

Reflection

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Look me up on the Internet and you'll see the extent to which this single paper appears to define my career. Most papers on incidence and prevalence have a short life because that kind of information is quickly replaced by a more recent source. I had no idea when writing this paper what its impact would be. The paper received recognition in the public media almost immediately, including coverage in the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, all the major women's magazines, and a few talk shows. That was thrilling for me personally and it was gratifying that the work, combined with other events and contributions, seemed to be giving women the vocabulary to talk about date rape and to interest colleges and universities in doing prevention education. In 1990, I was called to testify before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, which was holding hearings on the Violence Against Women Act. One of the titles in this act was specifically directed at campus rape and used statistics drawn from this paper to demonstrate the magnitude of the rape problem. And just recently, I learned that the charges made in this paper about underestimates in federal statistics had hit their mark when the National Institute of Justice released a second national study of college students that compared the type of questioning used here to the standard National Crime Victimization Survey items and reported that the former resulted in estimates of rape prevalence that were 11 times higher than what the federal survey was identifying (see Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000).

Doing empirical research that influenced public policy is the fulfillment of every social scientist's dream, but in so doing, this paper became a target for those opposed to change. I have woken up to the *Sunday New York Times Magazine* to find these data identified as the source of "rape hype that betrays feminism," and had the discomfort of seeing them the subject of chapters in scholarly books as examples of fraud in social science, lying with statistics, and stealing feminism. I was at the time and continue to be especially grateful to case studies of the media treatment of my work done by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting and by the Media Education Foundation in their video, *Date Rape Backlash: The Media and the Denial of Rape*.

The best response to backlash is to keep turning out the work, and there is certainly more work to be done. The Sexual Experiences Survey that is reported in this paper is the most widely used instrument for survey-based assessments of sexual assault victimization and perpetration. It is used for a variety of research goals, including estimation of incidence and prevalence, testing of theoretical models of victimization and perpetration, and conducting outcome studies. However, my colleagues and I believe that it could benefit from revision to ensure that the questions cover the full range of relevant experiences in terms that young adults from diverse backgrounds can easily comprehend and are consistent with existing state and federal statutes. We also believe that it is critical to conduct follow-up questions to the survey to verify that a revised Sexual Experiences Survey is categorizing sexual assault experiences accurately.

Starting with this paper and throughout my many years in this field, I seem to have an ability to pick research directions that push the envelope. My present work on applying restorative justice philosophy to healing victims and holding perpetrators accountable is not an exception. For someone who doesn't like criticism and prefers to be liked, it has been an interesting psychological journey and I must acknowledge the support I have received from friends, feminist colleagues, and the victims themselves.

REFERENCE

Fisher, B., Cullen, F. T., & Turner, M. G. (2000). *The Sexual Victimization of College Women*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice and Bureau of Justice Statistics.