



## Book Review

### **Aliraza Javaid (2018) *Male Rape, Masculinities, and Sexualities: Understanding, Policing, and Overcoming Male Sexual Victimization*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan**

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Aliraza Javaid's *Male Rape, Masculinities, and Sexualities* (2018) is a sociological exploration of the phenomena of male sexual assault. Consisting of eight chapters, the book aims to dispel popular misconceptions of the topic which the author connects to gendered relations and power dynamics. The author bravely inserts his personal narrative as a gay male sexual assault survivor, supplementing his analysis of the literature with his own qualitative interviews with 70 public officials (e.g., counsellors, therapists, volunteer agency caseworkers and police officers) and open-ended questionnaires sent out to an undisclosed number of respondents. In so doing, he provides a soulful analysis of the topic of male sexual victimisation. His findings reveal what many criminologists might suspect, namely that an under-reporting of male sexual assault occurs due to widely held misconceptions that men cannot be raped, male victims are emasculated and the victims themselves are to blame. Thus, male sexual assault survivors must overcome inferences about their character based not only upon gendered notions of victimisation, but also the general stigma faced by all sexual assault survivors (Ralston 2012).

This text has a variety of strengths. In addition to providing much needed enquiry into this woefully understudied topic, thereby adding to the emerging field of queer criminology, Javaid emphasises the impact that one's life experiences can have on the research process by incorporating auto-ethnographic elements. For those without prior knowledge of this topic, this can help illuminate the emotional experiences of those victimised. An important, though underdeveloped, sub-point made in this text is the relationship between the researcher and the researched. An underlying assumption social scientists face is that they engage in the activities of their research. If one studies 'deviant' topics, it is often assumed that one engages in the activities of the group or that the researcher cannot act as a critical insider (see Hodkinson 2002). Javaid (2018: 139-149) focuses on some of the issues that he has faced both as a private citizen and in some professional settings. However, there are broader implications of this phenomenon. As Compton, Meadow and Shilt (2018) have discussed elsewhere, academics studying LGBTQIA+ issues and sexualities run the risk of having their work dismissed, being bullied into resignation or humiliated professionally in other ways. However, this argument has also been made for scholars in relation to race and gender. The significance of this is that we are forced, as researchers, to put on intellectual blinders and not ask critical questions that can provide powerful insights into the human condition. In an age of austerity, it seems that academic freedom is a selective privilege and the politics of science are still as fierce as ever (see Kuhn 1962).

One of the major limitations of this text is that in Javaid's aim (2018: 8) to cover such a broad intellectual geography, the text does not attribute great detail to any one aspect. Although this text may appear to some as one that is overly descriptive, this critique is mitigated with several chapters devoted to theory. Moreover, descriptive styles of writing tend to be common in criminological texts as opposed to sociology texts, which are often overly theoretical. In addition, the text makes several highly interesting points, even if it fails to unpack them fully, among which is the connection between gay spaces, intoxication and victimisation. One of the prominent myths that Javaid identifies as being held by public officials is that gay men are sexually promiscuous deviants (2018: 169–175) who engage in behaviours that place them at risk (2018: 184–185). While ultimately, this theme is left unpacked, it begs the question why, in an era of significant civil rights gains, some gay men engage in increased rates of drug and alcohol consumption (Schmidt et al. 2016). Indeed, this question seems to be the elephant in the room that many scholars writing on this topic are hesitant to pose (see Cimino 2005).

Javaid's reliance on only his personal narrative to speak on behalf of male victims means that an aspect of this work has been left unexplored. In this sense, the book fails in its aim (Javaid 2018: 8) to fully explore the concept of male rape victims from different sexualities. Although Javaid does, throughout the book, make up for some of these limitations, he is able to do so only on the basis of data that pertains to his own personal experience. This opens up his work to the very critique he is attempting to avoid—that his work may contain some bias. Coupled with the lack of a data triangulation strategy (see Denzin 1989), this makes it difficult to assess some of his claims, especially those early on in the text (Javaid 2018: vii) and in other parts where he writes about his perceptions of certain situations. While I sympathise with Javaid's story as a fellow victim, survivor and colleague, his work begs larger societal questions that can be posed only if we place his narrative within a broader sociological context (see Mills 1959: 15). However, rather than viewing these limitations as ones which undermine the strength of his work, it is important to acknowledge that such limitations prompt larger questions, thereby signifying a contribution that is indeed substantial.

*Male Rape, Masculinities, and Sexualities* is an attempt to shed light on a highly understudied topic and makes a crucial contribution to queer criminology. Being a pioneering researcher, especially one with a personal connection therein, can be a difficult task. The early work by such scholars has faced significant criticism, may be dismissed by senior colleagues and lacks the intellectual and moral support that might be afforded to 'safer' topics. Were it not for those so stigmatised, sociology would be further dominated and controlled by the white cis-gendered heterosexual male voices that make up its ranks (see Ladner 1973). This text would provide a lively source of discussion among upper level undergraduate courses in criminology (e.g., penology and victimisation) and sociology (e.g., deviance and criminological theory) due to its method, broad coverage of the topic and the larger issues discussed therein.

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