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Sexual violence is motivated by power and control.

- It is carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality.¹ In this way, sex becomes the weapon used to achieve a sense of power. The common misbelief is that sexual violence is the overuse of coercion in order to satisfy the primary motivation of desire. Sexual violence functions to silence and control those whom it targets.
- Clinical studies have determined that sexual assault is a pseudo-sexual act that primarily serves non-sexual needs and is motivated more by retaliatory and compensatory motives than by sexual ones.²
- The Albert government uses this simple yet clear example in their best practice manual for police and crown attorneys:
Sexual assault does not happen because of uncontrollable desire. Instead, it is a crime that is about power and control. For example, if someone hits their friend over the head with a baseball bat, no one would say they are playing baseball. Instead, we would say that the baseball bat is used as a weapon. Similarly, when someone is sexually assaulted, it is not the same as “having sex;” instead, one person uses sex as a weapon to hurt another.³
- Targeting sex and sexuality and exploiting what in a nonviolent or coercive circumstance would be an intimate act, results in an emotional, psychological, and physical assault. A survivor’s response to sexual assault often reflects his/her reaction to the violation of self.⁴
- Understanding the violation of self in a survivor’s discloser/report is central to a) gathering accurate information, b) effective relationship building, and c) a trauma informed approach.
“It’s a crime like no other. A violation of the self as well as the body – an assault on trust, on privacy, on control. It’s also an offence with an afterlife: a sense of bruising shame and guilt.”⁵

¹ Government of Ontario. (2011). Changing Attitudes, Changing Lives: Ontario’s Sexual Violence Action Plan. Toronto, ON: Ontario Women’s Directorate. Retrieved March 20, 2014 from: www.women.gov.on.ca/english/resources/publications/svap2011.pdf

² Groth, A. Nicholas, with H. Jean Birnbaum. “Men Who Rape: The Psychology of the Offender.” New York: Plenum Press, 1979.

³ Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, 2013, Best Practices for Investigating and Prosecuting Sexual Assault. http://justice.alberta.ca/programs_services/criminal_pros/Documents/SexualAssaultHandbook-PoliceCrown.pdf

⁴ Alberta Justice and Solicitor General ETC

⁵ The Globe and Mail, (2013), How Canada's sex-assault laws violate rape victims, KIRK MAKIN The Globe and Mail, October, 2013. March 20, 2014 at: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/how-canadas-sex-assault-laws-violate-rape-victims/article14705289/?page=all>