

Dealing with Rape Fantasies as a Survivor of Sexual Violence

By Kate

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Fantasies are images or scenes that produce enjoyable feelings - they can range from brief thoughts or images to stories with detailed plotlines. They may deal with actual past experiences, purely imagined experiences, or a mixture of both. They can be non-sexual – e.g. fantasising about becoming a millionaire or being a world-famous rock star, and they can be sexual – fantasising about kissing your favourite celebrity, about having sex with a colleague or a friend, and so on. Some people fantasise during sex about being out-of-control or being forced to have sex against their will. There are many theories as to why people have rape fantasies and it is an area that is still very much taboo and hush-hush in society. Some people believe that having a rape fantasy means that the person fantasising wants to be raped, some people believe that fantasising about rape means you are masochistic, some people believe that a rape survivor should not find fantasising about rape sexually arousing. Many survivors working through their sexual healing who have rape fantasies experience a lot of shame and confusion – they may feel disgusted with themselves for having a rape fantasy, they may feel that enjoying fantasising about rape invalidates the trauma that they went through, they may question if they actually wanted to be raped and so on. This article will discuss some of the main questions about rape fantasies that a survivor of sexual violence may have and hopefully assist in helping the survivor to understand their fantasies without shame and judgment. Remember of course that human sexuality is highly individual and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to understanding why we fantasise about the things we do - it is unlikely that all people have rape fantasies for the same reason.

Does fantasising about rape mean I wanted to be raped?

Just like the general population, many survivors will have had rape fantasies before the abuse/assault occurred. Having these kinds of fantasies does not mean that the survivor wanted to be raped. Rape fantasies during sex can symbolise many things, but the difference between fantasy and reality is that in fantasy the survivor is totally in control of what happens and when it happens, whereas in an actual sexual assault there is absolutely no semblance of control whatsoever. The desire to be out-of-control in a sexual fantasy is in no way a desire to be raped in real life.

Fantasies often serve as a “wish fulfillment” - for example, fantasising about somebody you are in love with, meeting your favourite celebrity and so on. This theory would suggest then that the person fantasising wants to be raped. However, this is a myth – commonly, the fantasy of “rape” barely resembles actual rape. More often than not, most people who have rape fantasies imagine a passionate scene with very little force, based around the “victim” being so desirable that the “rapist” cannot control themselves, while the victim generally does not feel the terror, confusion, rage and disgust of an actual rape. These kinds of fantasies are often termed “erotic rape fantasies” (Critelli & Bivona, 1998). The second type of rape fantasy that is generally discussed is an “aversive rape fantasy” - one which more realistically resembles actual rape and has themes of humiliation, violence and pain (Critelli & Bivona,

1998). While this type of rape fantasy is more realistic it is not an indication that the person fantasising wants to be raped. The "wish fulfillment" could very well be that the person desires a passionate sexual encounter, that they want to feel desirable, or have the relief of not having to be in control. If rape fantasies were a sign that the person fantasising wanted to be raped, it would be expected that there would be some relationship between having fantasies of rape and actually being raped, as while rape is always the choice of the rapist and never the victim's fault, there are decisions we make every day that can influence the possibility of being raped. This theory is not supported by statistics as it has been found that women who have rape fantasies are no more likely to be raped than women who don't (Gold et al., 1991; Gold & Clegg, 1990; Kanin, 1982).

Does fantasising about rape mean that what happened to me wasn't that bad?

Having a rape fantasy as a survivor in no way makes the brutality of what happened to you less valid. Rape is about power, control, shame, degradation, humiliation and so many other awful things. It **was** that bad. Fantasising about rape in the aftermath of sexual violence can in no way take away the reality and the validity of the brutal crime that was done to you.

How can I find rape fantasies to be a turn-on after being abused?

Having rape fantasies after rape and sexual abuse does not mean that there is something wrong with you. Many people, both male and female, have rape fantasies and enjoy them. It is difficult to get an exact number of how many people have rape fantasies as it is a very taboo subject, but research has shown that rape fantasies play a major role in the fantasy lives of one to two people in 10 (as a low-estimate) (Critelli & Bivona, 2008). As a survivor of rape, it can feel like a "betrayal" of your mind to have a rape fantasy, you can feel disgusted with yourself for being turned on by imagining rape. It seems though that for whatever reason, rape fantasies are a natural part of both male and female sexuality – just because you are a rape survivor does not mean that you somehow need to be held to a different standard than everybody else.

Is having a rape fantasy "healthy" for me or does it mean I'm "perverted"?

Simply having a rape fantasy is not necessarily "bad". As pointed out by Staci Haines (1999), there are no "right" or "wrong" fantasies. She advises survivors to avoid labelling their fantasies and instead focus on whether those fantasies impact on you negatively or positively. Her advice for whether a fantasy is affecting you negatively is to consider:

- Do you dissociate when you have a rape fantasy?
- Don't use fantasies to avoid being present with yourself or with your partner
- Don't practice being disembodied or dissociated when you are sexual. Fantasies can be a way to be present and embodied with your partner and can help to make your sex life richer.
- Do you have more than one fantasy?
- Is that fantasy the only way you can get turned on?

Staci Haines (1999) considers it less important to analyse the content of the rape fantasy and more important to focus on whether that fantasy feels compulsive or a negative impact to your healing. She advises that part of sexual healing is to allow more flexibility into your thinking and more freedom in your sexual choices, regardless of the messages you received about what sex is. If your fantasy feels intrusive and uncontrollable try approaching it as a trigger and break it down the way you would any other kind of trigger.

For many survivors, rape fantasies can be a powerful way of working through their memories and the dynamics of the abuse. They may recreate the assault or aspects of the sexual abuse in an attempt to take control over the past. They may use the fantasy to get closure on what happened to them. They may feel empowered by taking a memory of something that was done against their will and using those dynamics in a sexual fantasy.

Regardless of the content of fantasies, the most important thing is to make sure that they are not negatively affecting the person fantasising. Having a rape fantasy as a rape survivor does not mean that you wanted it or that you're perverted. It's nothing to feel shame about or judge yourself for. Many, many people have rape fantasies and despite popular belief they haven't all been actually raped – there is no connection between having a rape fantasy and being a survivor of rape. It is a universal fantasy across all groups of people and all cultures.

If you feel that your fantasies are negatively impacting you it is important to talk to a professional about it. Your sexual healing and sexual well-being is very important and you deserve to feel comfortable with yourself and your sexuality. To find a sex therapist contact www.aasect.org for a list of sex therapists in your area, or if you would prefer have a read through [Finding a Therapist](#) to learn how to find a trauma counselor you feel comfortable with. As with any therapist, it is important to interview potential candidates to learn how much they know about working with survivors. Insurance doesn't generally cover sexual problems but as sex problems can lead to anxiety and depression, sex therapy can be covered when those kinds of diagnosis are made. Additionally, post-traumatic stress disorder is widely covered by insurance companies.

Suggested Reading:

[The Sexual Healing Journey](#) by Wendy Maltz

[The Survivor's Guide to Sex](#) by Staci Haines

References:

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