By the same author

Sexual Honesty, By Women, For Women (1974)
The Hite Report on Female Sexuality (1976)
Women and Love: A Cultural Revolution in Progress
Fliegen mit Jupiter (1993)


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Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 2 Soho Square, London W1V 5DE

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library


Typeset in Great Britain by
Hewer Text Composition Services, Edinburgh
Printed in England by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc
Rape, Sexual Violence, and Pornography

Sexual Violence in the Culture

Where do pressuring women into sex, rape (of various kinds), paying women for sex (either outright, or as many men said, in marriage or on dates), and buying women in pornography fit into men's lives—if they do? Are they things only "abnormal" men are involved with, or do they in some way involve and affect all men's lives and relationships with women, because they somehow involve the basic underpinnings of the entire social structure?

If sex/intercourse has traditionally been the basic symbol of male domination and ownership of women (whether or not an individual man may feel this at any given time), rape and paying women for sex, or buying women through pornography, are basic extensions of this ideology—not biologic "urges" or part of a physical male "sex drive." It is what "sex" means to men that makes them sometimes want to rape or buy women, not a desire for orgasm or sexual sharing.

The general culture—in movies, books, jokes, and popular sayings—reinforces the idea that men "get" or "take" sex from women, men "have" women, men conquer and possess women, women say "no" but mean yes, women "give in" to men—and "penetration" is the symbol of this victory. Men, brought up to feel that a vital part of being a male is to orgasm in a vagina, often resent women's "power" to withhold this "male need" from them—not realizing that this is in many ways the only "power" left to many women. It is this dynamic that in part sometimes leads men to say that women are "more powerful" than men.

In fact, the model of sex as we know it has even been called the "rape model" of sex. If men have more power, money, and privilege than women, can the definition of "sex" change? Won't forcing women into sex (intercourse), either physically through rape, or financially through paying a woman or buying pornography, continue its appeal, due to its meaning? Arguably a real and profound change may occur. Right now,
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In many ways "fucking" and physical rape stand as an overwhelming metaphor for the rape—physical, emotional, and spiritual—of an entire gender by our culture.

Do men want to rape women?

"Sometimes I've found myself getting excited watching a show in which a man is planning a rape. It bothered me that I was being aroused by it. I'm not sure I understand why."

"I have often wanted to rape a woman, and I fantasize about it a lot. But the idea disturbs me because it runs counter to my sense of mutual respect, humanism, feminism, etc. I'm really anxious to see what other men feel about rape."

What does the physical rape of a woman mean to men? Is the desire sexual? A form of hostility and anger? Or a way to reassert an injured "masculine pride"?

Many men think of rape as a way of putting a woman "back in her place"—this was a man's right. Others say women are "asking for it," the implication being that women have no right to be sexual unless it leads to intercourse with men, and that men have the right to control women's sexuality:

"I've seen a lot of women who seem to be asking for it... just as a person with a fistful of money is asking for robbery by flaunting his money, especially in a gin mill or dark alley. I also feel sympathy for women. After all, when someone wants to protect one's money from being stolen, the money can be placed in a bank. But how does a woman protect her body from being raped? I wish I knew. A little more prudence, I guess. I'm glad I'm a man."

"There is the provocation of 'dry hustling.' Dry hustling is making oneself available for sex and then withdrawing or withholding it. The brassiere-less woman in a public place is a dry hustler. The bra-less look is attractive. It is supposed to be. And it is a provocation."

A few say rape is justified by the male "sex drive" and the "failure" of women to meet that "need." Underlying this point of view is the idea, strong in our culture and in all patriarchal cultures, that men own women's bodies. As one man said, "She is mine. I have a right to orgasm..."
through intercourse. God gave me the right when he made women for men." A man should not have to masturbate for orgasm when sexual desire is not mutual, according to this point of view; he should have his orgasm through a woman at all times (only an orgasm had through intercourse with a woman is legitimate), and it is a woman's duty at all times to help him do this.

Also implicit in many of the replies is the idea that a woman denying a man sex is somehow denying his manhood and that by raping a woman a man is re-asserting his masculinity—not only with the woman but in his own mind:

"Once I was going with a woman (in high school) and she would not let me have sex. All my friends had done it with their girlfriends, and even did it with us when we went out on double dates and parked together after. I got to feel like a real reject. I could have lied to them about it, but then my girlfriend would have found out, and they probably wouldn't have believed me anyway, since I couldn't have described the feeling. This made me so angry I felt like raping her. Finally, without anybody knowing, I picked up a streetwalker and had intercourse. This did a lot for my feeling of confidence in my own masculinity. Soon after, I broke up with my girlfriend and started going with somebody else who would go all the way. Then I could tell the guys, and I felt like one of the group again."

One man writes about his desire to rape being connected to the teachings of the culture:

"It's pretty obvious that I have some hostility toward women that started way back—they have something I want, and I'm a 'bad boy' for wanting it—they're excluding me—they have a secret—they have a sex organ, but dirty little boys don't get any, etc., etc., ad nauseam. I have become aware of these feelings and know when they are active; when I feel them, I back off whatever situation is causing them and find something else to do."

One man describes chillingly his generalized feeling of rejection—feeling left out of what "everyone else" is enjoying, what other men are having:

"I have certainly wanted to. Usually this desire comes after I have been rejected by a very attractive woman, e.g., at the office. Then I fantasize following her, putting a gun to her head (I own a revolver), and asking her something like 'Now tell me who you want to go to bed with.' In recent months, I have become more sympathetic toward rapists, because I see in myself the other side of the sexual revolution: it is all well and good for the Beautiful People to decide to bring their
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tancies out of the closet and talk about the joys of sex in public—it is another to be tantalized day after day by the sight of beautiful women you desire but can’t have. Apparently every one of them is experiencing the wildest sexual pleasures and fulfillment, because the media are everywhere saying so.”

The image of a rapist appeals to some men, who identify it with being strong and virile, passionate and powerful:

“I don’t think I could. But I have been sort of impressed by people who pulled off what seemed to be an especially brilliant or daring rape.”

“I have fantasies of doing it, as a form of ‘proving’ to the woman that I am really all ‘man,’ able to get and keep a hard-on and use it to force myself on her, whether she wants me or not.”

Some men even write that all “real” men have a desire to rape women because this is part of a male’s innate makeup (a “natural” animal instinct*):

“Why do I want to rape women? Because I am basically, as a male, a predator and all women look to men like prey. I fantasize about the expression on a woman’s face when I ‘capture’ her and she realizes she cannot escape. It’s like I won, I own her.”

“Rape behavior in males today probably exists because it has been selected for (this would take precedence over selection by females) in the Darwinian model of natural selection; as much as our contemporary society despises the rapist, we must admit that in man’s history the rapist’s genes were naturally selected because the behavior had survival value.”†

A few men wonder why they don’t have these feelings, and if they are “abnormal”:

“I have never raped a woman, or wanted to. In this I guess I am somewhat odd. Most of my friends talk about rape a lot and fantasize about it. The whole idea leaves me cold.”

In fact, despite the seeming secret admiration of some men for rapists as the ultimate “man,” strong and powerful, the reality is usually just the opposite: it is the man with the lowest self-esteem who is most likely to rape women or pressure them for sex—the man who does not see

* This is inaccurate, since animals do not rape. The implication in this answer is that rape is a “natural instinct,” which only “civilization” can overcome. In fact, it is our “civilization” which has created the concept and encouraged it.
† Darwin’s theory concerned selection between different species, not within species. This is a misunderstanding and misuse of the concept of “survival of the fittest.”
himself as strong and powerful, the man who feels the most rejected, the most like a “loser.”

The loner-rapist who becomes violent is becoming more and more a common figure in our society—unfortunately:

“I am single, never married, never lived with a woman, and I am so alone that I am slowly going crazy. I am fifty pounds overweight, work as a clerk in a welfare office and as a security guard at nights. I find going out to meet women very frustrating. Going to dances and no one wanting to dance with me gets me pissed. I get very depressed and antisocial. I have a perverse but vicarious thrill in other people (usually men) who go berserk in public places and kill innocent bystanders, such as David Berkowitz (Son of Sam). When I was in college, I wanted to shoot good-looking coeds on campus with a concealed automatic pistol. They never look at me or acknowledge my humanity, so maybe I’m not good enough for them. I think they’re afraid I’m going to rape them. I would never rape a woman because I don’t think I could convince them I’m serious, they’d probably scream and I would run. Berkowitz’s strategy was more direct, hostile, vengeful, and up-front. I admire Berkowitz, Son of Sam, for what he did.”

The story of a rapist

“I am twenty-three. I am at present incarcerated here at the State Medical Facility prison for rape. I have been incarcerated for approximately four years.

“I turned myself in to the authorities after my fourth successful (if it can be properly termed as such) rape, I couldn’t stand the pressure or the worry that I might seriously hurt or kill my next victim. I have since been in various therapy sessions, and am still attempting to glue my thoughts, feelings, and ideas to a more suitable state that is more acceptable to myself and society.

“I sincerely hope you can find that my feelings are honest, as I did my best. I’d like to say this before going on to the questions, that a rapist is tagged a Mentally Disordered Sex Offender (M.D.S.O.), but it’s a question not so much of a sickness, but comparable to a building block. In most of our childhoods, we start learning and experiencing life, and it’s our responsibility to build correctly foundational morals. If incidents happen, trauma, accidents, whatever, that tears down one’s blocks, he must put it back together. I believe that when my ‘blocks’ were kicked over, I put them back up incorrectly and in a disordered fashion. It took twenty years to try and gain enough confidence and
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I respect to try and reorder and rebuild my 'blocks.' An M.D.S.O. is
diseased animal, but someone who has to get a thing straightened
in his own life and head before he can live acceptably to his peers.

I'm presently a nurse's aide in this facility's hospital, specializing in
emergency aid and the intensive care unit for the last two years. I have a
G.E.D. with only tenth-grade backing.

I was brought up in a broken home before my mother remarried
my stepfather. I'm the oldest of five children. I suffered disrespect for
myself, and feelings of guilt and helplessness since my father's divorcing
when I was five, and have lived my life being a phony to get people's
attention.

I have raped women (four rapes with one attempt) for two major
reasons: (1) to gain a feeling of absolute control over a woman I felt
rejected me, and (2) to prove I was as worthless as my inner turmoil
made me believe I was. A lot more is involved, but that's the basic cause
for my acts. The acts themselves were frightening to both myself and
my victim. I felt like I only wanted to be accepted, to have her say she
understood me, I just didn't have enough on the ball, or the confidence
to ask, or try and build the relationship because I had myself doomed
in my own head towards rejection.

When I was refused sex before, I usually felt rejected and then
anger, and get pissed off to the point I feel justified to rape her and
degrade her. I'm now at the point that I still feel rejection, but I try to
understand women have their preferences, as I do, and they have desires
and likes, as we all do.

When I raped, I felt a commitment to finish intercourse after
initiating my approach, though I didn't want sex (I was after that
feeling of utter control and domination over someone else), but I felt
I had to finish what I started. In normal sex with a willing partner, I
usually desire intercourse, and I also like to just hold and hug and lightly
pet with those women in my life I feel close to without the actual sex
act, or having to go on to intercourse.

I used to ejaculate immediately (three to five seconds after
penetration) if the intercourse was forced on my partner. I feel this
happened because when I'm forcing sex, I'm not into the act of sex,
but only out to prove I can control my victim, and also to increase my
inadequate feelings about myself. It used to bother me so much that
the confusing act would in itself cause me to rape for a fourth time,
eventually forcing me to turn myself in for help. I now have routed
out most of my inadequacies to the point of I now realize I no longer
have to be phony, which helps my self-confidence and allows me to be
a bit more open with my relationships.
1981: THE HITE REPORT ON MEN

“I felt very inadequate and powerless when I raped. Most often and as often as I can feel powerful, I’ll try and achieve the feeling. The point where I feel most powerful during non-forced sex is at the point I keep up my foreplay until they beg for me to enter them. I feel like I’m very much in absolute control.

“I would still like to live my fantasy in sex. I would like to have a partner who is at first unwilling (young; between fifteen and twenty-six) but is soon aroused by my tongue until she asks for my penis.

“My first sex experience was also the first time I was very aware of orgasm, I was nine and my partner thirteen. She dared me to first kiss her, and she manipulated me until I was performing intercourse. All I can recall is that when I came, I felt like a part of me had just left and went into her, and I neither understood it or wanted it. I was very much afraid someone (my mother) would discover its absence and hate me. I was extremely confused and very frightened.

“I had sex with a hooker once, and it was a mess. We did it in a motel room with her four kids not more than three feet away watching TV. I was feeling greatly inadequate, afraid, and guilty, plus I didn’t have the agreed-upon price (ten dollars). This was when I was fifteen, my last of three previous sexual encounters before I met my wife in high school.

“I was still living at home with my family when my wife first came into my life during our high school days and it was simply assumed and accepted we were having sex. We never really discussed this until the question of marriage and children cropped up two years after we had been together. So we are common law. We have a seven-year relationship that has been broken up in pieces of time by army service and my present four-year incarceration period. I much like my long-standing relationship, am at this time in it, very much in love and comfortable and proud to have this woman who’s lived with my mistakes and still loves me. Our sex is varied and pleasing, we know more or less just what we both want and how we need to express our sexual needs.

“I’ve had extramarital experiences and my wife has had two known to me. She knows of all of mine now, but didn’t at the times they occurred, with the exceptions of when we were separated or traveling, or in the Army. At the time I felt I was being cute, with no regard to my wife’s feelings, sometimes hoping she’ll find out and force an issue. When she discovered my affairs and my rapes, she was very much hurt, confused, and very willing to accept her actions as the reasons I raped.

“I don’t think I ever trusted myself with love enough to let it affect me until these last three years. I just used my wife for our first five years, I suspected and was wary of her reasons for loving me until two years ago when we started talking about fears and inhibitions we were trying to
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avoid concerning ourselves. After that, it seemed I just accepted her. By
that I mean I didn’t suspect her motives, I respect them. I don’t worry
about her leaving me. If it happens, I hope it’s with a man she can be
happier with. With this growth, my feelings for my family and friends
is larger and a lot more comfortable.

“I’ve cried out front and without hindrance just these last three years.
Also over my wife’s and my near breakup, over a close friend’s inability
to express himself and his bottled-up emotions. I’ve never thought of
suicide, and I consider it to be a weakness, and a very selfish act. Even
when I turned myself in, I did it to stop hurting others and from tearing
myself and my wife up further and to get help with my problem.

“Before, my wife and I only had a fairly content sexual relationship,
with nothing else about it truly understood. Since I’ve started feeling
good about myself, we’ve been talking a little more openly, and about
our feelings and wants more than just saying mundane day-to-day talk.
I think my first rape was sexually satisfying because it was one of my
fantasies and it worked out, and because it was an on-the-spot encounter
and I didn’t have to communicate, or trust this woman, just have sex
with her and no other responsibility.

“Now I have enough confidence and trust in my wife to tell her
absolutely everything I feel or think or want, and don’t worry about her
rejecting me (my biggest fear is rejection), or laughing at me. Sometimes
I don’t feel my wife is as open with her feelings and thoughts as I’d like
her to be, and she has difficulty expressing herself from what I feel she
may be afraid I won’t understand. She also can’t bring herself to trust
me as fully as I’d like for her to, due to my past actions and behavior.
Hopefully she’ll learn to trust and respect the changes I’ve tried to make
in these last four years.

“I believe my sex life now will be completely altered from what it
had been six years ago. I’m not into ‘just sticking it in until I bust’ no
longer. I have to bring out my partner’s fulfillment to enjoy my own. I
no longer have the desire to ‘take’ my partner, she now has to be willing
in order for me to gain my pleasure. I no longer feel women were made
just to please me, but are individuals I must work with and for to gain
t heir respect. I feel I’ve grown and matured in the past four years of
incarceration to the point that I’m content with myself, which seems
to reflect to my loved ones. I feel I have a great deal to offer now, it
just hasn’t been asked of me yet.

“I’ve gone those four years with no more sex than fantasy and
masturbation. Not including the first nine years of my life, this is the
longest I’ve abstained from sex. I sure as hell don’t like it.

“I answered these questions because I felt a present need to express
my feelings and to see if I could be honest with myself. I wanted to do it in a way I wouldn’t be laughed at or misunderstood by assholes. I think, too, I secretly want a pat on the back. I also hope people will see that some rapists aren’t just animals, but just confused and tightly locked up in their own fantasy worlds. As a whole, if a person has the balls to answer these honestly and openly, he may find quite a few surprises and insights. I found it an eye opener and I used it to get a little feeling out, it made me back up and take another look at aspects of sex that I had taken for granted.”

Of course, rape can happen in less “dramatic” ways, in daily life; some men admit they have raped a woman—but “only my wife”:

“Only my wife once, after about fifteen years of marriage from frustration and anger when she wouldn’t verbalize with me. Once was too much.”

“I would never think of taking it by force—except from my wife. I don’t think I could get it up in a rape situation. It so appalls me that I couldn’t do it. I have forced myself on my wife when she has repeatedly refused me and has led me to believe I could have some then closed up.”

Other men describe using their positions of power to pressure a woman into sex or acceptance of an inappropriate situation at work:

“She was an employee and I was the ‘boss.’ I don’t think this is the only reason why she had sex with me, but it was an influencing factor. Maybe she felt that intercourse with me would give her some security in her job, but only maybe.”

“I have raped a woman, but never by beating her or that type. Rape by exorcism, firing her off the job, or not giving her a contract in business, etc.”

But a large minority of men stress they would not even think about raping a woman, because they want the woman to want to be involved; rape would not satisfy their desire to be wanted and accepted:

“If the woman doesn’t want me, I don’t want her.”

“It would not be at all self-assuring to have to force my attentions on a female. It’s a woman’s affections that I want—not just her body. I’d rather masturbate than have sex without affection.”

One man whose wife had been raped describes his opposition to rape:

“My wife was a rape victim when she was nineteen. A good part of our marriage so far has consisted of my, and our, attempts to pick up the pieces. The idea of rape is a complete and total turn-off to me;
even the pseudo-rape sequences in X-rated movies fill me with the vilest hate. I sincerely believe (intend) that I would without hesitation kill any man who ever again touched my wife with this unspeakable atrocity. I at moments imagine my wife’s screams on that night several years ago—I’m afraid that all the anxiety I’ve ever felt for the victim (my wife), I would unleash on a man if I heard a woman’s call for help. It is my belief now, and she agrees, that this is a good part of the reason we cannot seem to get to a normal sexual functioning level in our marriage.

“She is a beautiful and intelligent girl, and it infuriates me to see all the ways that it has put kinks into her personality. She is afraid to be by herself, even somewhat in our house. She seems to want to be as unobtrusive as possible all the time. This whole rape fixation in the porno industry is a big bring-down for both of us... and at moments I wonder whether it is good that women’s rape fantasies are stressed so frequently in the men’s magazines, as they are. I mean, how many animals are there around?”

**Pornography and the Definition of “Male Sexuality”**

What is the reason for pornography’s increasing importance in our society? According to *Forbes* magazine, by 1978, sex was a larger business than the record and film industries combined, amounting to $4 billion a year. Why do men use and look at pornography? Is it for sexual stimulation or male bonding and identification? What “turns men on” about pornography? Is it because of the viewing of female nudity or sexual activities? Or because of the fantasies of male power that accompany the viewing?

Certainly we all—men and women—have a right to see and read about intimate relationships between people—and in this way, to make more sense of our own lives and feelings. But pornography as we know it does not for the most part serve this purpose. In fact, much of pornography shows a woman submitting to a stronger, threatening, perhaps hostile and violent male.* Even in “soft-core” pornography, in which a woman is alone on the page, perhaps making eye contact with the viewer but almost always in a “come and get me” pose, the woman

* Pornography much more frequently shows women rather than men being dominated, tortured, and humiliated. Sadism against women is a cultural theme for the West which goes back to the “witch” burnings of the Middle Ages during which several million women were killed.
is being dominated too—not by a man in the picture, but directly by the viewer, who can use her in any way he pleases. Pornography as we know it—as, indeed, sex itself—is a reflection of society, with women often being used for men’s pleasure. The fact that men dominate women in most of these pictures is such a commonplace that it is not seen as remarkable.

Pornography also reinforces in men the idea that all women can be bought; as one man said, “Pornography is a cheap way of buying a woman.” Pornography does not glorify women; most men have contempt for the women they see on the pages, no matter how beautiful. A common form of using pornography is for men to look at it together in a group and to make comments about the women. This is a form of male bonding and reinforces the idea of male ownership of women.* Pornography reminds one of slave markets and slave auctions: each man can appraise, select, and buy the body that suits him. House slaves are the younger, “prettier” women, while field slaves are the hard workers—domestics or wives. The economic pressures on women, especially poor women, to sell their bodies in this way are great.

The continued spread of pornography will make relationships between men and women much slower to change, because pornography reinforces in men so many of the old and stereotyped attitudes to women and toward themselves that have done so much damage—both to women and men—already. This is true just as much of pornography that shows the woman/women dominating men as it is of depictions of men dominating women, since this is only a role reversal and still centers on the same definitions of sex involving all the issues we have discussed in this book so far. Pornography keeps men believing women are the way they want women to be, or have been told women are (either submissive or dominant, “bitchy”), and fortifies men’s belief in their own sex role. Men, reading and looking at pornography, know they are sharing in something other men see, and assume therefore that this is what all “real men” want, identify with, and enjoy.

* Most men do not look at pornography with a woman, as most women do not like the way women are portrayed in pornography. Also, men looking at pornography together also find that it is another way of proclaiming one’s masculinity for other men to see, and a way for men to have sexual feelings together while still focused on a “heterosexual” object.