Rape Typology and the Coping Behavior of Rape Victims

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To understand rape from the victim’s point of view, we spent a year talking with all rape victims admitted to the emergency floors of the Boston City Hospital. It became clear in our conversations that rape is an act initiated by the assailant, and that it is not primarily a sexual act but an act of violence. We learned that it was very important to the victims how their assailants gained access to them, that is, the mode of attack. We therefore analyzed all these cases, whether adult, adolescent, or child victims, and we developed a typology of rape based on the assailant’s method of attack. The two main styles were (1) the blitz rape and (2) the confidence rape.

Victims of rapists are either singled out for a sudden surprise attack or tricked into trusting the assailant as in any confidence game. In both inci-
ences, the sexual act is performed by force or threat of force and without the victim's consent.

The blitz rape occurs suddenly without warning and without prior interaction between assailant and victim. In this sort of rape, the victim is going about her life as usual when suddenly she is seized by the assailant. From her point of view, there is no ready explanation for the man's presence. He suddenly appears, uninvited, and forces himself into the situation. Often, he selects an anonymous victim and tries to remain anonymous himself. He may wear a mask or gloves or cover the victim's face as he attacks.

The typical example of the blitz type of rape occurs when a woman happens to cross the path of the assailant who is looking for someone to capture and attack.

The surprise attack outdoors is classified as a common blitz type of rape. However, it is not unusual for the victim to be attacked while she is asleep in her own bed by an assailant who has gained entry.

A 62-year-old woman was brought to the hospital at 8:30 A.M. by the police. She had multiple bruises on her face, neck, chest, and back, as well as a two-inch stab wound in her abdomen. Her first words to the counselor were "I thought I was going to be killed. I didn't want to die —I didn't think it was my time, but I remember thinking this is the way I was going to die." The victim said that she had been in her bed sleeping. It was around 3 A.M., and she woke up to feel someone jumping on her. She said, "I started screaming and he put a blanket over my head. I didn't have it off till he left. He said when he started, 'Let's see how you like this.' He started doing such crazy things. He was playing with my breasts and then he made me open my mouth and he put his thing in it. I never did such a thing. He made me keep my hands away from my mouth and he stuck it down so far I thought I would gag. It was just awful. Then he turned me over and tried my back end. He kept turning me this way and that. He raped me the regular way. At least he wasn't violent doing that: thank heaven that wasn't crazy. . . . I remember thinking that I never thought such a thing could happen to me. I thought I would die, and his hand kept clamping my neck tighter and tighter. When he finished raping me, he told me to keep the blanket over my head for 20 minutes and said if I took the blanket off, he would finish me. I didn't hear him leave, but every now and then, I would call out to see if he was still there. I hoped to get a view of him and kept peeking out of the blanket, but I couldn't see anything. Finally, I dared to take the blanket off and I called the police. They came right away and I called my daughter. The officer talked to my daughter and said I was lucky to be alive. I could hardly talk and was having a lot of trouble breathing." The victim was unable to identify an assailant, although she did work with the police in hopes of finding a suspect. She definitely would have pressed charges against the assailant.