

Gender Norms and Psychological Mechanisms that Make Sexual Assault Possible

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Abstract : This research examines gender norms that underlie the propensity to commit sexual assault and to carry it out. Factors that have been shown to relate to such propensity will be enumerated and tied to their ramifications. These include sexual objectification of women, endorsement of gender-based rape myths blaming the victim, masculine entitlement, low empathy to victims, along with elevated empathy towards rapists. Heavy use of pornography as well as a misconstruing of the meaning of refusal to sex, have also been implicated. Additionally, a cutting-edge investigation, which we have just completed, examined what seems to occur in the perpetrator's mind during the assault. No research to date has ventured to uncover what essentially allows the rape to be carried out in real time, in the sense of what mental mechanisms go into operation in rapists during the assault itself. Our findings demonstrate that dehumanization and rationalization are pivotal. On the one hand, the perpetrator apparently allows himself to disregard the victim's humanity while simultaneously justifying his actions in relation to the victim's behavior.

Keywords : gender norms, gender psychology, sexual assault, gender

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