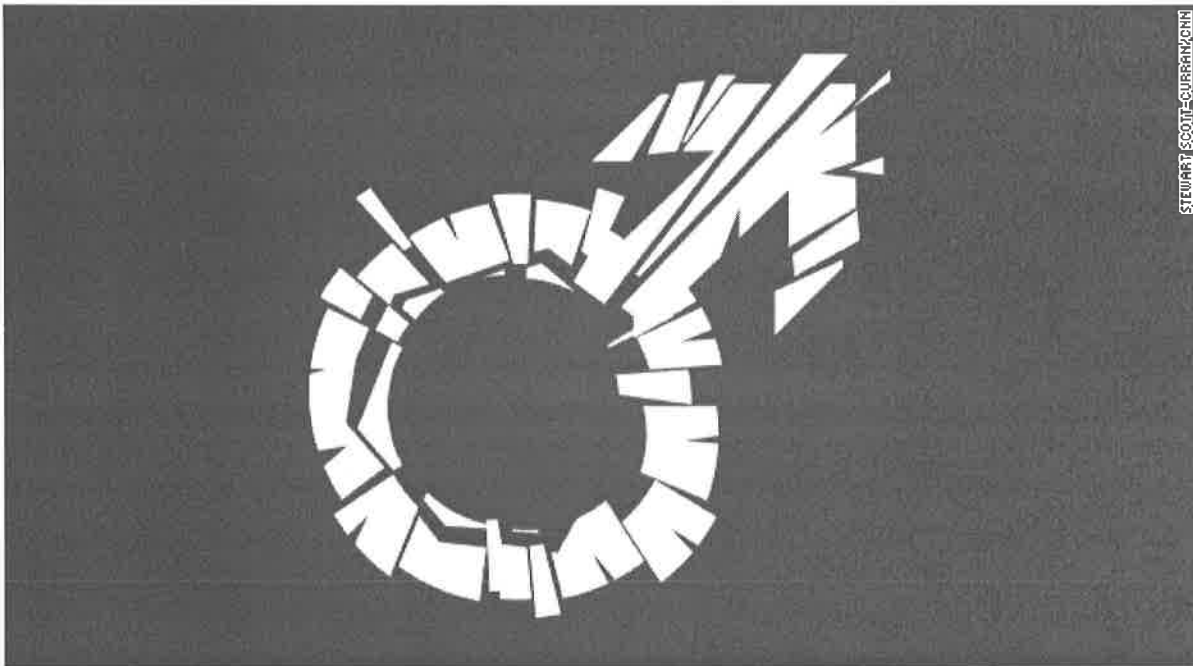


What Logic Is This? Men, Sex, and Sexual Assault

by Jacob Baker | Jun 9, 2016 | Featured | 0 comments



I'm finally coming around to the realization that there are parents that are genuinely okay with their daughters being (in theory) sexually assaulted and perfectly fine with their sons assaulting women. There are just too many examples at this point of parents (particularly fathers) justifying their sons' sexual violence or demonstrating no empathy for victims and no thought for how they might feel if their own daughters were violated in the same ways. In fact, they do the opposite by making their sons into victims and the girls into aggressors. It appears that either these people are willfully ignoring common understandings of rape and rape culture, or they operate under a different logic. Obviously they want to protect their sons from punishment, but that doesn't mean there isn't a method to their madness. How might this twisted logic work? I think in order to shed some more light on this ongoing and relentless evil, we need to delve more closely into how men *in general*-not just rapists-might think of rape, and specifically how they might understand rape as it relates to sexual behavior. While it's important to understand motivations of individual rapists in order to contribute to rape

prevention, there are numerous other factors and contexts that enable rapists to more freely assault, both physically and emotionally.

So let's assume that you're a guy you're pretty sure that you don't rape and don't want to rape and can't imagine even trying to rape, and likely never even think about having to decide if you should rape or not. If you are such a man, it's quite possible that the only way rape makes sense to you as something that not only happens but happens frequently, is if you think about it in terms of your own sexual experience. I'm going to make the assumption, then (both as a man and as a man observing other men) that this largely forms the basis of many non-rape men's understanding of rape as a phenomenon, or at least as a reference point. You understand sexual desire and the potential or actual frustration of not satiating that desire, and then throw in a (probably) initially willing and desiring partner who then stops willing and desiring before you do, and you might be able to somewhat empathize with being in a situation of sexual frustration. Not with still going through with it, necessarily, but just in being in that kind of situation. You might think that a guy in that situation who insisted in alleviating that frustration no matter the desire of his partner, still raped and should be punished and the message about consent reinforced once again, but man, that's still a frustrating situation, because biology.

So in this story—the one you might be most familiar with as a non-rape man—rape is about sex and sexual desire (and the frustration of that desire) and you get that because you have sex and have sexual desire. Also in this story, women have bodies that nature or God designed to be irresistibly attractive, and nature or God likewise designed men to be irresistibly attracted to them, so much so that women's bodies become a source of immense power that can overcome both of you if you're not careful. But, you also understand that it takes two to actually have sex and once one person calls it quits, no matter how inconvenient the timing, it's no longer sex if you try to keep it going. That's basic and you're certain you would act accordingly; hell, maybe you already have been in situations where your partner stopped desiring (or just as likely never really desired in the first place) at not the best time, and you stopped, too, no matter how much of a let-down it was, because you are, after all, a good guy and you believe your power to decide to do that is greater than the power of your sexual desire.

But perhaps most importantly, you can't imagine any other kind of scenario that would make rape *physiologically* possible. That's possibly the key, the foundation for your understanding of rape: in order for it to physically happen, there has to be some kind of a male physiological response to stimuli. So, with that in mind, you tick off the other rape scenarios that you've heard about that don't seem to include simply wanting sex more than the woman does: she was drunk and unconscious; she had previously rejected her rapist; she was gang-raped; she was raped as punishment for this or that; she was raped on a dare; she was raped because he hates women; she was raped because he felt his manhood was threatened; and a hundred other situations, all of

them boiling down, more or less, to men exercising power and control over women through sexual dominance. But that just doesn't make sense, not entirely, you think, because how could the physiological response necessary for making intercourse possible, especially in violent non-consensual situations, come out of any of those scenarios? You can't imagine yourself becoming aroused; frankly, all those scenarios make you a little sick, pretty much the opposite of arousal. It's completely not how you've experienced the desire essential to enabling you to have intercourse, and rape usually (though not always) involves intercourse, so there *must be something else going on* besides power and control, and that something else simply must be some variation of the woman providing the stimulus to making that male desire *performable*, even if its performance was with evil intent. So she was unconscious, but also maybe she had on a really tight shirt, and her drinking was a subtle, vulnerable invitation to sex, and why else would she wear a really tight shirt and drink to excess? That could basically be enough to get the ball rolling for some guys. Or in another scenario the guy may have wanted to punish her for some reason, *but* she must have *also* done something or dressed in a certain way—at least at some point—that provoked sufficient arousal to make that possible. In every conceivable scenario surely the woman provoked enough physiological response to make sexual violation physically possible. That doesn't excuse the rapist, but there must have been something overtly sexual to make the rape performable at all. Otherwise it couldn't physically have occurred.

And that's really not outside the realm of possibility, you think, because you know, as a man, how easy it is to become physiologically aroused. Doesn't take much for a lot of guys, probably most guys. Just biology, nothing more complicated than that. It might not even be anything the woman intentionally did. But something had to happen. Something *besides* just the desire for power and control, which doesn't seem to be equivalent to sexual desire (so you might think). Sexual desire appears to be absolutely necessary, so rapes happen at least partly out of sexual desire, and maybe then you reason that sexual desire might actually have to be the main thing, because why not hurt women in some other way? Why does it have to be sexual in nature? Clearly, because sexual desire was paramount, and not power. And to make matters even more complicated, our PC-obsessed culture wants to condemn men for their biology, a biology that couldn't have been activated without the implicit consent of the universe creating the natural environment where sex becomes possible in the first place.

But the problem is that none of that really matters. It doesn't matter if there was some sexual desire mixed up in the power and control or revenge or compensation for insecurity, etc. It doesn't matter what created the conditions for the rape to physically occur or even if the rape couldn't have occurred without some level of physical desire, because rape is not those conditions. It isn't that desire. Rape is rape, not sex. Rape is rape, not liberal culture forcing its sexual politics onto otherwise perfectly natural biological occurrences. Breaking it down to increasing physiological possibility and even necessity is one of the underlying principles that keeps rape culture in business, where

it's simply accepted that rapes are a common occurrence precisely because it is believed that rape exists on the same spectrum as sex (even if it's on the opposite end). And since sex is by definition participatory, it becomes easy to blame the victim, think of women as desirable objects, and trivialize rape when it happens, because rape becomes merely extreme or unconventional sex, and not an attacker attacking a genuine victim who is overpowered and not participating.

We are thinking rape is really just sex if a woman tells us she was forced against her will to have intercourse and we immediately look for the angle where she provoked or enabled the male sexual desire we think is the most necessary element for the rape to occur. We are thinking rape is really just sex if we think he can justifiably be called a rapist *but* she's nevertheless partly responsible. We are thinking rape is really just sex if the well-being of anyone or anything that is not the victim is of any substantial importance. Rape culture, in this sense, is the idea that rape is sex but gone sideways, the misalignment of two sexual wills, sex with an outcome that was much more beneficial to one party than to the other. Or, on this account rape culture is the belief that rape is merely the unfortunate logical consequence of women transgressing cultural codes of propriety that have been put in place to control their dangerous bodies and behavior. But rapists are in no way solely to be blamed, and are often only secondarily seen as responsible for their actions. Rape culture denies women as sexual agents—and therefore as fully human—by over-allocating sexual desire and desirability to them, but then removing desire and desirability completely when rapists might suffer any kind of consequence or when women protest their own violation. Women are then both hyper-sexed and undersexed, providing cover for accusations that they are their own irrational victims, and cover for institutions to find it safe to believe that nothing needs to change.

In theory rape might be an ever-present threat on some level, but our attitudes and beliefs contribute to the structures and institutions that create environments where rape can endure and multiply. The people who build and maintain and support our institutions believe certain things about sexual assault. Since men are the primary builders, maintainers, and supporters of these institutions—and particularly because men are overwhelmingly those who sexually assault—what they believe about rape and rapists is particularly important. I think these often include false beliefs about the equivalency of rape with sex, which allows responsibility to be imputed to victims, having the effect of both traumatizing victims further but also in softening responses to rapists. As long as these or similar beliefs continue to go unchallenged and unproved, they will continue to form the basis for all the protections being afforded to institutions at the expense of victims, as well as the softening and weakening of the environments that actually rapists need in order to continue to assault.

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