

# On NOT Doing What Comes Naturally

A review of

## The Causes of Rape: Individual Differences in Male Propensity for Sexual Aggression

by Martin L. Lalumière, Grant T. Harris, Vernon L. Quinsey, and Marnie E. Rice

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I am amazed, astonished, delighted. These sentiments, not normally associated with rape, were evoked by this remarkable and admirable book. Here is the American Psychological Association (APA), of all organizations, publishing a major work that investigates, as the subtitle puts it, Individual Differences in Male Propensity for Sexual Aggression, unapologetically using sociobiology as its organizing theme! In a time when the Bush administration has plumbed new and disgraceful depths in the subordination of science to political ideology, psychologists Martin L. Lalumière, Grant T. Harris, Vernon L. Quinsey, and Marnie E. Rice, with, one must assume, the permission if not encouragement of the APA, have bravely and effectively moved in the opposite direction: subordinating ideology to science. (Is it coincidental that they are Canadians?) On top of this, *The Causes of Rape* is well written, effectively argued, buttressed by data, clear in distinguishing fact from speculation, and a treasure trove of fascinating references and research possibilities. Clearly, at least some psychologists are finally opening up to evolutionary biology; it is about time.

In considering rape, the authors' focus on Darwinian considerations includes a careful and remarkably complete survey of *forced copulation* among nonhuman animals. Indeed, at the risk of sounding immodest, I have been concerned with sexual behavior, including forced copulation, among free-living animals for more than 30 years, and yet, thanks to Lalumière et al., I am now aware of several references in the animal literature previously unknown to me. This is not the telling of zoological tales for its own sake, nor is it a matter of naively assuming that whatever happens among insects, fish, or birds (never mind mammals) must necessarily be similar, and similarly caused, among *Homo sapiens*. Rather, it is a thoroughly scientific, open-minded search for common underlying patterns, with full awareness that what is natural is not necessarily good. In a world of tsunamis and HIV, earthquakes and smallpox, it should be obvious that the naturalistic fallacy is indeed fallacious. Moreover, in a world whose living things are all products of evolution by natural selection, it should be equally obvious that organic connectedness is not the exception but the rule, and that much can be gained by understanding those rules by which life, including the lives of *Homo sapiens*, operates.

In a nutshell, the key rule is maximization of fitness, and the key biological insight is that living things are inclined to use behavioral strategies toward that end (without, of course, necessarily knowing that they are doing so, any more than a maple tree knows that by flowering in the spring, it is maximizing its reproductive prospects). In the words of Lalumière et al.,

Dispassionate consideration of the theoretical and empirical grounds for inferring the existence of these strategies in nonhuman animals may facilitate evaluation of their relevance, if any, to humans. Our goal, however, is not to develop an animal model of human rape or, worse, to naturalize, trivialize, or excuse human rape. Rather, our goal is to provide a general overview of what is known about forced copulation in the animal world, to introduce concepts that are important when it comes to understanding the sources of individual differences among humans and other species, and to place the study of rape in a wider scientific context. (p. 6)

### They Succeed Admirably

On the human side, and it should be emphasized that this is the primary focus of this immensely useful volume, it is intellectually refreshing to see *phallometry*, *young male syndrome*, and *mating effort* replacing *phallocentrism*, *misogyny*, and *gender intimidation*, in short, to see reality displacing rant. No ranter has been more influential, or more wrong, than the redoubtable Susan Brownmiller, whose seminal 1975 work, *Against Our Will*, set a standard of angry sophistry, disconnected from reality but resonating with the emerging zeitgeist of her era. Brownmiller's famous claim that rape is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear, (p. 15) is worth repeating because it has been as influential as it is incorrect.

If sociobiology has been accused rightly, on occasion, of relying too heavily on just-so stories, the received wisdom concerning rape has long been based on little more than sheer fantasy. Brownmiller (1975), once again, stated,

For if the first rape was an unexpected battle founded on the first woman's refusal, the second rape was indubitably planned. Indeed, one of the earliest forms of male bonding must have been the gang rape of one woman by a band of marauding men. (p. 15)

Shades of Freud's patricidal primal horde, such assertions have done little honor to science or feminism and have only held back the curve of understanding. (Ironically, however, a pattern not unlike that asserted by Brownmiller, 1975, has been observed among free-living chimpanzees, but since the antibiological dogma also includes the claim, abundantly falsified, that only human beings engage in rape, such evidence would presumably be ruled irrelevant.)

Can it be that we are finally approaching a general theory of rape, analogous in its way to the unified field theory that so transfixes and eludes physicists? Perhaps. Lalumière et al. do a marvelous job of integrating numerous causal factors, including (a) young men with an evolutionarily predictable propensity for risk taking, (b) offenders with low embodied capital, (p. 94), (c) psychopaths, and (d) the role of conditional versus alternative strategies, not omitting the likely impact, in specific cases, of same-sex peer groups, devaluation of women, the possible predisposing effects of maternal immune responses, and the prospect that some sexual offenders represent what biologists call *behavioral morphs*. The unifying principle, as with all serious research in the biological sciences, is, as it should be, evolution and what it hath wrought.

### Reference

Brownmiller, S. (1975). *Against our will: Men, women and rape*. New York: Simon & Schuster.