

Soc 3290 Deviance
Overheads Lecture 22: Sexual Assault 2

* Today we continue our discussion of sexual assault by reviewing:

- (1) Cultural factors
- (2) Theories of sexual assault
- (3) Male victims
- (4) Child molestation

(1) The Culture of Sexual Assault:

- * Many cultures condemn sexual assault despite encouraging it
- * Encouragement of sexual assault found in prevailing attitudes toward women as well as sex roles
- * Laws against sexual assault traditionally protect “property” of males (as “stolen,” “despoiled,” or “less valuable”)
- * Women in our culture deemed “less valuable” or “cheap” find it hard to register a conviction against an offender (e.g. prostitutes)
- * Traditionally conquering armies sexually assaulted women as “spoils of war”
- * Pornography reinforces cultural image of women as sex objects (rapists’ “vocabularies of motive” reflect this clearly).
- * Women are often used in mens’ “masculinity contests” (e.g. “Did you score?”) involving relative social pressure & pointers from friends, the media, & implicit put downs if young men don’t go along

* This is reinforced by the popular cultural myth that women really are “asking for it” in various ways: victim-blaming rationalizations particularly popular among convicted rapists & that encourage others

* Our culture also traditionally socialized women to be easier to assault: emphasizing passivity & submissiveness as aspects of “femininity”

(2) Theories of sexual assault:

* *Psychological* theories: -rapists suffer from personality defects or emotional disturbance (“sexual inadequacy”)
-cannot explain but a fraction of cases
-cannot explain socially skilled offenders

* *Social-psychological* theory:

-sexual assault allegedly higher in sexually permissive societies
-“relative frustration” by men more likely to take rejection personally in such contexts

* *Feminist* theory:

-sexual assault not sexually motivated, but stems from desire to dominate women
-sexual assault rooted in gender inequality & attempts to maintain male power over women
-some argue exaggerates male dominance

(3) Male victims:

* While men not as at high a risk as women, many are sexually assaulted

- * Women assailants tend to use verbal pressure, male assailants more often use physical force (victims more often strangers)
- * Still, half of male assailants knew their male victims (more than half are straight, but assaulting out of anger)
- * Male victims respond with shock, self-blame, shame, anger & depression. Yet kept more internalized: fear of losing masculinity
- * Prisons are a very common setting for male on male sexual assault as a form of subjugation & domination
- * Sexual assaults of men by women in positions of power occur, but are rare (e.g. verbal “persuasion,” older women “seducing” youth, more than one offender). Often not recognized as sexual assault
- * In rare cases where force used, youth feel “loss of masculinity” / often get little sympathy

(4) Child molestation:

- * Child molestation=sexual assault as victims too young to give consent
- * Patterns:
 - (1) girls are more likely than boys to be molested;
 - (2) most molesters are men;
 - (3) most molesters are acquainted with their victims;
 - (4) the molester is usually unmarried, never or rarely dates, lives alone or with his parents
- * Impact on the victim often profound: PTSD, behavior problems, sexualized behavior & low self-esteem

* Compared to rapists who victimize women:

- (1) molesters are considerably older (over 35 vs. 20 and under);
- (2) molesters are more gentle and passive
- (3) molesters are less likely to resort to physical violence or penetration, often content with fondling;
- (4) molesters are much more capable than rapists of getting along with adult members of the opposite sex (rapists are less skilled);
- (5) most molesters commit the offence against the same child for a period of time; rapists attack different victims; &
- (6) most molesters admit their guilt, while most rapists refuse

* Molesters disastrously fail to meet sexist cultural standards of masculinity or dominance over women. Reflected in:

- assaults in prison
- feelings of inadequacy with adult women

* Less common types of child molestation:

- males who abuse young boys (often not gay / victims may repeat)
- women who abuse boys (may result in youth becoming rapist)

* Abused men may deal with anger of abuse by acting out as adults

* Abused women may turn anger inward & engage in behaviors likely to place them at risk of victimization

Conclusion:

* In the past 2 classes we have reviewed:

- patterns of sexual assault
- its personal consequences & social responses
- the culture of rape, explanatory theories
- the specific situations of male victims & child molestation.

* Much research continues in these important areas