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# Rape: It Only Happens to Others

by Leonard A. Sipes, Jr.

To say that this is a sexual society is probably the understatement of the year; the myths held by this nation on sex are astounding. Putting the myths about sex together with those about rape, it's not hard to realize the difficulty of understanding the crime of rape and its impact on our society.

*(It is now 9:30 p.m. on a deserted street near downtown. A young woman bids the guard goodnight as she exits her office building into the bitter weather of January. Shivering as she adjusts to the shock of the night air, she dreams of the warmth of her car and the security of her apartment. An alley provides a short cut to the garage. Ordinarily she wouldn't risk such a passage but it is cold, very cold, and she wants to start her trip home as soon as possible. As she turns into the alley she notices that her footsteps echo off the sides of nearby buildings. But suddenly, a charge of fear rushes through her body as the cold is all but forgotten. Footsteps, loud quick footsteps are behind her. Her heart thumps wildly and the palms of her hands begin to sweat as she quickens her pace. Although trembling, she tells herself that she is being foolish. She knows that it happens to others, not her, not now.)*

We read and hear about this type of rape daily in the local media and have come to feel that this is a prime example of this crime.

It is, in fact, an example of little more than half the four hundred and eighty-six rapes reported last year in Baltimore. Contrary to the myths, not only must a woman be careful and aware when she is on the street, she must also give just as much consideration to the company she

keeps and whom she invites home. Boyfriends, family, and neighbors are often involved in rape cases. Always remember that virtually any male at any time could be a rapist: the President's Commission on Crime has indicated that only thirty-six per cent of rapes in one survey were committed by an unknown male. In the majority of rape cases, the rapist lives in the same general area as the victim, often on the same street, and most rapes are not racially mixed. What is true, however, is that a rape victim often blames herself for what happened and that a new outlook on life in general often rules her mind

One of the most damaging rape myths is that the victim really wanted to be raped or that she enjoyed the act. As one woman stated, "Any person who feels that a woman actually enjoys the act of a man forcefully ramming his penis into her under the traumatic conditions of rape is probably naive about sex in general."

Whether or not it's the boyfriend, neighbor or a total stranger, forceable sex is just that, force: an act of violence. In a society which teaches women to feel that any sex outside of a loving relationship is wrong, the psychological damage to the victim is often brutal. As a mother needlessly blames the crib death of her infant child on herself, so goes the rape victim. She somehow feels that she is responsible for being raped; however, the research shows that the vast majority of victims did nothing to provoke their attacker. After being raped, the victim has a hard time explaining it to anyone outside of close friends or family, and often she does not even tell them.

Rape is the least reported major crime in the City of Baltimore. This is incredible when you consider that the President's Crime Commission states that at least two and perhaps twenty times the reported number may actually be occurring. The reason could be that the woman feels that nothing can be done by the police or that she thinks that the rapist will return for revenge if the act is reported.

Many people believe that it was just chance that they were raped. Possible; however, research shows that many

rapes were planned in advance. There is no doubt that women need help in this area, and that assistance could be provided by the Baltimore Rape Hotline. By dialing 366-RAPE you will find women who will be able to answer any questions about this crime. They can provide anything from experienced emotional support to practical knowledge of your options, especially in respect to the not always helpful criminal justice system.

Why hasn't the criminal justice system been that helpful?

At the center of national handling of rape is the idea that there are many false rape reports. The President's Commission on Crime has reported that some police departments regularly conclude that as many as fifty per cent of the complaints received were not actual rapes; thus the widespread use of lie-detection machines to verify a victim's story and the extensive courtroom examination of the victim's past sexual background to provide the defendant the legal chance to defend himself against a false report.

Mary Ann Willin, Assistant State's Attorney for Baltimore City is a woman who handles a large portion of the city's rape cases. She states that there are not any more false reports for rape than there are false reports for other crimes, and recent police data confirms this. She further states that lie detectors are rarely used by her office and that a probe into the victim's past sexual history has little effectiveness in establishing the truth of most rape cases.

Richard Freedman of the Mayor's Office on Crime was an important figure on the recent Baltimore City Rape Task Force Report. He agrees that there is not an excessive amount of false rape reports.

Judge Arabian of the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City has many years of experience in trying rape cases. She also recognizes that there is difficulty with the conflicting information in this area. She recognizes that every case is different; in some cases, a previous sexual history probe is discouraged, in others it is necessary: there are, in fact, false reports. While she emphasizes that everything possible is done to protect both the defendant and victim.

Assistant State's Attorney Willin feels

that there is a psychological factor common to all rapists; she believes that rape has nothing to do with sex but, rather, violence. Violence under the conditions of rape characterizes a maladjusted person who is dangerous to our society. On the other hand, Judge Arabian thinks that there is no one common factor among rapists.

Something that everyone seems to agree on is that the criminal justice system has made some tragic mistakes in dealing with rape.

Provisions are now being made to educate everybody dealing with the problem, and complaints of the insensitivity of police persons and court officials are dropping off. The victim can now be compensated for any injuries by the state; additionally, legislation is being proposed in Annapolis to close off the trial to spectators.

One recent development is that the Maryland Court of Special Appeals has upheld the use of a probe into the past sexual history of the victim. The rape victim can be assured that there are people working in her behalf. For advice, contact the Rape Hotline, the State's Attorney's Office, or the police department.

What many have tried to do is to provide some concrete methods to advise women on what to do if sexually assaulted. Tragically, there seems to be a lack of stable information in this area also. What the public often fails to realize is that there is not one type of rapist just as there is not one type of robber. If you are quite sure that little or no harm will come to you if you resist, make all the noise you can. (It is best to shout "fire" for this cry often seems to bring a faster response than a cry of "rape.") Remember your chance of being harmed. If a weapon is displayed, it is best to submit to the act. Don't shout for help unless you know your cry will be heard and answered. Research shows that it is best to walk with another person, even another woman. Never list your address by your first name if you live alone. Work out a signal with the people next door or in the next apartment. If you find yourself in trouble in a retail or business area,

smash or bang the window; this is an old police trick, for every officer knows that these establishments have burglar alarms. Never hesitate to use a fire call box. Always check the back seat of your car before entering it.

There have been times when a woman in trouble has said "Go ahead, rape me," in a very calm manner and her assailant has lost interest and walked away. There have also been instances where the woman has resisted and has been murdered for her efforts. There is no one prescribed method of discouraging a potential rapist. No one act will work in all cases. Again, remember your chances for harm, for a healthy and alive rape victim is just that, healthy and alive.

It is not easy for a man to understand what a woman goes through when raped. Even in writing this article this writer is still not sure that he does. The following account from a person who has spent years in studying crime and its effects might provide some insight.

*On a recent fall night in Northwest Baltimore City a man was homosexually raped and beaten. Dazed, confused and somewhat hesitant, he decided to contact the police. During the report-taking process, one officer smiled to the other, indicating a lack of concern on their parts which naturally made the raped man furious, as well as embarrassed.*

*At the hospital, instruments probed the abused area and he didn't like the idea that the whole world was beginning to know what happened. While waiting for further examination, he heard one doctor ask another if he felt that the victim really enjoyed it. "Yeah, if the clown was walking in that part of town at night, he was probably looking for it," stated one doctor. He was furious over the remark and began to wonder if he should have even bothered to report it at all.*

*Later in speaking to the State's Attorney he was asked, "Why the hell were you walking alone, what were you doing out at that time of night?" "How were you dressed, was your shirt open, did you do anything to attract the attacker?" The raped man angrily shouted back "Why are you asking such damned*

*stupid questions, who cares how I was dressed or why I was walking alone, what the hell does all of this have to do with me being attached?"*

*He was given a lie detector test to judge if his story was true and he began to wonder just why he was not being believed.*

*His rapist was caught and brought to trial, and the victim took the stand. The defense lawyer started probing the victim with questions: "Tell me sir, did you struggle with your attacker, are you sure you didn't provoke what happened to you?" The lawyer tried to discredit the victim: "Tell me sir, about your past sexual history." In front of a packed courtroom he was forced to explain events in detail that he ordinarily would only have told to close friends.*

Why is the courtroom examination conducted in such an intimidating way? Often in a rape case there is only one witness: the victim. There may be evidence to support the state's case, but their best evidence is the story of the person attacked. The defense lawyer knows from the beginning that his mission is to discredit the victim's story in any way he can to produce a reasonable doubt in the mind of the judge or jury. A past sexual history probe is not used in every rape trial. It is, however, questionable whether these inquiries achieve the truth or whether they are simply tools of intimidation. In a robbery trial, past histories of being robbed, kind of dress, or reason for being at the place of attack are not often used for it is felt that this has little to do with trying a person accused of robbery. Many believe that the same attitude should hold in rape.

Rape is an issue that desperately needs close examination, and one of the reasons that it's not getting this consideration is the emotionalism of those trying to explain it.

The entire area of the criminal justice system dealing with rape is in need of reform, but any time we are dealing with Constitutional safeguards, clear thinking and facts should be our guide rather than emotional outcries from both sides that produce more misconceptions.