**A Variety of Theories That Have Been Developed To Explain the Possible Root Causes of Sexual Violence**

**Aberrant Behavior**

Sexual violence is clearly abnormal behavior. It is most likely the result of drug or alcohol abuse, serious miscommunication, or some other situational stressor that triggers an individual to act in a way that he or she would not normally act.

**Caveman Courting**

There have been clear differences in male and female evolution which combine to preserve the species, and these differences account for why men are more sexually aggressive in our society. Rape occurs because it was the strategy that was favored by natural selection, since it increased male reproductive success by maximizing mating frequency while minimizing commitment to any single mate. Despite the fat that society has criminalized rape, and although perpetrators may not be consciously attempting to “spread their seed” when they rape, the deep evolutionary roots of rape make it slow to expire.

**Exchange Theory**

Human beings, for the most part, engage in behaviors that reward them and avoid behaviors that have a high cost. Sexual violence is used in social settings and situations where the rewards are higher than the costs. Historically, there has been cultural approval for males to force sexual attention on females. Furthermore, the institutional consequences (i.e., laws) for sexual violence are inadequately and seldom enforced. Until potential perpetrators are given the message that rape is quickly and severely punished, they will continue to see rape as “cost efficient”.

**Chemical Imbalance**

Sexual violence is perpetrated by people who have some kind of chemical imbalance. For instance, elevated levels of testosterone make some men more violent than those who have normal or lower levels of testosterone. Studies of incarcerated rapists have found higher levels of testosterone in the more overtly violent offenders.

**Feminist Theory**

The root of violence against women is gender inequality. The recent history of our culture is one of male domination (patriarchy), where men had the right to control and dominate women. Sexual violence is one of many gender-based injustices that thrive in a culture where entitling men and disenfranchising women is the norm. Hundred of years of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse will only be turned around in conjunction with other social action that eliminates gender inequality of any type.

**Learned Behavior**

All human social behaviors are learned through personal experience or exposure. Sexual violence is the result of some individuals learning that it is acceptable to be sexually violent under certain circumstances, and other individuals learning to accept or tolerate this violence. This learning occurs primarily through childhood experiences – either by experiencing or witnessing sexual violence – but can also be supported and reinforced by the popular culture through all forms of media messages.

**Anti-Social Behavior**

Sexual offenders are anti-social and have no regard for other individuals (their victims) or social institutions (including legal consequences). In fact, they seem to take sadistic pleasure in the abuse that they perpetrate, and they may be violent and inappropriate in all aspects of their lives.

**Escalating Sexual Deviance**

Sex offenders are obsessed with deviant sexuality. They cultivate intense sexual fantasies involving the suffering or humiliation of another person. They also tend to exhibit a range of paraphillias and fetishes (e.g., exhibitionism, frotteurism, pedophilia, and voyeurism). Over time, offenders feel an overwhelming urge to “up the ante” and make their fantasies become reality. For example, a voyeur will escalate from peering into bedrooms, to sneaking into bedrooms, to rape. A pedophile will escalate from thinking about sex with children, to consuming child pornography, to sexually abusing a child.

**Systems Theory**

Sexual violence is a symptom of a family system or relationship that is out of balance. The normative structure of the family or relationship, the personality traits of the individuals involved, and stress and conflict combine to create an environment in which sexual violence can occur.

**Social Control Theory**

All social systems are held in place to some degree by force or the threat of force. This is true in the political, religious, and social arenas. The more resources (social, personal, economic) one has, the more effectively the threat of force can be used. The fewer resources one has, the more likely one is to be subjected to force, particularly if they appear to be vying for the dominant group’s resources. Sexual violence is used to perpetuate male supremacy, and is used as a tool to keep women fearful and subjugated. The rape of slaves by their owners during the first 2.5 centuries of our country; of Muslim women by conquering Servian forces in Bosnia; and of women in the U.S. military by their male peers and superiors are all examples of rape being used as a demonstration of power – as a tool of social control.

**Just-World Theory**

People get what they deserve. Most sexual violence is precipitated by the poor decisions or actions of the “victim”. All men and women know the many behavioral signals that are precursors to a sexual interaction. If those signals are present, and both persons choose to stay in a given interaction, then a certain level of consent is present. It is unfair for one of the partners to suddenly want “out” of the interaction once the signals are clear, particularly if that person had been actively putting-out these sexual signals through appearance or behavior. If the other partner wants to then complete the sexual interaction, the situation then does technically become “rape”, but it was also largely set into motion by the “victim”.