve and maintain control over anyone who may become a threat to them. Because psychological effects of rape on women are such that cause fear and ultimately submission, rape would naturally seem to be the best scare tactic to use. According to Brownmiller, Males at some time realized they could rape, and proceeded to do it (Brownmiller, 1975).

2. Most feminist theories state that sexual coercion is motivated by a desire to exert control over women and not out of lust.

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

3. Feminist view that in the past, paternity certainty was important in terms of property ownership, and therefore this control was necessary to maintain power (Brownmiller, 1975).

If a man was guaranteed to be a prospective father his son would be heir to his property. But a woman is necessary for this. If he could secure a son of his own lineage- through any means possible then he would have a hold on the property and it would stay in his family heritage for as long as a son was present. If the property was in the hands of the woman's family and she bore him a son; the property would no longer belong to her family (that is if there are no other males present to claim it) but to his (family) at the passing of her father. Through rape a man is assured a son without having to get consent from the woman who is to birth the child.

4. Feminist theories share a twofold belief that sexist attitudes lead to increased motivation to rape.

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If a man has the belief that he should discriminate against a woman simply on the basis of her sex then anything that he does to her or any way that he treats her is somewhat justified on this basis.

5. Men learn rape through socialization including attitudes, sex roles, emotions, perceptions, and cognitions that justify male dominance

While women are taught to be passive and submissive; men are instructed to be active and dominant. Tenderness, sensitivity, and empathy are encouraged in women and discouraged in men. Because of this, men are socialized to devalue women and develop masculine self-concepts. Further, males develop hostility towards women and even learn to find sexual arousal from domination. An argument put forward by feminists' states that men rape as an expression of their hostility and anxiety about women becoming too powerful. Research also suggests that rape is related to socio-political and economic disparities by suggesting that rape actual increases with less inequality between the genders, upholding the theory that men rape to maintain an existing hierarchy (Ellis, 1989). This power struggle is natural in the manner by which the sexes are socialized (as mentioned above) this power structure also exists to maintain a hierarchical structure where violence is available and even necessary (Brownmiller, 1975; Malamuth, 1996).

Surprisingly, the feminist theory, in recent times, has shifted from a simplistic view that rape is motivated solely by a desire to dominate and not out of lust. Feminists instead claim that one must view the act of rape from the victim's perspective and not the perspective of the perpetrator, and

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therefore their definition is extended to include rape as a sexual act; rape is sometimes considered sex from the victim's perspective

Next, is the evolutionary theory which almost completely, contradicts the arguments put forward by feminists.

Evolutionary theory states that there are two levels of behaviour causation: proximate and ultimate. Proximate causes of behaviour are temporary, immediate causes; and include the behaviour influence of genes, personality, physiology, and environmental stimuli. Proximate causes attempt to explain how these mechanisms lead to behaviour, while ultimate causes explain why the proximate causes exist in the first place (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

Adaptation is a phenotypic trait with a purposeful design created by past selection that rules out pure chance as a possible explanation for proximate behaviour. In each adaptation is a specific cause, or selected force, that created it (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000). In other words, adaptation is the means by which individuals eventually overcome environmental 'obstacles' which have affected them over long periods of time in evolution and caused directional selection. Adaptations therefore do not cause immediate increase in reproductive success in present environments, and human behaviour is sometimes inadequately adapted to these existing environments. Some adaptations are specific sexual selections, which are a selection of traits which increase the quantity and quality of an individual's mates rather than the specific individual's survival (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

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

Further, there exists a large sexual irregularity in humans in that males need to make little reproductive effort to produce offspring. All that is required of a male is enough time to secure a mate and ejaculate, a process which has a relatively low energetic cost. For females, however, the minimum requirement is nine months of pregnancy, painful childbirth, and a period of lactation. As one can see, the scale of 'favour' is slightly tipped.

During evolution, this unevenness caused males who could mate with multiple partners to be favoured by sexual selection because they out-produced males who could not gain access to multiple females (Thornhill and Thornhill, 1992).

On the contrary, females have been sexually selected to secure a mate with whom they have bonded and can together be responsible for the offspring. Therefore, females have adapted to resist sexual intercourse with an un-bonded partner and to be more selective regarding their sexual partners (Thornhill and Thornhill, 1992). If females were selected to be willing to mate

with any male under any circumstances, Thornhill and Palmer (2000) argue that rape would not occur.

The evolutionary theory of rape does not reject the notion that learning and socialization may play a role in rape. But it does posit that rape is the result of an adaptation to increase the likelihood of a male to pass on his genes without obtaining a female's approval. An adaptation is characterized by its evolutionary function, and the relationship between reproduction and the rape-adaptation hypothesis depends on the similarity of today's environment with the environmental features that led to the selection that designed the adaptation.

The rape-adaptation hypothesis also does not assert that rape is heritable, but implies that males have psychological traits that are fixed and do not vary among the human gene pool.

In summary, there are currently two likely explanations for ultimate causes of human rape: First, since increasing female partners increases male reproductive success, it may be an adaptation that was directly favoured by selection. Secondly, it may instead be a by-product of other adaptations such as a sexual desire of males to have multiple partners without commitment.

Thirdly is the Biosocial (Synthesized) Theory. This theory of rape, posited by Lee Ellis (1989; 1991), merges the concepts of the effects of sex hormones on brain functioning to portions of evolutionary, feminist, and social learning theories of rape to form a biosocial theory (biological-social theory). This theory fuses the strengths of the other theories, while avoiding the

weaknesses, to create a synthesized theory of why rape occurs. The theory rests on four main propositions:

1. There are two drives which motivate most rapes (and other forms of sexual behaviour): a sex drive and a drive to possess and control;

The biosocial theory differs from the feminist and social learning theories by asserting that rape is largely a sexual act. This first proposition suggests that all sexually reproducing animals have an unlearned sex drive controlled by the limbic system of the brain. A second drive to possess and control is also exhibited in many animals, and this is directed towards numerous things in the environment, particularly food, water, and shelter, but including sexual partners and offspring. Primates also exhibit signs of possession and dominance, and it is documented that humans are extremely possessive toward one another in terms of mating behaviour. For human beings, the sex and possession/domination drives are closely linked, and both comprise the motivation behind all sexual behaviour. Domination and aggression are tactics rather than goals, a means towards a sexual end (Ellis, 1991).

2. The actual techniques involved in most rapes are mainly learned, though not all males are equally likely to learn these techniques;

The second proposition suggests that the behaviour surrounding sexual coercion is learned, and that the major form of learning is experiential rather than imitative or attitudinal. Some males may be more disposed to rape behaviour than others genetically, but no male is a born rapist. Men learn to become rapists through shaping and successive approximation and women

may play a role in shaping this behaviour. If females initially resist and then give in to a male's pressure, he may later generalize that behaviour to other women and continue his actions.

3. Evolution has selected males for readily learning methods of securing a large number of mates, including the use of deception and force;

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