

# **Redefining Rape**

Examining the Social Construction of Masculinity  
to Draw Attention to Male Rape Victims' Experiences

Brandon Bollinger  
Senior Exercise in Sociology  
2010-2011

“Redefining Rape: Examining the Social Construction of Masculinity to Draw Attention to Male Rape Victims’ Experiences”

Author: Brandon Bollinger

**Abstract** Rape has largely been understood as the sexual conquest of a man/men over a woman/women through a display of power. While rape is largely a woman’s issue, 1 in 33 men has been the victim of attempted or completed rape (NIJ/CDC 1998, exhibit 1). This paper seeks to ask the question why male victims’ experiences have been largely excluded from research and discussions on the greater issue of rape in society. Through hermeneutical research into the discussion of rape theories and the social construction of gender, with an emphasis on masculinity, this paper examines five general schools of thought on rape as they relate to the social construction of masculinity. Ultimately, I conclude that the social construction of masculinity leaves it difficult to comprehend male rape victims’ experiences as understood through theories on rape. Since rape is an issue of violence and power, it is complicated to understand male victims’ experiences when, as a society, we understand masculinity in terms of violence and power. The issue is not necessarily in understanding rape so much as it is in understanding masculinity.

## ***Introduction***

In order to “redefine rape” it is important to begin with a development of how rape is understood. Throughout history and across cultures rape exists as a serious social problem. In its essence, at the heart of victims’ experiences, rape is an issue of violence and power.

There have been many attempts to understand why rape happens. Theorists from diverse academic backgrounds have contributed many ideas to this question. The majority of these theories are based on the experiences of female victims, as it is largely seen as a women’s problem. Rape *is* a serious social problem for women, affecting them much more than men. In the National Violence Survey Against Women (NVAWS), it was reported that 1 in 6 American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime (NIJ/CDC 1998, exhibit 1). This survey also found over 17.7 million females aged 18 years and older have experienced completed or attempted rape (NIJ/CDC 1998, exhibit 1). Those who have experienced rape are “3 times more likely to suffer from depression, 6 times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol, 26 times more likely to abuse drugs, and 4 times more likely to contemplate suicide” (RAINN, nd). This problem clearly exhibits life changing factors beyond the moment rape occurred. Not only does rape change the victim’s life after the instance, but also it structures the way women interact socially due to fear of the possibility of unwanted sexual encounters. Marge Piercy, in her poem *Rape Poem*, writes,

Fear of rape is a cold wind blowing  
all of the time on a woman’s hunched back.

Never to stroll alone on a sand road through pine woods,  
never to climb a trail across a bald  
without that aluminum in the mouth  
when I see a man climbing toward me. (Searles and Berger 1995, 7)

This stanza demonstrates the struggle women face in dealing with the fear of rape. Their interaction around men even on a “stroll” can leave women with a deep fear. Rape clearly is legitimized as a serious problem for women.

While “9 in every 10 rape victims [are] female” (RAINN, nd), we are still left with the 10 percent of victims that are male. The National Violence Survey Against Women reports 1 in 33 men have been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in his lifetime (NIJ/CDC 1998, exhibit 1). While victims of rape are typically women, male victims’ experiences often go unnoticed. Does society see these male victims as targets of the same social problem that female rape victims suffer from? Furthermore, do these male victims feel included in the broader discussions of rape and rape victimization? The focus in this paper looks further into the experiences of male victims in order to understand why their experiences often go unnoticed.

As a society, male victimization has been difficult to understand because it clashes with how we comprehend masculinity. The social construction of masculinity makes it difficult to imagine men being victims of rape since men are supposed to be aggressive and violent. The World Health Organization published, “Sexual violence against men and boys is a significant problem...though, it is one that has largely been neglected in research” (WHO 2002: 154). Studies have estimated that in the United States, 2.78 million men are victims of sexual assault or rape (NIJ/CDC 1998, exhibit 1). With those numbers, along with the fact that, “males may be even less likely than female victims to report an assault to the authorities” (WHO

2002:154), it is clear that the problem of male victimization is much larger than popular perception<sup>1</sup>. Male rape is such a difficult issue with the lack of reporting and the stigmatization behind being a victim that experts have a difficult time comprehending the extent of the problem. Fred Pelka mentions, “articles which speculate that anywhere from one in nine to one in seven men will be raped or sexually abused in their lifetime” (1995:251). The World Health Organization, in their *World Report on Violence and Health*, mentions, “Most experts believe that official statistics vastly under-represent the number of male rape victims” (2002:154). While it is true that females are much more likely to be sexually assaulted than males, it is still an issue that the social knowledge based on sexual violence often continues to leave men out of the discussion of victimization, particularly because much has been left to learn about male victims, and much has been kept silent by male victims themselves.

This paper will examine the intersection between theoretical explanations of rape and the social construction of gender in order to explain the reason male victims’ experiences are often left unrecognized. By demonstrating how masculinity is constructed, each theoretical explanation of rape becomes dismal in understanding male victims experiences. Since rape is an issue of violence and power, theories have difficulties understanding male victims’ experiences because, as a society, we understand men in terms of violence and power. The issue isn’t necessarily in how we theorize rape so much as it is in understanding masculinity.

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<sup>1</sup> Davies and Rogers write, “five out of the 40 male rape victims in the study by Walker et al. (2005) had contacted the police after their rape. Only one out of these five cases resulted in a criminal conviction” (2006:368).

Therefore, to “redefine rape” so the issue of male victims experiences are discussed more and incorporated into theoretical discussions, we must begin by redefining the masculine construct.

### ***Literature Review***

The literature for the purposes of this paper is comprised in four parts. First, there needs to be a clear understanding of how rape is defined. Second, there is the literature that discusses the social construction of masculinity, with an emphasis on how masculine sexuality and aggressive action is viewed. Third, I have collected literature that develops or discusses theories on rape. Finally, I have collected works about male victims of sexual assault, both theoretical and case studies in order to show contrasting theories, but also to demonstrate how many of these theories are lacking in comparison to others.

#### DEFINING RAPE

Rape is a complex and misunderstood term in society. The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines it as:

The act of taking anything by force; violent seizure (of goods), robbery. 2. The act of carrying away a person, *esp.* a woman, by force. 3. A. Violation or ravishing of a woman. Also, in mod. Usage, sexual assault upon a man. 4. *concr.* One (*esp.* a woman) who is raped. (P. 186)

The gender divide in this definition, favoring the idea that females are the typical victims and male victims are more of a modern, or recent phenomenon, suggests that we need to look at a more inclusive and equal way of defining rape. While it is true that females *are* the typical victims of rape, I argue that the gendered definition has created an exclusive element, whereby the experiences faced by male victims seem to be a separate social issue, as if defined by something else. The definition

also only mentions sexual behaviors when talking about “upon a man,” but when females are mentioned, the term rape is broader, inferring more actions. Instead of looking at male victims and female victims as two different usages, I propose to look at rape as a *social* phenomenon that affects both sexes. Though the actual experiences across gender and sexuality are not always constant, I plan on using the term in a broader sense in order to encompass as many sexual assault experiences as possible and to present the issue as a social problem as opposed to a gendered micro-level problem.

Lee Ellis writes that rape “is usually considered a legal term,” and therefore in his book he strips “its ‘legal baggage’” and refers to it as “a collection of behavior patterns involving forceful attempts at sexual intimacy, regardless of whether those behavior patters happen to conform to all the legal statues in the jurisdiction where the act took place or not” (1989:1-2). Understanding “rape” without its “legal baggage” is important for this paper, since the law on rape is different in various countries and communities. It is also different depending on the action carried out, relationship with the assailant, and a series of other components. Therefore, rape will both be seen as social problems as opposed to legal problems to avoid complication. Noreen Abdullah-Khan furthers the idea of this social problem, by stating, “Rape is seen as one form of...social control” (2008:5). Combining the more experience-based definition proposed by Ellis with the larger social issue of control and power relations discussed by Abdullah-Khan, I hope to demonstrate a synthesized definition of rape that will allow for a more inclusive and sociological

understanding of this complex issue. Thus, as I have mentioned in the beginning of this paper, rape is seen as a social problem involving violence and power.

#### CONSTRUCTED MASCULINE IDENTITY

The masculine identity roots itself in what it is not. Kimmel writes, “Being a man meant also not being a boy. A man was independent, self-controlled, responsible” (2006:14). Fred Pelka writes, “as a man, I’ve been socialized never to admit to being vulnerable” (1995:250). Kimmel, again, writes, masculinity is “also defined according to what it is not—that is, not feminine and not homosexual” (1987:72-73). The literature on masculinity demonstrates how man is seen as “the pinnacle of society, and all other categories and character traits are compared against the male standard” (Kokopeli and Lakey 1992:446). This masculine identity follows men from the home, to the workplace, and to any other social arena, such that men’s roles change according to their environments.

Society has constructed an aggressive and violent identity for masculine sexual practices. John Gagnon and William Simon early on brought the concept of sexual conduct as being constructed by society in their book Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality (1973). From there sociologists developed this construction to further understand masculine, feminine, heterosexual, and homosexual behavior. Sociologist Michael Kimmel has produced numerous books that attempt to understand gender constructions, particularly as they pertain to male sexual practices. His two books, The Sexual Self (2007) and The Gendered Society Reader (2004), consist of a collection of valuable resources to understanding constructed male sexual roles. His other anthology, Changing Men (1987), contains

chapters that look at attempts to challenge or critique masculine roles in society, which will be useful in depicting further or progressive outlooks of rape victims' scripts later in this research paper. Other authors such as Patai (1996) would debate with Kimmel and other masculinity scholars who look for integration in feminist teachings, because Patai sees extreme feminism as hostile towards men and also heterosexuality. Patai writes, "this sort of feminism is doomed to failure because it alienates many women – and, of course, men too" (1996: 164).

### THEORIES OF RAPE

There have been various attempts to understand why rape occurs. For the purposes of this paper I will attempt to discuss the vastly different, yet popular, theoretical explanations for the occurrence of rape. Much attention has been focused on the biological, psychological, legal, and cultural reasons for the occurrence of rape, and I have included some of these sources along with sociological theories. First there is the feminist theory of rape, which focuses "upon the male domination of sociopolitical and economic affairs as the ultimate determinant of a society's risk of rape" (Ellis 1989: 11). The feminist theory seems to include the largest variations, yet all focus back on the male dominated society. Brownmiller provides one school of feminist thought that focuses on rape as an "exercise in power" (1975:256). This power is through man's ability to rape, and also the agent of fear he promotes through his power. Brownmiller also focuses on the violent nature of rape, focusing on the power relationships between the male assailant and the female victim. Her theoretical discussion is based on a patriarchic society. Catherine MacKinnon argues that the mere construction of heterosexuality,

with an emphasis on hegemonic masculinity, is a reason for rape. MacKinnon writes, "I want to talk with you about rape as a problem of sexism, a problem of the inequality between men and women" (1987:81). This inequality is rape in itself due to the power differentials between men and women. MacKinnon sees the issue in a more grand and historical sense, looking towards the constructions as a constant source of difficulties for women. Feminist theorists branch out from Brownmiller and MacKinnon to focus on different societal issues that a masculine dominated society could foster sexual assaults. Feminist theorists generally emphasize female victim's experiences. Though at times these theorists do recognize male victimization as an issue, their focus is mostly on women's experiences since feminist had to fight to make rape recognized as a serious social problem in the first place.

Other schools of theory, such as Keith Burgess-Jackson's book A Most Detestable Crime, which emphasizes the notion that rape is coerced sex. Most theoretical explanations for rape discuss rape as a violent abuse involving power. This notion exists across feminist, legal scholars, and masculinity scholars alike (as we saw in Abdullah-Khan). Baron and Straus would not disagree that rape is about power, but rather look closer at American culture, particularly at gender inequality, pornography, social disorganization, and legitimate violence in their book Four Theories of Rape in American Society (1989). Noreen Abdullah-Kahn in her book, Male Rape: The Emergence of a Social and Legal Issue, paints the "positivist" theory of rape, which looks at both psychological and biological reasons for rape. This approach "advocates that individuals are driven to crime by forces that are

generally beyond their control and locates such forces within the biology or psychology of the individual” (2008: 39). This approach works for some cases, however, many theorists disagree with this theory suggesting that not all rapes are committed by individuals who are biologically or psychologically prone to violent behaviors. These theories all discuss different reasons for why rape happens. Each of these theories was constructed with the idea of female victimization, however some have been stretched to include male victims. When attempting to understand the experiences of male victims through these theories, the gendered constructed idea of masculinity does not allow for male victims’ experiences to be explained. It is not that these theories lack comprehensive ideas to explain male victims’ experiences; it is that male victims’ experiences are shadowed by the social construction of masculinity.

#### LITERATURE ON MALE VICTIMS OF RAPE

Rape was not considered a problem by legal or social standards until the rise of the “women’s movement and the establishment of the National Center for the Prevention and Control of Rape” in the late 1960’s (2000: vol. 4, 2576). It was not until the mid to late 1970’s that the recognition of men as victims of sexual assault developed. A series of studies, primarily conducted in prisons by writers such as Anthony Scacco in his book, Rape in Prison (1975), drew national attention to male rape as a relevant issue. From there, writers slowly directed their attention to this problem as pervasive in society, not just prisons. Gillian Mezey and Michael King are two recognized psychiatrists on the field of male victimization. Their volume, Male Victims of Sexual Assault (2000), has helped develop the issue of male victims in

society and how different academics fields understand this problem. Michael Scarce, a social scientist, but more notable for his advocacy for gay rights, frames the issue of male victims of male assaults in, Male on Male Rape: The Hidden Toll of Stigma and Shame (1997). Joanna Bourke and Ronald E. Smith et. al. provide insight on male victims of female assault in their works, Rape: Sex, Violence, History (2007) and “Social Cognitions About Adult Male Victims of Female Sexual Assault (1988), respectively. Noreen Abdullah Khan focuses the issue more broadly in her book Male Rape: The Emergence of a Social and Legal Issue (2008). These writings, along with others demonstrate the issue of male victimization through case studies and theoretical explanations for why men are victims. This allows for an important comparison to the literature and organizations that focus on the experiences of female victims. What is out there currently about the experiences of male victims has demonstrated some hope that society will recognize this phenomenon as existing between both sexes. The literature on male victims’ experiences demonstrate that rape is a violent exercise of control and power, which is paralleled with the literature that is based on female victims’ experiences. So then we get back to the question, why are male victims’ experiences less discussed and researched when men are capable of experiencing these violent exercises of control and power? Ultimately it lies in the notion that men are viewed as the ones who are violent and have the control and power in society.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Considering my paper consists of an evaluation or interpretation of theoretical frameworks, it does not seem fitting to include a theoretical framework

section. Yet, I have found that my framework, or idea, is the notion that theories offer “different but complementary insights and answers” (Wallace and Wolf 2006:416). Theory is a product of society, a fallible and complex organism, and therefore needs to be approached in a multidirectional manner, incorporating different experiences. My theoretical framework, or the idea driving this paper, consists of an outlook that knowledge construction can only be validated if it attempts to understand the different circulating ideas. Though the theories demonstrated in this research paper have difficulty explaining male victims’ experiences, it is not the fault of the theory itself. These theories have difficulty explaining male victims’ experiences because they explain rape through issues of power, control, and violence. I suggest looking beyond the theories themselves to see the issue being how society constructs gender roles. These theories alone offer impressive insight into different experiences and situations, yet they do not seem to grasp the larger issue to include both male and female victims. This conclusive attempt to understand victimization based on the experiences of multiple types of victims, even if they do not fit the cultural stereotype, will help frame the broader social issues at stake and help promote a more accepting and understanding society. Therefore, it is my attempt to use the idea of collective knowledge to frame my arguments and discussions.

### ***Methods***

The first process to this project was to look at the issue of male victims of sexual assault. I began by looking at national rape websites (RAINN and the NIH) that serve as resources for victims. While the majority of them mentioned male

victims somewhere in their website, it was usually miniscule compared to the resources and focus on female victims. While it is clear that there is a greater prevalence of female victims, there was often a push for more emphasis on understanding male victims experiences on these websites. As mentioned earlier, WHO published, "Sexual Violence against men and boys is a significant problem...though, it is one that has largely been neglected in research" (WHO 2002:154). This began my questioning as to why male victims' experiences have been out of focus, or left out of the general discussion of victims of sexual assault. From there, I began reading case studies that focused on male victims of sexual assault. Most of this literature focuses on the experiences of male victims and also offers some theoretical insight as to why men have been subjected to sexual violence. With these theoretical understandings, I started to wonder why the field that attempts to understand male victims has been so separate from the majority of research that focuses their attention on female victims.

I then developed an understanding of how society constructs male sexual behavior. Drawing from feminist sociologists gave a very narrow picture of masculinity, so I also found some literature on masculine studies. I was surprised to find that they were very similar in their understandings of the male sexual construct, however their approaches are quite different. Many feminist authors discuss male sexual actions as those done to women or opposed to women, whereas some masculine scholars (particularly Kimmel) try to reinvent masculinity to promote feminist ideas. Other masculine scholars offer hostile attitudes towards feminist theories, and seem to suggest that traditional sex roles serve an important

function in society (Patai). Both feminists and scholars that focus on masculinity contribute to a more concrete understanding of constructed male sexual behaviors, rather than attempting to understand masculine identity from a singular approach.

Finally, I gathered as many theoretical explanations of rape as I could find. I borrowed from some theorists who are typically legal scholars or in the natural sciences since they contribute to the popular understandings of why rape happens. I took the theories that seem to be building on others, and attempted to consolidate them. This is especially true for feminist theories, which contribute to the majority of theoretical understandings, but all seem to have a similar general focus. I located two of the major founders of feminist thought, MacKinnon and Brownmiller, and used their theories to demonstrate the essential feminist theoretical explanation for rape. Though these methods are not perfect by any means, my hope is to have the essential theoretical understandings in our society to demonstrate how male victimization seems to be lacking influence in these explanations. I will first explain masculinity as it exists in society, both as a practice and as a construct, then apply these masculine roles to see if they align with understanding the male experience of victimization. As mentioned before, I counteracted this by finding a few theoretical explanations for male victims, though they too are not fully inclusive in understanding the phenomenon of rape in our society.

### ***Discussion***

#### SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINE SEXUALITY

One of the main problems with rape is the social construction of gender identity with regards to sexuality. Kimmel writes, "Being a male is a crucial

component of personal identity for males in our society, stemming from the early experiences of gender as a self-defining characteristic” (1987:72). For men, their masculinity is one of their most important character traits in society. Masculinity embodies, “success and status, toughness and independence, aggressiveness and dominance” and is “also defined according to what it is not—that is, not feminine and not homosexual” (1987:72-73). We live in a masculine dominant society, where men have historically held positions of power, and therefore the masculine construction is deeply rooted in our culture. Masculinity is seen as a “character ideal...and measures everyone against it” (Kokopeli and Lakey 1992:446). This ideal separates women into a category that is opposed to men, and it also separates men who do not fit into this category along with women. Therefore if a man acts in a way that represents a woman’s role in society, he is no longer a man. This is especially true when we talk about sexual assault, as we often times believe that sexual assault must only occur to a female. When it does occur to a man, that man is emasculated. Men often times are silent about events because they are afraid of being less of a man.

“Stereotypic ideas about male sexuality, such as that men should always be ready for and enjoy sex with a willing women,” (Davies, Pollard, and Archer 2006:277) create normative behaviors, where men feel pressured to fit these stereotyped identities. If men should always be ready for sex with a willing woman, then why is it a problem when men are raped? Smith, Pine, and Hawley write about male victims of female assault, writing, “In each instance, the incidence was a traumatic one for the victim [male] and had long term negative effects on social,

emotional, and sexual functioning” (1988:102). Though we socially construct the idea that women are submissive and men are aggressive, accounts of female perpetrators do exist. King, Coxell, and Mezey write, “Women were the perpetrators of sexual abuse of men in almost half of reported cases” (2000:12). This glaring statistic demonstrates the pervasiveness of constructed notions of gender roles. King, Coxell, and Mezey further to write, “The idea that women may commit sexual assaults or that heterosexual men may be victims of such assaults confronts our assumptions about what it is to be male and female” (2000:12).

The construction of the male sex roles suggest that there should be no problem when a woman has sex with a man, regardless of consent, approval, or desire. Often men feel it is their job then to keep quiet when victimized, since they are not supposed to be subordinate. Outside of the laws, definitions, and early feminist thought, men too are keeping quiet about their victimization. “From infancy, men learn to endure suffering silently and in private. Stoicism is ingrained in many and varied ways.” (Nancy Levit 1998: 111). Levit furthermore explains, “[r]eal men show no emotions, and are thus emotionally reliable by being emotionally inexpressive” (1998: 111). For men to talk about instances of sexual assault or to show emotions about unwanted sexual experiences is to lose their masculinity, and furthermore, lose their legitimacy in society. This construct of masculinity has continuously been perpetuated in our culture (with slight variations due to changes in institutions, technology, and other social arenas). Historically then, men have unfortunately internalized instances of rape due to the fact that their roles in society do not suggest possibilities of victimization. Hence the earlier

mentioned difficulties of men largely keeping silent about their experiences and how it has become difficult to quantify the issue since, “statistics vastly under-represent the number of male rape victims” (WHO 2002:154).

Masculinity then is constructed in a very rigid, singular form. When men deviate from the understood norm, they do not perform their roles. Connell and Messerschmidt write, “The concept of masculinity is criticized for being framed within a heteronormative conception of gender that essentialized male-female differences and ignores differences and exclusion within the gender categories” (2005:36). This quotation demonstrates the idea that masculinity is understood in terms of the dichotomy between male and female. The hegemonic understanding of masculinity makes it difficult for individuals to internalize their role confusion when they have been stripped of their power and had violent sexual actions taken against them. Understanding masculinity from within rather than in constant comparison would allow for flexible social roles for men.

## THEORIES OF RAPE

### *Feminist Theory*

Feminist Theory is especially prevalent in the discussion of rape and sexual assault. “Rape is, for many feminists, the ultimate expression of a patriarchal order, a crime that epitomizes women’s oppression status by proclaiming, in the loudest possible voice, the most degrading truths about women that a hostile world has to offer” (Cahill 2001: 2). As mentioned earlier, Susan Brownmiller and Catherine MacKinnon represent two of the distinct forms of feminism. Brownmiller “emphasized that the motivations behind an act of rape were not primarily sexual,

that is, did not arise out of a sexual need, but rather were primarily violent, such that rape was an act of power that sought to dominate and degrade the victim” (Cahill 2001: 2). At the heart of this argument is the notion that rape is not about sex, but rather about violence. This argument has been popularized and attention has focused more on the notion that rape is about power. The source of that power is men, as they have the power to rape women and also the power to promote constant fear in women. MacKinnon, a legal scholar and feminist activist, writes about how “rape was in fact continuous with most heterosexual sex and could not be distinguished from it by mere reference to coercion or violence” (Cahill 2001: 2). MacKinnon’s argument is that sex between a man and a woman has always been a representative of man’s dominance over women and the social construction that men have all the power in society. MacKinnon focuses on the “meaning” (Cahill 2001: 3) of sex and notes the historical and cultural ways society has empowered men, leaving women subjected with little to no power and constant social violence based upon a female’s gender.

Feminist theorists have borrowed MacKinnon and Brownmiller’s arguments and looked more closely at cultural occurrences to understand rape. In Larry Baron and Murray Straus’s book Four Theories of Rape in American Society, they focus more on specific cultural reasons for rape. Their theories include a discussion of how pornography has created the idea that normative sex is violent and rough. They write, “pornography reduces women to sex objects, promotes and maintains male dominance, and encourages acts of sexual violence against women” (1989:123). This cultural media form has helped create and continue the general sex role

characteristics. Pornography perpetuates masculine aggression and female submission. It also perpetuates the idea that men are typically the assailants in violent situations and females play the role of the victim.

Feminism has brought a lot of attention to rape, which has been crucial for state and federal laws to be put into place. While feminist writers have been crucial in defining rape as a social problem, they often times neglect the notion of male victims. This may be one of the main reasons male victimization has been excluded from discussion of sexual assault.

#### *New Men's Movement*

Fred Pelka, in *Raped: A Male Survivor Breaks His Silence*, criticizes the negative attitudes men have towards feminists. As a survivor of rape, Pelka understands the difficulties men face after the occurrence. Pelka describe the hostility some men have felt, giving the example of rape crises centers, "the only institutions in our society founded expressly to help rape survivors, are identified by some men as hotbeds of feminism, and many men take 'feminist' to mean 'man hating'" (1995:254). Patai's ideas exhibit the notion that feminism has created a hostile attitude towards men, and also has created a "heterophobia." Women have had to question their heterosexual experiences and desires as well as their association with the oppressive male sex in the "name of feminism" (1996:154). Feminist ideas have brought about "the exorbitant sexualization of all interactions between men and women, the vigilante mentality, the vocabulary of sexual harassment even at the kindergarten level, the denial of due process in universities and the work place to men accused of sexual misdeeds..." (164). This has ultimately

led to the alienation of women amongst themselves, amongst men, and also men against other men in their quest to be feminist (164). Returning to Pelka, he writes about the hostile attitudes of some men towards feminism, as in Patai's ideas mentioned above, and how these hostile attitudes have created a "men's movement" (1995:255). This men's movement "[says] a lot of absurd things about sexual violence, not the least of which is that 'just as many men get raped as women'" (1995:255). We know from the National Violence Survey Against Women (NVAWS), that 1 in 6 American women and 1 in 33 men has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in his lifetime (NIJ/CDC 1998, exhibit 1). While these numbers are always open for debate, the new men's movement has no evidence to back up their claims, aside from their hostile attitudes. Pelka writes about how the new men's movement seems to want to express rape as a "gender-neutral issue," however it has only attempted to create hostility towards the group ("*women's stop-rape movement*") that developed rape to be seen as a problem in the first place (1995:255). Pelka believes, "this woman-bashing is an ungrateful as it is gratuitous" (1995:255). This movement, while trying to gain legitimacy and paint rape as a "gender-neutral issue," has tarnished its own legitimacy by their hostile methods.

### *Positivist Theory*

Positivist theory is based on the notion that individuals act based on psychological or biological traits that are beyond their control. Noreen Abdullah-Kahn attempts to look at the male rape question through positivism. She writes, "biological positivism has been grounded in the work of Lombroso (1875), who proposed that criminals existed as a lower form of human evolution than non-

criminals, comprising very distinct physical and mental characteristics” (2008: 39). This idea though is harnessed in the notion that rapists have no control over their actions, where, as we will locate through coercive sex theory, some rape accounts are premeditated. Biological positivism has many flaws in the way we define “lower form of human evolution.” Some members of society, which we may deem as high status based on their occupation or social standing, are still capable of being an assailant. While it is clear that there are biological differences, between men and women, and between individuals, the notion of biological differences as the basis for acts of rape and sexual violence seems to be too broad of a generalization. It would be easy to point to a case where an individual possessed “morally inferior” traits, without biologically inferior traits.

Psychological positivism is described by Abdullah-Kahn as “(1) uncontrollable impulses or urges, (2) mental illness or disease, (3) momentary loss of control precipitated by unusual circumstances and (4) victim instigation” (2008: 39). This idea too is flawed in the same way that biological positivism is, in that while there are biological and psychological differences between men and women, these biological and psychological differences have been embedded in cultural constructs that have only furthered the differences between the two sexes. We cannot escape the biological and psychological, but there can be pushes for changes within the cultural construction of the differences between men and women.

### *Coercive Sex Theory*

Burgess-Jackson in his book, *A Most Detestable Crime* (1999), sets to demonstrate how rape is coercive sex, rather than about violence or sex. He focuses

on coerced sex in order to focus less on the legal understandings of rape and more on the social experiences of rape. He argues that the term “‘violence’ itself has broad and narrow meanings” (1999: 96). While he argues that coercion too is broad, violence then limits “rape to forcible invasions” (96). Rape is then coercive and sexist to Burgess-Jackson, and he compares it to the act of robbery. The act can be “accomplished either forcibly or by threat,” and involves, “the taking and carrying away of the personal property of another with the intent to permanently deprive the owner thereof” (104). Burgess-Jackson admits that this theory is flawed in that it demonstrates specific experiences that women encounter, however he defends his theory based on those experiences (105-106).

Burgess-Jackson also draws on MacKinnon, writing, “[rape] is not just something a man does to a woman (although it *is* that); it is something men do to women” (108). Burgess-Jackson insists that the law looks at both the individual man raping the individual woman and the notion that *men rape women*. If the law looks at this two-fold instance, with the idea that rape is coercive sex, Burgess-Jackson sees potential for greater social change. The gendered notion of rape presented by Burgess Jackson does make it difficult to assess his potential for male victims. Also, the narrowly focused idea of rape as coercive sex leaves out a multitude of other forms of rape. One example that Burgess-Jackson leaves out is the instance where the “victim” is helpless or disabled, and therefore powerless on his or her own device. If a person makes a sexual advance, they are not necessarily coercing the already helpless individual, nor are they exhibiting any forceful behavior. This instance leaves one loophole in the coercive theoretical understanding.

*Male on Male Victim Theory*

Anthony Scacco in his influential work, Rape in Prison (1975), demonstrated male on male rape as a significant issue, and explained this phenomenon by theorizing, “it is not an act of homosexuality. Rather, it is an extension of the traditional male sex role and the patriarchal culture in which a single male or group of males seeks to dominate another person through a violent act” (2000: vol. 4, 2578). While this theory has offered the most popular understanding of rape for male on male rape, it does not necessarily fit rape where the assailant is a female. In this case, the constructions of femininity, being submissive, as opposed to the aggressive man, would not be able to explain why women rape men.

***Conclusion***

So oft in theologic wars,  
The disputants, I ween,  
Rail on in utter ignorance  
Of what each other mean,  
*And prate about an Elephant*  
*Not one of them has seen!*  
-John Godfrey Saxe “*The Blind Men and the Elephant*”

John Godfrey Saxe’s famous poem, “The Blind Men and the Elephant,” is based on the Indian legend of six blind men who approach the same elephant, but at different parts. Each individual attempts to explain the different parts of that elephant. They all describe the elephant very differently, and John Godfrey Saxe comments at the end of his poem about how each individual has their own understanding of the whole elephant based on their experiences touching one part

of the elephant. However, not one of them has experienced the whole elephant themselves, and therefore aren't necessarily correct, but are not necessarily wrong. For theory, this is an important lesson. As demonstrated in this paper, many theories of rape have not looked at the broader picture to include different experiences victims have, particularly that of the male victim. If we get stuck on the individual experiences we may not necessarily get the whole picture of the issue. While many theorists have cited the fact that rape is not about sex, it is about power, one needs to look further into the notions of power. The problem here is how we have constructed gender categories, and how females or males are "supposed" to experience and demonstrate their sexuality. Abdullah-Kahn writes, "The construction of masculinity is central to understanding male rape because the problem of rape is a problem of masculinity" (2008:71). To say that males are the carriers of power in our society then leaves out those men who have been victims of sexual assault. To give males the power in our society in itself is problematic. Rather than attempting to create a new theoretical paradigm, I argue that we need to fundamentally change the way society has historically constructed masculinity and femininity. If we attempt to change the way people conceptualize their roles in society, then we will be able to better understand rape as it exists in society, or even better this devastating social issue may disappear. If we culturally diffuse power amongst men and women, rather than expecting males to take the power, then men may possibly stop exerting power upon women and men, and those males who are victims will no longer be left out of discussion. Social change, or inclusion will start with the cultural acceptance that men can be victims of sexual assault.

## **Limitations**

By streamlining and basing my theories on the foundations of each discourse, I have left out new innovative understandings of rape. Though many of these new theoretical explanations still have left out the notion that men can be victims, they do not lose their importance in the field of rape studies. With more time I would have liked to evaluate each theoretical explanation further. I also would have liked to spend more time on queer theory, and queer theorists explanation for sexual assault. This has largely been left out because it would take a whole new discussion on queer masculine construction that is not necessarily the dominant understanding of masculinity in society today. Queer theory has recently become more and more progressive in its understandings of rape because queer theory questions the notions of masculinity. New hermeneutical research should be done to include more focus on queer theory and its contribution to the discussion of rape. Furthermore my paper deals with gender differences, but future research could examine sexuality differences as well in order to see how the issue of rape is discussed.

Considering that rape is largely a legal issue in society, further studies should be done to demonstrate how the law has left male victimization out of the popular discourse of rape. Specific laws across states have been set to protect male victims of sexual assault, but as seen earlier in the definition of rape, this is a “modern” understanding, and thus hasn’t been better understood in legal matters.

Finally, rape takes forms in multiple ways. Further studies should be done to break down the different ways rape occurs (stranger rape, acquaintance rape, marital rape, child rape) and see how theoretical explanations demonstrate or fail to

recognize these occurrences. My hope is that one day we will have a much more inclusive understanding as to why rape occurs so that this social problem will hopefully one day not exist. Also, from my involvement in the mental health industry, I see how difficult it can be for young men to conceptualize rape instances while also trying to understand their role as a young man. I hope that future research and activism pushes towards a change in language and gender construction. While this may be extremely optimistic, one can only stay optimistic, as I have seen this social problem affect individuals (not just men) and their families. I believe that the further development of knowledge, including the knowledge of male rape victimization as a social problem, will only help move this issue in a positive direction.

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