

Reflection

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In 1977, I received funding from the National Institute of Mental Health to do a large-scale probability sample survey of women residents in San Francisco to try to ascertain the prevalence of rape and other forms of sexual assault. Although I included a question in the interview schedule asking the 930 respondents if they had ever been the victim of wife rape (these were not the actual words used), I had no intention of writing a book on rape in marriage at that time.

While I was still analyzing the survey data, legislation making “spousal rape” a crime in California was proposed in 1978 by Assemblyman Floyd Mori, who had been working against strong opposition to achieve this legal reform since 1976. Given the paucity of information on wife rape, particularly information obtained from a scientifically sound survey, I was asked to speak in support of the legislation when it came before the all-male Senate Judiciary Committee in Sacramento. On accepting this invitation, I focused on analyzing my data on wife rape.

As it turned out, I and 17 others—mostly women—never testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee. There was a last-minute decision to permit only four men and one woman to testify. Based on the questions asked and the answers given by the five selected individuals, it seemed clear that their major function was to reassure the worried Senators that if the law were passed, very few wives would likely try to prosecute their husbands for spousal rape. This made me realize that it was fortunate that I was not permitted to testify that 14 percent of the women who had ever been married in my survey had been the victims of rape or attempted rape by a husband.

After Assemblyman Mori agreed to several last-minute compromises, the bill on marital rape was approved unanimously, becoming law on January 1, 1980. Although my contribution to a change in the California law on spousal rape ended up being insignificant, I became aware of the need to publicize my findings about wife rape—not only as a tool for those campaigning to change the law in other states, but also to bring public attention to the appalling reality that many men considered rape in marriage to be their prerogative if their wives refused their advances. To continue to see rape in marriage as a husband’s privilege is not only an insult, a gross violation of women’s right to control their own bodies, but a very profound indicator of the flagrant inequity that is built into the institution of marriage in the United States—as well as in most other countries at that time.

I hoped that publishing a book on wife rape would publicize this scandalous situation, as well as the widespread prevalence and the traumatic effects experienced by the victims of rape by their husbands. I knew that changing the law would not be enough to empower women to report their husbands’ rapes and seek their prosecution for these crimes without an educational campaign to publicize the new law. I hoped that my book would prove useful to the campaigners in states where rape in marriage was still legal. I personally traveled to a few states to share my findings with women advocates for battered women, who were

the primary ones working on this issue. Finally, *Rape in Marriage* was published by Macmillan Press in 1982—the first book in the world on this topic.

Although the movement to criminalize rape in marriage in all states continued over the years, I felt very dissatisfied and disappointed with what I perceived to be the failure of the rape crisis centers and the battered women's movement to deal with wife rape after the publication of *Rape in Marriage*. The obvious inference is that my book did not have much impact on these two key feminist movements. Besides rarely getting invitations to lecture about wife rape after *Rape in Marriage* was published, hard evidence for my perception was provided by a national survey of services for victims of wife rape undertaken by Lynn Thompson-Haas, the Executive Director of the Austin Rape Crisis Center at the time (her unpublished report was completed in 1987).

When a second edition of *Rape in Marriage* was published by Indiana University Press in 1990, I decided to use my new introduction to criticize the rape crisis centers and the battered women's movement for their continuing neglect of wife rape—the most frequent form of this crime. I summarized the methodology and findings of Thompson-Haas's study, including her conclusion that “many sexual assault programs see marital rape as a ‘family violence problem,’ and many programs for battered women see it as a ‘sexual assault issue’ ” (p. xxv). Neither movement considers it their responsibility to deal with rape in marriage. Hence, it continues to be neglected by the very organizations that should be assisting and advocating for these traumatized victims. Tragically, I believe this is still the case. This is particularly reprehensible for the battered women's movement, most of whose clientele have been raped by their violent husbands. In addition, there are a large number of victims of wife rape who have never been physically battered. There is no sound reason for rape crisis centers not to assist and counsel these women.

Happily, the literature on wife rape has grown considerably since I published both editions of *Rape in Marriage*. Although I've been disappointed that my book did not have a greater impact on the feminist movement against violence against women and influential policy makers in this country, I know that I have good reason to be proud of the quality of my study and my book and that both were groundbreaking achievements. I am also very gratified to know that *Rape in Marriage* has helped many survivors of this heinous form of misogyny.