

THE **WHY**  
OF SEXUAL ASSAULT  
RISK FACTORS AND  
ASSOCIATED ELEMENTS



1 IN 6 WOMEN HAVE SURVIVED AN  
ATTEMPTED OR COMPLETED RAPE

EVERY **98 SECONDS**,  
AN AMERICAN IS  
SEXUALLY ASSAULTED.

WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?  
THERE ARE MANY  
CONTRIBUTING FACTORS:

A PERPETRATOR'S SENSE  
OF POWER, CONTROL,  
AND ENTITLEMENT



VICTIM-BLAMING (LETTING  
ABUSERS OFF THE HOOK)



GENDER ROLES  
AND STEREOTYPES  
(REINFORCING  
INEQUALITY)

SUBSTANCE ABUSE (HINDERING  
A PERPETRATOR'S JUDGMENT)



**NO SURVIVOR IS TO BLAME FOR  
THEIR ASSAULT.** IF YOU OR SOMEONE  
YOU KNOW HAS EXPERIENCED SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE, YOU CAN CALL THE  
NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE  
AT **1-800-656-4673** FOR HELP.

## **The “why” of sexual assault: Contributing factors are numerous and complex**

By Diana Pressey

Recently, sexual assault allegations against powerful men have skyrocketed. As #MeToo exposes these abusers, the spotlight on the issue of sexual assault has grown. Understanding its contributing factors is critical to diminishing it.

According to Rutgers University’s Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance, contributing factors to sexual assault include a perpetrator's sense of power, control, and entitlement; gender-based stereotypes reinforcing inequality between genders; alcohol and other drugs impairing perpetrators' judgement; and victim-blaming.

In addition, there is a persisting debate on whether sexual assault is a result of sexual attraction or power. A common belief that sexual attraction has nothing to do with it has prevailed for decades. “Rape is about power, not sex” is a mantra that first appeared in the 1975 book “Against Our Will” by feminist Susan Brown.

Rachel Maguire, a senior psychology and women’s studies double major at UNC, said she agrees with this mindset.

“To me, rape is absolutely about power because it is about one person doing what they want to an unwilling person,” Maguire said. “Sex is a consensual act between two or more people, therefore rape cannot be about sex because one person is exerting their physical power over another.”

Some have come to challenge this mode of thinking, arguing that there is no empirical data to support it.

Richard Felson and Richard Moran asserted in their article for Quillette that sexual assault perpetrators are motivated by a desire for sex, pointing to a study that found 15 year-olds are most likely to be assaulted. They said that youth is generally considered an attractive trait, and therefore it makes sense for the youthful to be targeted sexually.

Assuming that this is true, it’s necessary to examine why it is that 15 year-olds are considered to be the most sexually attractive. Evolutionary psychology explains that heterosexual attraction to younger women is biological, and men are attracted to younger women because their youth signifies fertility and reproductive value.

But women and girls aren’t the only ones who are raped, and the evolutionary psychology explanation doesn’t apply to high school girls. According to the 2011 study by David Utting and Susan Bewley in *The Obstetrician & Gynaecologist*, “Family planning and age-related

reproductive risk,” the age at which a woman is the most fertile is between the ages of 20 and 24 — not when she is still a teenager.

Mitra Norowzi, a sophomore journalism major at UNC, said the young age of many victims can easily be attributed to the power imbalance between victims and perpetrators, as perpetrators are often older than their victims.

“Sexual desirability may factor into it partially, but the fact that high school girls are being targeted the most as opposed to women in their 20s, that’s very telling,” Norowzi said. “The younger that people are, the more easily manipulated and controlled they are. High schoolers are younger, they have less of a position of authority or power, they’re still coming into their own, they’re inexperienced, they don’t know how to say ‘no’ as well yet. They’re easier targets.”

A simple examination of sexual assault cases demonstrates that most of these cases involve a power dynamic of some sort. Often, the perpetrator holds some degree of control over their target, whether it be physical, psychological or even professional — consider recent cases with powerful men like Harvey Weinstein and Matt Lauer taking advantage of women in their field, for example.

Noam Shpancer, a practicing clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at Otterbein College, acknowledged that power plays a role in sexual assault, but challenged the idea that sexual assault is exclusively about power. He called this argument “a catchy political slogan” and argued that it oversimplifies sexual assault.

“First, human behavior is multiply determined,” Shpancer said. “Meaningful human events have more than one reason, and are shaped by more than a single motive or force. Rape is a human event. It is motivated by more than one thing. Second, to claim that sex — one of our most powerful motives (our species’ existence depends on it, after all) — is somehow absent from an act that routinely involves erection, vaginal penetration, and ejaculation defies reason. Arguing that rape is not about sex is akin to asserting that gun violence is not about guns. Both claims betray an incomplete, and politicized, view.”

He also mentioned a scholarly article published by Beverly McPhail, an adjunct professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. This article is titled “Feminist Framework Plus: Knitting Feminist Theories of Rape Etiology Into a Comprehensive Model” and does exactly that.

One of the concepts of McPhail’s developed framework is an acknowledgment of the complexity of sexual assault.

“Rape occurs due to multiple motives rather than the single motivation of power/control,” McPhail wrote. “The multiple motivations include, but are not limited to, sexual gratification,

revenge, recreation, power/control, and attempts to achieve or perform masculinity. Power/control remain an important component of rape but may be the motivation, the means, and/or the result."

While young high-school aged students are most likely to be assaulted, according to research, sexual assault is a major issue for college-aged students, as well. This may be thanks to the presence of contributing factors like substance abuse within in these environments.

According to Sam Vinogradov, a sophomore biomedical engineering major at UNC-Chapel Hill, college students have more of a reason to be wary of being a victim of sexual assault. He recognizes that it isn't an issue pertaining solely to college students, but he does believe it's highly concentrated in university environments.

"I think on college campuses, there's a lot more potential for sexual assault, (they're) teenagers in college, and all their experimenting and such. Drugs, alcohol, they all play into the potential for sexual assault.

Norowzi concurred that people are more vulnerable to sexual assault when they drink, but she emphasized that victims are never to blame.

"Unfortunately, a lot of the time, the involvement of substance is used against or to discredit a victim, but to me, that also plays into the power imbalance," she said. "Alcohol physically weakens victims, so it creates the perfect opportunity for a perpetrator to take advantage of that. It's unfortunate but true that predators use this as a tool."

She said drinking is a major contributing factor in college because it can open the doors for miscommunication, lower inhibitions, and hinder common sense.

"There are degrees of ill-informed consent dealing with substance involvement. I have friends who have experienced some ambiguous sexual encounters, and even some male friends of mine who should know better, sometimes I see them interacting with girls who are under the influence. I try to say something to them, but it's tough to get through to them, especially since it's happening on such a large scale in college. It's almost like it's easy for them to excuse it."

In a similar vein, Maguire mentioned that people still don't have a clear understanding of consent, saying it leads to "people engaging in sexual assault that they might not realize is assault."

"Men still oftentimes engage in sexual coercion," Maguire said. "They may not even see that as a form of sexual assault simple because they're unaware that coercion is on the same level."

At a meeting of Project Dinah, student members of the UNC organization — which works to stop interpersonal violence — discussed the sexual assault factors of drinking, sexual entitlement, and gender roles.

In terms of drinking hindering perpetrators' judgment, many declared that alcohol is no excuse for rape.

Skye Allan, a senior psychology and English double major and Project Dinah co-chair, said she has read several studies that look into abusers blaming alcohol for their actions.

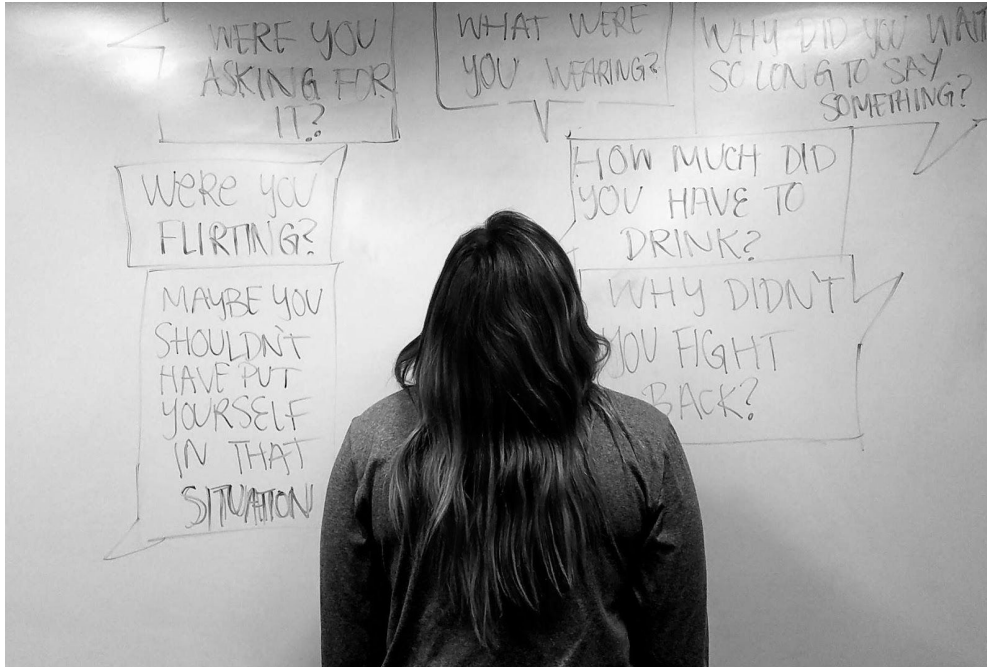
“The person already had that in their head,” Allan said. “It’s not the alcohol that makes them beat their spouse or rape a girl at a party; it’s that they already had it in their head, the alcohol just lowered their inhibition to doing it. And another observational study studied several bars in an area, and they watched how men used alcohol as projecting that they were drunker than they were to make it more acceptable for their behavior.”

Emily Bullins, a junior political science and women's and gender studies double major and Project Dinah co-chair, added that there are “two different types of dangerous behavior” that bartenders are taught to watch out for.

“People have defined it in two different patterns of behavior: predatory and opportunistic, so these people obviously have these states of mind, the ability to commit these disgusting, heinous acts,” Bullins said. “So I definitely think that people use alcohol as an excuse. Drunk people don't rape; rapists rape.”

Justin Wahlers, a first-year psychology and philosophy double major and Project Dinah member, decried the victim-blaming side to the alcohol argument.

“With alcohol, there's this idea that the victim has some part of the blame because he or she had been drinking, too,” Wahlers said. “There's no place for that. I see more studies showing that alcohol is a place for victims to cope with the abuse that was already done to them.”



**Victim-blaming can not only be detrimental to victims, but also communicate to perpetrators that they can get away with their actions, since the burden will not be placed on them.**

Sexual entitlement is another issue that factors into sexual assault. According to a UN study of 10,000 men in Asia and the Pacific, over 80 percent of men who admitted to sexual abuse reported that sexual entitlement — or "the belief that men have a right to have sex with women regardless of consent" — was their primary motivation

Norowzi mentioned that she believes sexual entitlement is reflective of socially accepted norms.

“Societally, it has always been acceptable or encouraged to dominate younger women, it has always been acceptable or encouraged to try to control them,” she said. “Male entitlement spans across all fields, so it makes sense that it would also apply to sex. In general, we have a big problem with the patriarchy and chauvinism and abuse on all fronts, so it’s really not surprising that male entitlement also extends to sexual situations.”

Vinogradov added that people’s belief that they have the right to sex is particularly visible online.

“I haven’t necessarily seen it so much in real life as I have on the internet, but I think that entitlement is a big issue,” he said. “I have read a lot of threads and forums where people feel entitled to sex and feel disgruntled and frustrated when their efforts towards the opposite sex are not met with intercourse.”

Vinogradov may have been referring to some variation of the subreddit r/incels, or “involuntary celibates,” which up until recently was an online area overflowing with sexual entitlement. Recently, it was shut down, but before that, men unhappy with their inactive sex lives posted in threads, blaming women for it and spewing misogyny.



**The #metoo tag**

Should include reverse rape. It's a serious problem that's just as bad and just as, if not more, common than what people usually refer to as rape, and it is a form of rape.

Let me educate you all here a second, because unfortunately, reverse rape is often overlooked and ignored.

Reverse rape is when someone refuses to date someone else because of their appearance, weight, race, because they're trans, or for whatever other biased reason they might have. It's denying love and affection to someone who they would otherwise choose to date in an instant, but because of transphobia, fatphobia, racism, or other issues of oppression, they engage in reverse rape. It can be VERY harmful and cause lasting emotional trauma and insecurity, much like the typical meaning of the word rape.

Victims of reverse rape are still rape victims. It's a serious matter and it makes me so depressed to see how it's always overlooked and victims of reverse rape aren't taken seriously.

**We need a new law where Females are equally distributed among men** (self-insale)

submitted 24 minutes ago by Circlemarvellerjk

This law will not only help tackle the ongoing and ever rising male virginity epidemic, it will also allow men to select the female of his choice. The female in this instance will not have any say in this matter. Simply because if we were to let them choose whatever man they wanted, they would only go for the attractive looking males. Can't let that happen, of course.

This is why this law needs to be implemented -- and by implementing it it will save countless of fellow men who have being denied basic human rights.

r/Incels  
u/Lookismisreal • 6h • The Black Knight

**The government owes me sex**

The miscreants in the government are a bunch of selfish, lowlife, sack of cunts who don't care about the people, especially Incels, even though they consistently spout how they have the peoples best interest. Rather than helping disabled incel men, they rob us by forcing us to pay them tax -- and for what? What is the government actually doing to help us better our predicament? I'll tell you: absolutely nothing. They don't provide us free plastic surgery, they don't provide us a partner, they don't provide us sex, they don't provide us tax benefits, they don't add "Lookism" as a hate crime, they don't stand against the dipshits who mock and shame us consistently - but god forbid when someone mocks a bitch for wanting to get an abortion - all hell breaks lose.

Apart for Incels, here are the people the government helps using our hard earned money: the unemployed waste of spaces, useless single mothers, marriage partners, disabled people (apparently Incels aren't included, even though Inceldom is a disability), old people, homeless people and degenerate drug addicts. These groups of people get all the fucking help and benefits they want, thanks to the money we provide them. Yet, here I am, destined to suffer with no hope at sight, not even a single shred of sympathy is thrown at my side. There is literally no greater injustice than this

I need a pure woman who is on my level. I refuse to settle. I will keep searching until I find her. I will not contribute to female hypergamy. I have a right to have standards when I, myself, meet those standards in return. It's like someone with a BS in CS asking for a programming job. Will that same dude go around feeling eager to apply to some tech call center job answering phone calls in some shady office?

NO. THOSE AREN'T HIS QUALIFICATIONS. I have my qualifications too and I have a right to have those needs met.

r/asktrp

**How not to be a guy that a girl feels OK saying shit like "I'm not in the mood tonight" or "Can we not have sex tonight?" to?**

I think when you get to a level where the girl thinks it's okay to ask this kind of shit, she already has no respect for you. What's the mindset that one must exude in order for her to never even think of asking or mentioning this?



**Im so HORNY and its a fucking TORTURE** by HappinesIsaWarmBlunt in Incels

[-] insale 1 point 3 days ago

Not having sex with incels is a violation of human rights. Women should be jailed for crimes against humanity

**Do you feel there are any circumstances in which a person is obligated to have sex with you?**

Yes

**These are a mere few of the many examples of toxic sexual entitlement available online in subreddits like r/incels or dating sites like OKCupid. This entitlement is often accompanied by a belief in sex as a commodity.**

A few examples of particularly toxic posts: one declaring that rape was just sex and used the term “rapebaiting” as a victim-blaming tactic; another comparing “incels” to Jews and women to Nazis; and yet another describing "reverse rape" — "when someone refuses to date someone else" — as a problem equivalent in severity to sexual abuse.

One post stated, "Not having sex with incels is a violation of human rights. Women should be jailed for crimes against humanity." Another declared, "The government owes me sex."

Perhaps incels are an extreme example, but the fact that these men even think this way and believe it is justified indicates deep-rooted issues with the way some people perceive the issue of sexual intercourse as something to which they are entitled.

Even worse, some posts in the subreddit go so far as to glorify Elliot Rodger, who murdered six and injured 14 women in the Isla Vista killings at University of California, Santa Barbara before killing himself, as well.

Allan pointed to Rodger as an example of how dangerous entitlement can be.

“His whole thing was, he was angry that beautiful women didn’t want to sleep with him,” she said. “He felt that he was owed an attractive female partner, and he had a history of being violent towards women he found attractive in general and couples, because they had what he wanted and he felt that he was owed that. And he got angry when that didn’t just materialize because he was a man. He was pretty specific about that in his video.”

In this video, Rodger spoke bitterly about what he considered his plight and described what he intended to do.

"I'm 22 years old, and I'm still a virgin," Rodger said. "It has been very torturous ... It's not fair. You girls have never been attracted to me. I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it. It's an injustice, a crime ... You will finally see that I am, in truth, the superior one, the true Alpha male.”

His fury is clear in the video and other leaked emails of his, and it is directed solely towards the women who did not pay him attention.

According to Allan, this kind of rage is a result of men learning that the only socially acceptable negative emotion for them is anger.

“It basically comes from authority figures, including parents, including social media and media in general,” Allan said. “Teachers and coaches, that group of people who are seen as authority figures and who the child looks to as the way to act.

“Men are taught that the only way to get things is by force or by power, and it really cuts them off from much more nuanced relationships, not only with women, but with men,” she continued. “They’re allowed to bro-hug, but they’re not allowed to give a hug when they’re upset or they’ve been hurt. And the only acceptable emotion for them, really, is anger.

Allan added that this is especially noticeable in popular media.

“In video games and movies, whenever a man has suffered a huge loss, he goes on a rampage,” she said. “That is the only, apparently, acceptable way for him to deal with his grief and anger —



or to drink his problems away or hook up with random women. There are no real positive models or reinforcements for men to talk with their friends or talk with therapists because it's not 'manly'; it's not what a man does."

All of these elements lend to the reasoning as to why some people decide to sexually assault others. Power dynamics and sexual entitlement are two of many crucial factors to consider.

Some might wonder how this knowledge can be applied in order to reduce the prevalence of sexual abuse. Elimination of messages exacerbating contributing factors — such as those containing toxic gender stereotypes — might help, since the messages people absorb affect their attitudes and behavior, according to Allan and others.

Another method is education, or informing the public that consent is critical; nobody is entitled to sex with anyone; and victim-blaming and sexual assault will not be tolerated.

Sexual assault is a complex issue, and the development of a plan to prevent and combat it is thereby complex as well. Understanding contributing factors and sexual abusers' motivations is only the first step, but it is an essential one.

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## NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **”THE WHY OF SEXUAL ASSAULT” PIECE EXPLORES THE MOTIVATIONS OF PERPETRATORS**

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. - Over the last few weeks, reporters Diana Pressey and Michelle Langlois have investigated the controversial topic of sexual assault and its causation. With a plethora of reports of sexual assault allegations in the news, their piece seeks to answer a timely question.

Pressey and Langlois aim to share with their audiences the contributing factors to sexual assault and why it may occur. According to the reporters, understanding these factors is necessary to diminish it.

The piece constructs an examination of sexual assault’s causation with the perspectives of experts and various college students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Members of Project Dinah, a student organization at UNC that dedicates itself to the safety and empowerment of individuals, had a lot to say when it came to the topic.

- MORE -

“THE WHY OF SEXUAL ASSAULT” PIECE - Page 2

Mitchell Slentz, a junior sociology and women and gender studies double major and Project Dinah secretary, believed that power was one of the largest contributing factors.

“I also think it’s clear that it’s about power when you look at other axes of oppression,” Slentz said. “Pretty much any other marginalized group — women of color experience higher rates of sexual violence than white women, trans women experience much higher rates, disabled folks — one in two disabled folks or people who use mobility aids have experienced sexual violence. Any way you find a power dynamic, you find higher rates of sexual violence.”

The role of substance abuse and sexual entitlement in sexual assault are two subjects discussed in the article. It also addresses the debate of whether sexual abuse is a matter of power or sex.

Pressey and Langlois are confident that this story will have a large impact on their audience and provide a framework through which sexual assault can be understood and combatted.

The article will be released on the Youth Project’s website on Dec. 9.

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