

Reflection

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It is an honor to have my and Joseph Marolla's paper, "Riding the Bull at Gilley's," included in *Violence against Women*. I accepted the editors' invitation to write a brief reflection on why I chose to research this problem because I have never written about the reasons for dedicating my career to issues related to violence against women.

It was during the early 1970s, while I was a graduate student at the University of Illinois, Chicago, ironically taking my first course in "Sex Roles" taught by Pauline Bart, when an unknown assailant broke into my apartment while I slept and raped me at knifepoint in an attack that lasted several hours and changed my life forever.

My recovery took many forms. I almost immediately became involved in the anti-rape movement that was just emerging in Chicago. In particular, I became a "public" victim willing to talk about my rape to any audience that I thought had the potential to help raped women. Understandably, in the early 1970s, most victims sought anonymity to avoid the stigma of rape. Perhaps most important, I redirected my scholarly interest to focus on sexual violence against women. My NIMH funded research, which involved face-to-face interviews with 114 incarcerated convicted rapists (and a contrast group of 75 other felons), publication of this paper among others and *Understanding Sexual Violence: A Study of Convicted Rapists* (Routledge, 1990), grew out of my personal experience and a deep desire to know why rape occurs.

At some point, I stopped speaking publicly as a victim because I was no longer effective in that role. In fact, my work as a feminist scholar on a topic of deep personal significance healed me and restored my sense of personal power—the thing that is taken from women when they are raped. It is important for raped women to know that despite what the medical model predicts, it is possible to emerge from rape an even stronger woman than you were before.

When I began my work on rape, the psychopathological model, which assumes that rape is the result of a mental illness and that it often includes an uncontrollable sexual impulse, dominated the field. According to this model, because men who rape cannot control their behavior, they are not responsible for it either. This also was the heyday of victim blaming and the assumption that women consciously or subconsciously precipitate, and consequently are the ones who are really responsible for, rape. Thus, much of the psychiatric literature focused on the behavior and motives of women and even girls rather than men.

I think the value of my work and that of many other feminists is the challenge it poses to those who would blame women for rape. Equally important is the contribution it made to the major paradigm shift that has taken place in our understanding of sexual violence from a psychopathological model to a feminist model and the assumption that rape is socio-cultural in origin: men learn to rape and, as this paper demonstrates, many enjoy it as much as riding the bull at Gilley's!