

# **15 Myths that Enable Sex Offenders**

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Rape and other forms of sexual assault is not an uncommon experience in our society; but that does not mean it is normal, nor does it mean it is excusable in any way. It means this is an epic problem.

Sex offenders do a great deal of damage to the victims they prey on and the society at large. They are masters of deceit and are chameleons by trade. There are many myths in our society that contribute to their success – myths we must understand – myths we must dispel.

## **Myth 1: We know everything.**

There is much more we do not know than what we do know. We are ignorant about most things. If we remember this, we will do a much better job trying to understand what we do not really know.

Sex offenders are “masters of disguise”, they know how to blend into society and are present everywhere; in our schools, our places of worship, our communities, our professions, and even our families.

Here is what you need to understand about sex offenders – they will do everything they can possibly do to hide who they are from you.

Sex offenders are hunters. Like a hunter stalking deer for sport, sex offenders stalk their victims. Like the hunter, they use a façade to blend into their surroundings. By stalking and wearing camouflage to hide themselves, the hunter remains unseen by the deer he is about to shoot. Similarly, sex offenders use a façade to hide who they really are. They purposefully try their best to look, act, and talk like a normal person so they can blend into our society and go unnoticed. Sex offenders know what we think and do better than we realize, and then they manipulate the situation to their advantage each and every time.

## **Myth 2: Victims deserve it.**

This is a very common misperception based on the fact that many people blame the victims for their behaviors, thereby negating the seriousness of the impact on the victim and mitigating the suspect’s responsibility.

Going back to the hunter and deer analogy – deer do not know they are being targeted. The hunter knows he is hunting, but the prey almost never know they are being stalked.

Our society tends to put the blame of a sexual assault on the victim for various reasons such as the victim dressing a certain way, participating in what some consider irresponsible

behaviors, not fighting back or screaming, or not taking proper preventative measures. Sexual assault is never the victim's fault and no preventative measures can keep it from taking place. The sex offender is a hunter who preys on those who make easy targets. For example, a young woman who is known to hang out at bars and drink with her friends every weekend, a male who has passed out from consuming too much alcohol, or a child whose care has been entrusted to an unknown sex offender. The sex offender is usually, but not always, someone the victim knows and has established some level of trust with. Sex offenders use this trust against their victims.

### **Myth 3: We understand all the variables.**

Human behavior is so very unpredictable, in fact we often do not understand all the reasons why we do things, much less why someone else may do or not do something. All behavior meets a need. We cannot hope to understand the behaviors unless we try to understand the need or needs that are being met. Here is one of the problems our society has: most people make up their mind within the first five or 10 minutes whether they think a sexual assault really happened or not. Given just a few facts, but mostly the biases, and we make up our minds and we prove or disprove what we think happened.

To ensure clear unbiased investigations are conducted, we need to identify and investigate at least three hypotheses in each sexual assault case in order to be fair and impartial to both reported offender and victim. The first hypothesis is: the sexual assault happened the way the victim said it happened, even if it does not make sense, or it may not seem believable. The second hypothesis is: the sexual assault never happened, because there is a possibility that it did not happen. The third hypothesis is: the sexual assault may have happened, but in a different way than what the victim reported.

If all three hypotheses are truly investigated we can come to a better conclusion. That is what we call science and research. It is our job to be fair; and it is not fair when we open a case file and see a list of reasons why we think the victim is lying and not one single thing about why the suspect might be lying, or any list that shows the victim might be telling the truth, or any list why the suspect might be telling the truth.

### **Myth 4: We understand all sex offenders.**

Although there has been a great deal of research on sex offenders, we really know very little about individual sex offenders because sex offenders are not a homogeneous group of people; they are as individual as they are individual and they are generally 99 percent just like us. The main difference is that sex offenders are willing to do something sexual to another person without their permission.

Only three percent of sex offenders are caught, meaning 97 percent of sex offenders are still out there hiding among us in plain sight.

Trying to fully understand a sex offender's train-of-thought and why they do what they do is challenging at best. We cannot walk in their shoes, because what they do is so far away from

our morals and ethics. We have to put them in their own shoes and see the world from their viewpoint. We need to figure out what needs are being met when they sexually assault someone, and the only way to do that is to listen to their life story.

**Myth 5: All sex offenders can be categorized.**

Attempting to categorize sex offenders actually puts blinders on us all. It minimizes the extent of damage, and the number of victims and sexual offenses the sex offender more often than not commits.

**Myth 6: Men & women are the same.**

Sex offenders use this myth against us. They often understand the physical and psychological differences between men and women and exploit these differences.

**Myth 7: We can truly know someone.**

None of us can truly know another individual any more than anyone can truly know us. None of us are very good at judging character. To believe we can makes all of us more vulnerable. Everyone is capable of hiding their true intentions, thoughts, and feelings.

Everyone has three personas. The first persona is the one we show most people or acquaintances. We show our second persona to people we trust not to judge us, such as our family and close friends. The third persona we usually keep to ourselves; this persona is the part of us that we feel most people would not accept about us.

**Myth 8: Most sex offenders simply make poor decisions.**

Most sex offenders plan, fantasize, and rehearse their crimes before they actually commit them. They have already victimized the victim through fantasy many times before the victim is even aware of the possibility of this happening. Most sex offenders would have us believe they are opportunistic and impulsive. The sad reality is that most sex offenders are absolutely compulsive; they have done it before and they will do it again, and again, and again.

**Myth 9: The victim should have known “it” was going to happen.**

Many people assume that most victims believe their decisions and behaviors are intentional, therefore they should have expected they could have or should have been raped. How many times have we gone to a teller machine at night dressed in nice clothes and withdrawn more than \$100 in cash and not been robbed? Yet, the one time we are robbed, should we have expected it?

The same goes for sexual assault. Many of us have been in the room of a member of the opposite sex, at night, perhaps even drinking, but were not raped or sexually assaulted; yet many victims, and many in our society, will tend to blame the behaviors of the victim instead of the suspect.

**Myth 10: Credibility is always based on the evidence.**

Unfortunately, credibility sometimes has very little to do with the evidence of facts of the case and has more to do with likeability. We tend to believe people we like, and distrust people we do not like. This concept really does impact on whether we believe someone or not. If we recognize this reality, we can develop strategies to avoid falling into this mythical trap and making poor decisions about rape allegations.

**Myth 11: We don't need to understand the context of what happened.**

The context of the assault is more important in understanding what happened than anything else. If we do not understand the context of the experience (before, during, and after the incident), including the previous experiences and reactions of the victim, we can never hope to truly understand the behaviors, decision making, or reactions of the victim.

**Myth 12: Stress, crisis, and trauma are the same.**

Many people, especially those of us in helping-professions, often work with trauma victims. Sadly, many people, if they are not careful, confuse stress, crisis, and trauma; sometimes viewing trauma and its effects on the victim as merely stressful events; thereby misunderstanding the gravity of the situation and impact on the victim. Trauma has an absolutely profound effect on memory, decision making, reactions, and behaviors during and after the crime.

**Myth 13: Few sexual assaults are drug facilitated.**

Approximately half of all reported sexual assaults, and a good majority of unreported sexual assaults, involve the drug called ethanol; commonly called alcohol. But in every traumatic incident, the body (primarily the pituitary system) infuses huge amounts of chemicals into our systems which inhibits certain actions and formation of memories very similar to the narcotics that are used with surgery patients. These natural drugs profoundly impact the way we behave and what we remember. So even if alcohol or some other drug is not used during the sexual assault, there is a likelihood our internal infusion of drugs, as a direct result of trauma received, greatly impacts our decision-making, memory, and impact of the assault.

**Myth 14: All recantations are true.**

Many victims will recant their allegations of sexual assault due to fear, pressure, depression, a desire to return to a normal life, stress, and many other reasons. Just because a victim may make a full or partial recantation of the reported assault does not mean the assault did not occur. Investigators must continue to pursue the investigation and actually add investigative steps to better understand the true nature of the recantation. In some cases the recantation can actually validate the trauma and strengthen the investigation and subsequent prosecution.

**Myth 15: We know everything.**

Myth one and fifteen are the same...but it is added again for emphasis on the greatest myth; that we think we know everything. In reality, we often know very little about each and every case and all the variables that can adversely affect our decisions. Therefore...we need to keep an open mind, develop alternative hypotheses, and seek diligently to find the truth deterred neither by fear nor prejudice (bias).