A Dangerous Myth

A lot of rape victims, both male and female, feel that the assault has somehow been their fault, or that they have provoked the attacker in some way. This can lead to torturous guilt and ambiguity.

Elena was assaulted at a party by a friend and, to her horror, discovered that she was lubricating during the encounter and that after she repeatedly said no, her body went limp and she froze. Afterwards, she was wracked with guilt: was she secretly aroused by the whole thing? Why did she stop fighting? Wasn’t her body’s response “proof” of what she really wanted? Her attacker had told her at the time, “I know you want it” and she was tortured with the thought for weeks after: did she actually want it? This was particularly distressing for Elena, since she had recently been exploring elements of BDSM with her long-term boyfriend. The shame of these thoughts prevented her from speaking out.

Don't Be Fooled by Physical Arousal

Elena’s case is more common than you’d think. In our culture, we (mistakenly!) believe that if the body physically prepares for sex, that it must mean we are also mentally consenting. In fact, sexologists call this phenomenon “arousal non-concordance” and it means that for many women, what is happening for them physically and what is happening emotionally are only loosely connected.

Trust Your Heart

If this is sounding familiar, it’s important to understand that being lubricated does not mean
that you secretly wanted or enjoyed an assault. This merely means that your body recognized a stimulus in its environment as sexual and responded accordingly. Some women experience orgasm during an assault, but this merely means that their bodies were stimulated and the orgasm is nothing more than an involuntary physical response to a physical sensation. Trust what your heart and mind were feeling during the encounter, not your genitals.

Your Body’s Reaction Later On

Similarly, being aroused later on by the idea of your assault means nothing except that your body and mind are working hard to make sense of and integrate your experience. Some women find that role playing aggressive scenarios, or sex that highlights aggression and power play, is a good way to “work through” their trauma. This is a touchy topic and something that only you, your partner, and possibly a sex-positive therapist can work through together.

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