

TITLE: Can you Commit Rape and not Consider Yourself a Rapist?

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Introduction: Sexual assault is a widespread problem with serious emotional consequences for its survivors that persist for an extensive period of time after the incident. Interventions that target the emotional and cognitive processes of potential perpetrators may help prevent assault.

However, any intervention targeting high risk individual's cognitions requires an understanding of the thought processes that contribute to the perpetration of sexual assault. To this end, this study aims to contribute to our understanding of the situational factors and mental processes that influence sexual assault perpetrators in order to develop efficient and effective prevention programs. Using 78 first-hand accounts of sexual assault perpetration from Reddit.com we researched whether perpetrators would: experience feelings of shame and regret, mention situational factors that contributed to their actions, fail to realize it was rape until after the incident, and fail to outwardly label themselves as rapists.

Method: We collected 78 stories of first hand sexual assault perpetration from Reddit.com, a popular social news website that receives over forty-million visitors per month. We used thematic analysis to code common themes that appeared in the data.

Results: The thematic analysis found that the authors claimed that they did not intend to harm the victim, perceived that they had the "green light", failed to reevaluate the situation until an extreme reaction occurred, mentioned alcohol consumption, and wished they had not committed sexual assault.

Conclusion: These accounts demonstrate that some who perpetrate sexual assault reflect on their experiences and that some experiences may have lasting consequences for both victims and perpetrators. The authors did not intend to harm the victims and were in situations that put them at high risk for committing sexual assault (ex. alcohol consumption). The information from these accounts may help develop important components of prevention programs.