

Grappling with Rape: Hard Truths



Walk in Shand Meadow, Stanley Spencer, 1908

The following is owed to explication and not exculpation.

From the Latin *rapere* (seize by force) are the words rape, rapt and rapture.

Rapists are very correctly but not universally despised by both women and men. The laws of most lands are written to reflect the gravity, disgust and abhorrence the act of rape invokes. In cultures where rapists enjoy more favourable ratings, the judicial system shifts the weight of responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim.

Rapists find their highest approval ratings among themselves. They play by a different set of rules, making their

accomplishment a function of defiance of the law and brute conquest.

The genes the rapist wears never go out of style because—compared to authors, athletes and electricians—rapists are disproportionately prolific breeders. To be noted without flinching is what they admire in themselves is what natural selection sees fit to admire.

During the Bosnian war (1992-95), an estimated 50,000 women were raped, many in special rape camps. In South Africa, [one in every four](#) women is raped. In South Africa a woman has a greater chance of getting raped than learning how to read, which means an unconscionably high percentage of men are undeterred by the brutality, violence and dehumanization of women rape invariably occasions. Based on the ubiquity of the act and the appalling numbers, more and more human rights groups are signing on to the notion that rape is a global epidemic.

Popular psychology, spear headed by publications such as *Psychology Today*, contends that some women entertain rape fantasies. Well before Freud published his revolutionary theories on the relationship between the unconscious mind and sexuality, the philosopher Schopenhauer understood that nature has one goal: reproduction— “the most marvelous of all instincts, and its work the most astonishing ... the sexual passion is the kernel of the will to live.” So while the sexually aroused individual selfishly chases his pleasures, the beyond purpose is procreation (propagation of the species). It is likewise for the sake of her offspring and the health and vigour of the species that women desire what is best for their eggs, and the rape fantasy, if only subconsciously, not only identifies the instinct that predicts a female’s attraction to the alpha male but makes the case that rapists, as a group, are alphas. Which make our laws that punish rapists inconsistent with nature’s first purpose: reproduction.

Men in Genes

Do males secretly admire, envy rapists for their exceptional ability (virility) to conquer and breed under the most trying circumstances? Is there an unacknowledged fraternity of closet rapists, and if yes, how big is the closet?

All life forms are characterized by the blind will to live and not die, and reproduce. Genes that survive from one generation to the next are deemed the fittest. Hostile environments that limit the winner's circle to the exceptional best guarantee gene fitness.

Until quite recently in man's history, natural selection favoured physically dominant males who could provide for as many women as they could feed and defend. Environments hostile to arousal and reproduction (war, scarcity) isolated those exceptional males who could successfully reproduce under stress. It's one thing to consummate with a consenting, loving partner in the midst of plenty, but altogether another story to consummate with a woman whose village you have razed, whose husband and children you have killed, who hates you, is revolted by you and wants you dead. If the mixing-diluting-of the enemy's blood is the definitive biological conquest, men who are not capable of consummating in negatively charged sexual environments run the risk of seeing their genes eliminated from the gene pool. Males who are physically and emotionally equipped for rape, especially multiple rapes with multiple partners, are rewarded by nature: their copious seed is transmitted to the next generation. Evolutionary biology's toughest truth is that natural selection rewards sexual coercion; it is not interested in sensitive, caring, compassionate males.

Left to their own devices and fantasies, most men, the majority of whom discreetly suffer from Don Juan envy, would seduce and procreate with as many women as possible. There isn't a man alive who at some primordial level doesn't wish to

scatter his seed. If the ultimate prize of war—the heavyweight event that separates the breeders from the non-breeders—is unrestricted access to conquered women, the rapist is the first in line. His seed will get a future hearing, while the omegas on the sidelines console themselves with booty and plunder.

Reducing the rapist to his essential place and purpose, he represents those exceptional men who are capable of procreating under the most trying conditions. He is able to consummate in the presence of judgmental males, in times of war, in environments with the smell of death in the air, and with women who loath him. He will prevail when least expected, and it matters not a whit to natural selection whether he is admired or detested for his breeding prowess. His DNA lives on.

Richard Dawkin, in *River Out of Eden*, explains that we don't have to go far back in time to find a common ancestor. In the Middle Ages it was not uncommon for an alpha male—with the backing of *jus primae noctis* (law of the first night) or *droit du seigneur* (the lord's right) —to sire a hundred offspring. And if these subsequent offspring should sire an additional ten for five generations (a century's worth), the dominant alpha male's genes will be present in more than a million children, grandchildren and great great grandchildren etc, all of whom might be recognizable by an outstanding physical feature (shape of nose, chin, mouth) which is why we are often able to identify someone as German, or Scandinavian or Greek. The science of genetics, the branch of biology that deals with heredity, combined with the laws of exponential distribution force the conclusion that many of us, and perhaps most of us, are the sons and daughters of nature's favourite brute—the rapist.

Since in the modern era rape is universally outlawed, and abortions safer and more readily available than ever before, resulting in fewer births from coercive sex, there has been a

major shift in viewing rape less as a procreative tool and more as a weapon against institutionalized social iniquity. In 1968, Eldridge Cleaver (*Soul on Ice*) infamously described rape as an "act of insurrection," the great leveler, the orgasmic means to the end of blurring the distinction between society's winners and losers. Rape is the quick and efficient answer to a frustrated alpha male's ambitions, or minority status or negative self-esteem. When an unemployed, uneducated rapist forces himself on a society woman who would otherwise have nothing to do with his kind, he is addressing an imbalance his nature cannot abide by. He doesn't regard rape as a crime but a correction against an exclusionary social order that has robbed him of his dignity and self-esteem. Rape is the temporary means by which he takes his rightful place in society. He rationalizes it as justified affirmative action without consent. In the unacknowledged but ongoing war among males for access to the most prized females, he proves to himself and 'the boss' that he is an equal. He feels no regret or remorse but is hooked on an endorphin high that will bid him to rape again and again until he is caught. Sixty percent of rapists become serial rapists.

When we pass our genes on to the next generation, we are passing along knowledge: a set of survival instructions, the most important of which is the ability to reproduce under stress, which is why the rapists' genes are very present in the overall human gene pool. Estimates vary widely but worldwide, among reported incidences, a woman is raped every second, which speaks to the DNA that predicts the act and the ineffectiveness of the laws against it. Sometimes it doesn't take more than a drink or two or a couple of hours spent in boisterous male company to feed the notion that it is OK to force a woman to have sex against her will. Men, soldiers in particular, often bond around the act of rape. Among certain men, rape is confused for a right, which in turn confers bragging rights, which is why it is not unusual for rape to be carried out in the public domain.

In recognition of man's propensity to rape, cultures have attempted to deal with it in a variety of ways. The Spartans, as part of their military training, legitimized it by encouraging rape as a rite of passage. Other cultures, citing overpowering female sexuality, require sexually mature women to be clothed from head to foot and not to fraternize with men. Other men argue that rape is normal. The French actor Gerard Depardieu [admitted](#) as such in a *Time* magazine interview:

. . . at nine he participated in his first rape? "Yes." And after that, there were many rapes? "Yes," he admits, "but it was absolutely normal in those circumstances. That was part of my childhood."

Man is at war on many fronts, but all are instances of the same war he is waging against himself, against his nature. Since human nature cannot be wished away (will there one day never be another war, another rape, another lethal altercation?) it is imperative, as a pedagogical challenge, to learn to recognize and react to warning signs that, in the time it takes six rapists in a city bus to unzip or an angry man to put his hand on a kitchen knife, behaviour antithetical to the rule of law and laws of decency is about to prevail.

Perhaps this is what the French writer George Bernanos had in mind when he wrote (*Diary of a Country Priest*), "The instinct of prayer is deep in all of us ... It may be a form of the mysterious struggle of the individual against the race."