

## **Rape: Crime or Confusion**

*The Hidden Health Crisis That Threatens All Women.* The title on the cover of the November *Self* Magazine caught my eye. The article begins: Leigh says she thought her date was going quite well, right up until the point when she was drugged and raped. As Leigh went over the details in her mind, she was certain she had not consented to have sex with her date, and she could not have possibly blacked out after three drinks. But her certainty began to soften when her date treated her warmly after the rape. She began to question: would a rapist behave nicely? This did not make sense to her. Leigh had not told anyone that she feared she had been raped. She says first she needed to know if what she remembered was real, so she saw this man again to get validation of what happened. She ended up being drugged and raped again. “How could I have done something like that? But I did.” Fact: Predators skillfully exploit the confusion.

The article continued to explain that this same confusion plagues most victims of sexual assault. In fact, FBI found 21 other women who had been drugged and raped by this same man. The prosecutor found that plenty of women were attracted to this predator, and that this guy was aroused by the very idea of non-consent. Ten educated, professional women were eventually contacted to testify against this man who pretended to be a doctor, a CIA employee, even an astronaut. All ten women told the same kind of history.

The author of the article notes that the most remarkable thing about the trial was that despite the outrageousness of the accusations against the predator, the testimony of ten women wasn't enough to get a single rape conviction against him. The director of the National Judicial Education Program of Legal Momentum in New York City states, “In far too many cases, juries don't believe date rape exists. To a juror, a rapist is a guy who jumps out of the bushes and throws a woman to the ground causing terrible injuries. The victim reports to police immediately. Anything that falls short of that story is questionable.” The defense attorney in the trial told the jury: “He is a playboy. You don't have to like him for that, but you've got to respect and understand the fact that that's all he is. All the women were lying. They got drunk and had consensual sex and regretted it.”

“Non-stranger rape victims exhibit distinct behaviors, states a clinical psychologist specializing in sexual abuse. Victims re-engage offenders because they are trying to reclaim their lost dignity. Their sense of control has been yanked away from them and they need to get it back. Denial also plays a powerful role. Survivors have a hard time accepting the idea of themselves as a victim and turn to their attackers to help explain away their fears.”

Do you think you would act differently? Would you fight or immediately call 911 and report someone you were on a date with? Statistics say no: A mere 17% of all rapes are ever reported. Reasons not to report include confusion, denial, shame, and guilt. If the victim is a male, the statistics on reporting are even lower. Many victims assume they won't be believed.

In the end, this same predator is back on trial. This time the victim reported promptly and had a medical sexual assault exam. The experts predict that this time around, the woman taking the stand will win.

Fact: Unwanted sexual contact of any kind is a crime. Report the incident to law enforcement immediately and have a compassionate, nonjudgmental medical/forensic exam with Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) at Gerald Champion Regional Medial Center's ER. Begin the journey to healing and justice.

The Take Back The Night Committee will be hosting two showings of the award winning documentary *VDay Until The Violence Stops* Saturday, January 17 at the NMSU-A Pro-Tech Building Room 128 at 2:00 pm or 7:00 pm. This documentary is an extraordinarily empowering celebration of community awareness that leaves us with the hope that change can happen. Please join us.

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