Male Sexual Victimization: Examining Men's Experiences of Rape and Sexual Assault

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Examining Men's Experiences of Rape and Sexual Assault

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This study examines men's sexual victimization experiences in the United States using a nationally representative sample of victim narratives from the National Crime Victimization Survey. An analysis of men's incidents reveals many similarities to women's rapes and sexual assaults as well as some rather gendered differences, particularly in regard to offender sex, victims' willingness to report to officials, and a few uniquely masculine ways in which some men frame their experiences. The study begins an important exploration of men's descriptions of their sexual victimization experiences and responses and encourages future empirical and theoretical research of this understudied population of victims.

Keywords: *male rape; masculinity; sexual victimization*

While there has been a vast literature published during the past 30 years on sexual violence against women, relatively few studies have investigated men's sexual victimization experiences in the general U.S. population. Aside from a handful of studies that have attempted to measure prevalence of sexual assault among men (for an overview, see Tewksbury 2007),[1] most of the articles on male sexual victimization in the United States have examined specific male populations, such as male victims of child sexual abuse (Nelson and Oliver 1998), sexual coercion among college men (for an overview, see Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, and Anderson 2003; also see O'Sullivan, Byers, and Finkelman 1998), and most recently male rape in institutional settings such as prisons (Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2006; Kupers 2001; Eigenberg 2000).

Thus, the present study seeks to expand on a rather limited knowledge of male sexual victimization experience in the broader U.S. population by more closely examining the incidents that men reveal to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), a large, nationwide study of crime incidents in the United States. According

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to the NCVS, 9 percent of victims of rape and sexual assault are male (U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS] 2003). While these numbers certainly make clear that the majority of rape and sexual assault cases are crimes perpetrated against women, the data also point to a sizable minority of male victims who have been largely ignored by researchers and theorists. Thus, the present study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the unwanted sexual experiences of men in the United States.

Social Definitions of Sexual Violence and Masculinity

The paucity of research on male victims of rape and sexual assault may be not only because of the fact that men compose only a small proportion of overall victims but also because of the ways in which sexual violence has been legally, politically, and theoretically constructed over the years. For instance, until the 1980s, most states' rape laws excluded the potential of men as victims by specifically defining rape as a crime committed against women. Even today, the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, a major source of U.S. crime data, continue to define rape as "the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will" (FBI 2004).[2]

More important, for more than 30 years, rape and sexual assault have been largely framed by activists as a women's safety issue and by feminist scholars as a substantive area within a broader violence against women literature. Ensconced within a movement and scholarship devoted to understanding and eradicating violence against women, it is not surprising that most prevalence studies (Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 2000; Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski 1987; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997)[3] and other empirical research on rape and sexual assault (Adams-Curtis and Forbes 2004; Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006; Bondurant 2001; Carmody and Washington 2001; Cook 1995; Cowan 2000; Frohmann 1991; Kahn, Mathie, and Torgler 1994; Konradi 1996; Layman, Gidycz, and Lynn 1996; Williams 1984) have focused their attentions almost exclusively on female victims.

Moreover, theories developed over the years to explain why men are sexually violent toward women have clearly established men in their roles as sexual predators, with women as the targeted prey. By ascribing sexual violence to men's nature (Ellis 1989; Thornhill and Palmer 2000), men's dominant position in society (Brownmiller 1975; Nelson and Oliver 1998; Sanday 1981; Schwendinger and Schwendinger 1983), or the ways in which men are socialized (Burt 1980; Friedland 1991; Gilbert 2002; Jackson 1995; Martin and Hummer 1989; Messerschmidt 2004; Sanday 1990; Scully 1990; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997; Worcester 2002), theoretical linkages between sexual aggression and masculinity, or hypermasculinity (Connell 1995; Messerschmidt 1993), are so well established in the ways in which rape and sexual assault have been conceptualized over the years that to envision men as victims (or women as aggressors) requires a conscious bracketing of preconceived notions about both sexual violence and gender.

Indeed, social ideals about gender may especially contribute to nonrecognition of men as victims. For instance, while social constructs of femininity—as physically weak and sexually vulnerable—fit overall perceptions of sexual victims, social expectations of what it is to be a man in our society—as strong, tough, self-sufficient, and impenetrable (Kimmel 1996, 2003; Messner 1992, 2003; Pollack 2003; Sabo 2003a, 2003b)—counter images of victimization in general and sexual victimization in particular. With "real" men expected to avoid behaviors associated with femininity, men who are overpowered by others may be judged to have failed in their masculine duty to stick up for themselves (Doherty and Anderson 2004, 97). A gendering (or feminization) of victimization can be seen in the derogatory labels (e.g., sissies, pansies, pussies) hurled at boys and young men who are victimized or, more broadly, fail to live up to the standards of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) measured by control over one's emotions, one's destiny, and others. In short, men's victimization undermines the dominant ideals of masculinity.

Furthermore, men who are victimized by rape or sexual assault contradict hegemonic definitions of male sexuality that require men to be sexually potent, dominant, and in control. In other words, "real" men are expected to want sex (with women) and to initiate and pursue sex (Muehlenhard and Cook 1988; O'Sullivan, Byers, and Finkelman 1998), and are often rewarded for sexual assertiveness (Doherty and Anderson 2004; Kassing, Beesley, and Frey 2005; Martin and Hummer 1989; Sabo 2003a, 2003b). Thus, within a culture where men are not supposed to take no for an answer and where sexual restraint is seen as women's responsibility (Muehlenhard and Hollabaugh 1988), men who admit that they do not want sex or, worse, were forced to have sex violate codes of male (hetero)sexuality.

Expectations for men to achieve certain standards of masculinity, coupled with a fear of being perceived as gay or "womanly," may prompt boys and young men to demonstrate masculine behaviors as part of a process of impression management (Goffman 1967). For instance, "hooking up" sexually with as many females as possible may help men to "prove" to others that they are both masculine and heterosexual (Eder 1995; Ferguson 2000; Gilbert 2002; Kimmel 2003; Messner 1992; Pascoe 2005; Sabo 2003a, 2003b). Other demonstrations of masculinity (e.g., physical toughness, risk taking, ability to take care of matters themselves) may also be enacted as part of men's self-presentations and can be particularly useful for male victims of rape and sexual assault, seeking to repair or reestablish masculinity (Carlson 2008; Mullaney 2007) after being victimized by incidents that typically happen to women.

This study examines male sexual victimization as a specifically gendered experience and pays particular attention to the ways in which male victims interpret and respond to situations that clearly contradict social definitions of sexual violence and masculinity. Thus, the study examines both men's descriptions of sexual victimization and their demonstrations of masculinity during the disclosure of these incidents.

An analysis of men's own narratives of unwanted sexual experiences allows for both a delineation of the types of sexual crimes men are experiencing and an exploration of the ways in which men frame their sexual victimization experiences.

Method

This study examines a broad range of men's sexual victimization experiences revealed to the NCVS and collected during the years 1992 through early 2000. The NCVS is a large-scale probability survey of people twelve years and older that provides annual estimates of crime and victimization rates in the United States (U.S. Department of Justice, BJS 2003). The data used for analysis in this study incorporate both NCVS structured responses and incident narratives. The NCVS incident narratives are open-ended responses to a final question at the end of the interview that asks victims to describe what happened to them. While NCVS structured responses are available for public access via the Inter-university Consortium for Political Social Research Web site (www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD), narrative responses are accessible only from the U.S. Census Bureau or BJS offices in Washington, D.C. Narratives for this study were obtained by permission from the BJS, which granted access to photocopied pages of incident report narratives and accompanying structured responses for sex-related incidents from 1992 to early 2000.

This study begins by comparing men's and women's sexual victimization incidents (N = 1,050) and then looks more closely at men's incidents (n = 94). It is important to note that the sample used for descriptive analyses in this study contains 232 teenaged victims twelve to seventeen years old (218 females and 14 males), with 60 respondents younger than sixteen (54 females and 6 males).[4] Although the dynamics and consequences of sexual assault of teenagers (by other teens or adults) can be very different from adult-on-adult assault, a statistical comparison of teen and adult victim characteristics and various incident conditions found no significant differences that warranted their exclusion from this study.

Sexual victimization incidents in this study consist of rape (defined by NCVS as completed forced vaginal, anal, or oral penetration), attempted rape (defined by NCVS as attempted forced vaginal, anal, or oral penetration), and a broad range of other sexual assaults (defined by NCVS as completed or attempted attacks involving unwanted sexual contact but not forced sexual intercourse). It is important that sexual assaults for purposes of this study also include "nonclassifying" incidents, cases reported to NCVS interviewers but, because they are presumed to lack the legal requirement of force necessary for incidents to be defined as serious crimes, are excluded from NCVS public use files and BJS published reports. Nonclassifying sexual victimization incidents (approximately 20 percent of total sex-related cases) include sexual coercion without force, "inappropriate" touching, indecent exposure,

and sexual harassment. These cases were included in the present study's sample to examine a broader range of unwanted sexual situations from the victims' own perspectives.

Variables examined in this study include common victim characteristics (age, race, Hispanic origin, and household income), selected incident conditions (offender sex, number of offenders, interracial composition, injury, weapon use, time and location, victim's drinking, and resistance), victim–offender relationship, type of crime, and whether or not the incident was reported to the police or other officials. To compare men's and women's incidents, variables were cross-tabulated (in SPSS) by victim sex, using a chi-square statistic to examine significance between men and women and tested at .05, .01, and .001 significance levels. The resulting descriptive statistics presented in this article are simple percentage comparisons that provide preliminary parameters of sexual victimization experience by gender. A future study using more advanced multivariate analyses will be necessary for more comprehensively investigating the similarities and differences between women's and men's victimization experiences.

Additional analyses of men's incident conditions ($n = 94$) were also conducted to contrast male sexual victimization perpetuated by other men to incidents perpetrated by women. This was accomplished by cross-tabulating selected variables (age, injury or weapon, victim–offender relationship, type of crime, reporting to officials) by offender sex. It is important to note that, because of the small sample size for men's incidents and a distribution of n values within categories too small to convey statistical significance, many variables used to compare incidents by victim sex were excluded from analyses of men's incidents.

In addition to quantitative analyses described above, men's incident narratives were qualitatively examined for a more nuanced exploration of men's experiences beyond what structured variables can convey. Excerpts from men's narratives are cited throughout the article to illustrate the types of sexual victimization experiences that men describe to NCVS interviewers as well as to provide examples of how men demonstrate masculinity during the process of disclosing such information.

Specifically, men's narratives were examined for general descriptions and explanations of what happened to them and patterns of response (e.g., physical retaliation, reporting to officials). Because people act or perform in ways designed with an eye to their accountability and how they might appear to others (West and Zimmerman 1987, 136), an interview, and specifically the disclosure of a victimization experience, is a social setting for which demonstrations of masculinity may be especially visible. Thus, men's narratives were specifically examined for indicators of how men "do gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987), or negotiate masculinity during the process of revealing sexual victimization experiences that are not supposed to happen to "real" men.

It is important to note that, while providing a unique data source for examining men's experiences, there are some limitations to using NCVS narratives for this

study's objectives. First, NCVS narratives are not victims' verbatim responses but are instead summary statements transcribed by interviewers based on what respondents say happened. Although interviewers are instructed to record the respondents' answers as accurately as possible (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 2000, B3 237-53), there is no guarantee that they do so. A second limitation of the NCVS narratives is that they are often sparse in terms of contextual detail. For instance, many of the narratives do not sufficiently explain what happened leading up to an attack or afterward, and many are rather vague in their explanations of why the respondents thought or did what they did. This general lack of consistency in contextual detail makes it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions about what happened beyond what the respondents share with the interviewer.

However, what victims reveal in an interview setting or share with others is itself very telling. In other words, what sticks in people's memories, what they choose to say, and when they choose to remain silent can be intensely informative (Roy 1994, 6). And how people choose to frame potentially embarrassing events often involves a careful selection of wording and impression management in an attempt to showcase themselves in the best possible light. Thus, NCVS narratives provide a unique opportunity to explore both the details of male sexual victimization and the ways in which men demonstrate masculinity.

Comparing Men's and Women's Sexual Victimization Incidents

While the frequency of sexual victimization is certainly far less common for men than for women (i.e., 9 percent of victims of rape and sexual assault are men and 91 percent are women), cross-tabulations of victim characteristics by sex show many similarities between male and female victims (see table 1). For instance, the median age for both male and female victims is twenty-four. Approximately 8 percent of male and female victims are of Hispanic origin. And approximately 50 percent of male and female victims are from households with incomes under $25,000. Indeed, the only statistically significant demographic difference between male and female victims appears to be race. For instance, 33 percent of male victims are non-white, as compared to 17 percent of female victims ($\chi^2 = 5.703$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). And while sexual victimization is primarily an intraracial crime for both men and women, 38 percent of male victims are assaulted by someone of another race, while only 22 percent of women are victims of interracial attacks ($\chi^2 = 4.356$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$).

In addition to victim characteristics, there are also many similarities between men's and women's incident conditions. For instance, physical injuries requiring medical care occur in only about 9 percent of men's incidents, a percentage that is not significantly different from that for women's incidents. A weapon is used in 7 percent of both men's and women's incidents. Neither time nor location of incident significantly varies between men and women (e.g., approximately 65 percent of

Table 1
Sexual Victimization Incidents by Victim Sex

	Base *n*	Sample %	Male % (*n* = 94)	Female % (*n* = 956)
Victim Characteristics				
Age (missing 22)				
Teen (12 to 17)	232	22.6	15.7	23.2
Young adult (18 to 24)	292	28.4	34.8	27.8
Adult (25 and older)	504	49.0	49.4	49.0
Race (missing 525)[a]				
White	431	82.1	66.7	83.1
Non-white	94	17.9	33.3	16.9*
Hispanic origin (missing 534)[a]				
Yes	45	8.7	6.7	8.8
No	471	91.3	93.3	91.2
Household income (missing 583)[a]				
Low, less than 25,000	259	55.5	46.4	56.0
Middle, 25,000 to 74,999	174	37.3	50.0	36.4
High, 75,000 and above	34	7.3	3.6	7.5
Incident conditions				
Offender sex				
Male	995	94.8	54.3	98.7
Female	55	5.2	45.7	1.3***
Number of offenders				
One	1,009	96.1	94.7	96.2
Multiple	41	3.9	5.3	3.8
Racial composition (missing 563)[b]				
Interracial	110	22.6	37.5	21.5
Intraracial	377	77.4	62.5	78.5*
Physical injury requiring medical care				
Yes	128	12.2	8.5	12.6
No	922	87.8	91.5	87.4

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

	Base *n*	Sample %	Male % (*n* = 94)	Female % (*n* = 956)
Weapon used (missing 30)				
Yes	66	6.5	6.5	6.5
No	954	93.5	93.5	93.5
Time of day incident occurred (missing 29)				
Day	383	37.7	35.2	37.7
Night	638	62.3	64.8	62.3
Location (missing 13)				
Home (victim's or offender's)	516	49.1	40.7	50.6
Party or bar	63	6.0	8.8	5.8
Street or outdoors	153	14.6	15.4	14.7
School or work	175	16.7	18.7	16.7
Other	130	12.4	16.5	12.2
Victim drinking (mentions in narrative)[c]				
Yes	54	5.1	12.8	4.4
No	996	94.9	87.2	95.6***
Victim resistance (missing 370)[d]				
Resistance	608	89.4	89.3	89.4
No resistance, gave in	72	10.6	10.7	10.6
Victim–offender relationship (missing 4)[e]				
Stranger	183	17.5	19.1	17.3
Friends	126	12.0	11.7	12.1
Intimate partners	237	22.7	14.9	23.4
Coworkers	126	12.0	22.3	11.0
Classmates	58	5.5	2.1	5.9
Neighbors and roommates	54	5.2	2.1	5.5
Other family	39	3.7	3.2	3.8
Other acquaintances	223	21.3	24.5	21.0*

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

	Base *n*	Sample %	Male % (*n* = 94)	Female % (*n* = 956)
Type of crime				
Rape	287	27.3	20.2	28.0
Attempted rape	145	13.8	8.5	14.3
Sexual assault	618	58.9	71.3	57.6*
Reported to police or officials (by victim)[f]				
Yes	297	28.3	14.9	29.6
No	753	71.7	85.1	70.4**

Note: $N = 1{,}050$.

[a] The large missing values for race, Hispanic origin, and household income are because of reliance on a merging process of National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) narratives with cases accessed from the NCVS Multiyear Incident-Level Data File 1992 to 2000 (ICPSR 3140; http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/nacjds/NCVS). For more methodological detail, see Weiss (2006).

[b] Racial categories were restricted to black and white for purposes of constructing an interracial variable because NCVS collapses "other" races for offender race, and therefore there is no way of knowing if victims and offenders in the "other" racial group were of the same or different races.

[c] Although NCVS asks about offender drinking in its structured questions, information on victims' drinking or drug use was only available from the narratives and thus was coded from mentions of drinking in the narratives.

[d] Resistance combined all mentions of victims' protecting themselves—physical and verbal. The category for no resistance includes no action taken, submitted, or "gave in." A total of 370 narratives contained no information on resistance and were excluded from the analysis.

[e] Victim–offender relationships were operationalized into several categories from both structured responses and narrative detail. Intimate partners consisted of dating partnerships, live-in or cohabiting couples or spouses, and ex-partners.

[f] Reporting to police was combined with reporting to other officials because some of the incidents may not have been considered crimes worth reporting to police but were reported to other authorized people, such as employers, teachers, and so on. In addition, 87 incidents reported to police by others were included as part of the *no* category because of the study's focus on understanding victims' own perceptions and responses.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

men's incidents occur at night, and 41 percent of men's incidents occur in either the victim's or the offender's home). Approximately 89 percent of both male and female victims use some form of resistance strategy in their efforts to thwart an attack. And approximately 95 percent of both men's and women's incidents are perpetrated by only one offender.

However, despite the many similarities between men's and women's experiences outlined above, there are also a few highly significant gendered differences. First, and perhaps not surprising, women are significantly more likely than men to be victims of rape and attempted rape rather than sexual assault ($\chi^2 = 6.72$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$). For instance, 29 percent of men's incidents are defined by NCVS as rapes and attempted rapes, while 42 percent of women's incidents are rapes or attempted rapes. In addition, men are more than three times as likely as women to reveal in their narratives that they were drinking or using drugs prior to an incident ($\chi^2 = 12.298$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). While this finding may simply reflect the fact that more men than women use alcohol and drugs in general, it may also indicate that men are more likely to admit to being sexually victimized when they are intoxicated since alcohol impairs a victim's ability to resist attacks and therefore provides a plausible explanation for how it was possible for men to have been victimized in the first place (especially if the person overpowering them was a woman much smaller in physical stature and strength).

It is most important that while 99 percent of women are sexually victimized by men, only 54 percent of men are victimized by other men, with the remaining 46 percent of men victimized by women ($\chi^2 = 341.274$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). The fact that men are victimized so often by women certainly contradicts cultural stereotypes about women as passive, both physically and sexually, as well as the assumption that men are exclusively the aggressors of sexual violence.

Findings also show two significant differences between men's and women's experiences in terms of victim–offender relationships ($\chi^2 = 16.584$, $df = 7$, $p < .05$). While approximately 18 percent of both men and women are assaulted by strangers, more men than women are assaulted by coworkers (22 percent vs. 11 percent), whereas more women than men are assaulted by intimate partners (23 percent vs. 15 percent). A closer examination of men's incidents by victim–offender relationship (see table 2) suggests that there are also significant relationship differences based on offender sex ($\chi^2 = 22.43$, $df = 7$, $p < .001$). For instance, female-on-male offenses are most likely to be committed by intimates (28 percent of female offenders are intimate partners vs. 4 percent of male offenders), whereas male-on-male offenses are most likely to be perpetrated by strangers (24 percent of male offenders are strangers vs. 14 percent of female offenders) and coworkers (29 percent of male offenders are coworkers vs. 14 percent of female offenders).

A final significant difference between male and female victims of rape and sexual assault has to do with their decisions to report to police and other officials. While 30 percent of women report their sexual victimization incidents to officials, only 15

Table 2
Men's Sexual Victimization Incidents by Offender Sex

	Base *n*	Male Offender % (*n* = 51)	Female Offender % (*n* = 43)
Age (missing 5)			
Teen (12 to 17)	14	22.9	7.3
Young adult (18 to 24)	31	25.0	46.3
Adult (25 and older)	44	52.1	46.3*
Physical injury or weapon used[a]			
Yes	12	17.6	7.0
No	82	82.4	93.0
Victim–offender relationship			
Stranger	18	23.5	14.0
Friends	11	13.7	9.3
Intimate partners	14	3.9	27.9
Coworkers	21	29.4	14.0
Classmates	2	3.9	0.0
Neighbors and roommates	2	3.9	0.0
Other family	3	5.9	0.0
Other acquaintances	23	15.7	34.9***
Type of crime			
Rape	19	21.6	18.6
Attempted rape	8	3.9	14.0
Sexual assault	67	74.5	67.4
Reported to police or officials (by victim)			
Yes	14	21.6	7.0
No	80	78.4	93.0*

Note: $N = 94$. Victim characteristics (Race, Hispanic origin, and household income) and some incident conditions were excluded because of small *n* values from the merging process of National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) narratives with cases accessed from the NCVS Multiyear Incident-Level Data File 1992 to 2000 (ICPSR 3140; http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/nacjds/NCVS).

[a] Physical injury requiring medical care and weapon used were combined to increase *n* values for tests.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

percent of men report their incidents ($\chi^2 = 9.128$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$; see table 1). Because there are no significant differences between men and women in terms of serious injury requiring medical care, men's lower reporting may be more reflective of the difficulty men have recognizing or acknowledging that what happened to them was a reportable crime, particularly when rape and sexual assault are supposed to happen only to women. And while women, too, are often hesitant to report sexual victimization to the police for various reasons that include embarrassment, fear of retaliation, and police distrust (see Fisher et al. 2003; Weiss, forthcoming), men's reluctance may be exacerbated by a sense of shame for not fulfilling their masculine roles that dictate they be in control and take care of matters themselves.

Norms of masculinity (and shame for not conforming to those norms) may especially help to explain men's greater reluctance to report sexual victimization incidents perpetrated by women. For instance, 22 percent of male-perpetrated incidents were reported to authorities, whereas only 7 percent of female-perpetrated incidents were reported ($\chi^2 = 3.919, df = 1, p < .05$; see table 2). While men's greater willingness to report incidents perpetrated by men rather than women may be because of the higher likelihood of serious injuries occurring from male-on male incidents,[5] the numbers also suggest that men may interpret unwanted sexual incidents by other men to be more serious violations, perhaps because female offenders do not threaten their heterosexual identity. Of course, these numbers may also reflect an anticipation of ridicule or stigma from admitting to sexual victimization by women. Men's perceptions, as well as their descriptions of sexual victimization experiences, are discussed further in the following sections.

Examining Men's Sexual Victimization Experiences

An examination of NCVS narratives reveals a wide variation of male sexual victimization experiences, ranging from stranger rape and attempted rape by acquaintances to a full range of sexual assaults including intimate partner "coercion" and unwanted sexual touching in the workplace and public places.[6] The NCVS narratives collectively demonstrate that men are indeed victimized by forced sex, attempted forced sex, and other sex-related incidents much more commonly identified as crimes against women. The following sections provide some specific examples from men's NCVS narratives to illustrate the types and range of male sexual victimization.

Rape and attempted rape. While few men use the term *rape* in their descriptions of what happened to them, NCVS narratives certainly reveal that men experience incidents that fit today's legal definitions of rape and attempted rape. In fact, 20 percent of men's incidents are classified as rape by NCVS, and another 9 percent of men's incidents are classified as attempted rape. While all of these incidents involve forced penetration or attempts, they range in terms of the severity of additional injury. The following narratives depict three of the more severe, or aggravated, sexual attacks described by men. Each of these incidents was perpetrated by other men, and each was severe enough to have involved the police or required medical treatment.

> Respondent was visiting his boyfriend and 4 other roommates in an apartment when he was attacked by all of them with fists and a tire pump. He suffered rape, a black eye and cuts on the back of his neck. He did not resist or call police because he thought he deserved it, and thought he was in love. (16-year-old)

> Stranger attempted to rape him—both were at a friend's apartment. At 2:00 am, respondent woke up, went to the kitchen for a cigarette where a man attempted to fondle him.

> Respondent tried to push away the offender, but was pinned down. Respondent managed to get away before he could be raped. He was scared and ran to the police station, even though he was not fully clothed. Police are still questioning people. Respondent is visibly shaken. (21-year-old)

> Respondent was sexually attacked at a New Year's Eve party by another man he knew, but not well, between 35-40 yrs. old. The respondent went to the hospital for treatment of injuries and was released. (30-year-old)

While the previous narratives depict rather vicious attacks, the majority of men's rapes or attempted rapes resemble more typical "date rapes," incidents that are perpetrated by dates and intimate partners and rarely result in physical injuries aside from forced penetration itself. In addition, while there are certainly incidents of men being sexually coerced by male dates and intimate partners, the vast majority of date rapes described in men's narratives are attributed to girlfriends, ex-girlfriends, or female "friends." For instance, the following narratives describe three scenarios of date rape, all perpetrated by women.

> Respondent brought another student back to his dorm room. Both had been drinking. Foreplay initiated and eventually intercourse without consent took place. The girl coerced him to have sex with her. He told the RA on his floor. He was offered counseling. The incident was not reported to the police. He had no further contact with the girl. (20-year-old)

> Respondent took a skiing trip with a female friend. They both had been drinking. Respondent fell asleep. While sleeping his female friend attacked him, sexually forcing him to engage in unwanted sexual intercourse (rape). He did not report the incident to anyone but tried to deal with it personally. (23-year-old)

> Respondent was in his bedroom at home when his ex-girlfriend who was still living in the house wanted sex and tried to force him (he considered it attempted rape). He defended himself and got her out of his room. He did not report the incident to police. (54-year-old)

Perhaps what is most surprising about men's narratives of date rape is how similar they are to women's experiences of being sexually forced by dates or partners who feel entitled to sex and refuse to take no for an answer. Yet based on assumptions that men, by nature, need and want sex, and because of persistent cultural scripts regarding (hetero)sexuality that cast men as sexual initiators and women as gatekeepers responsible for restraint, men's incidents may seldom be acknowledged as "real" crimes. While part of the reluctance to identify men as rape victims is because of social definitions of gender, reluctance may also be because of an uncertainty of the definitions of rape itself. For instance, despite legal changes in rape statutes, rape is

still assumed to be forced vaginal–penile penetration. Women, lacking a penis, are therefore seen as incapable of raping men. Also, it is a common misconception that if a man has an erection or ejaculates, he must have consented (Kassing, Beesley, and Frey 2005). As the previous NCVS narratives illustrate, women do rape men vaginally and orally by coercing them to have involuntary erections.[7]

Sexual assaults. In addition to men's experiences with rapes and attempted rapes, NCVS narratives also reveal that men are victimized by a broad range of sexual assaults that include incidents in which they are grabbed or touched "inappropriately," sexually threatened, or even "flashed." Indeed, 71 percent of the incidents men reveal to the NCVS are sexual assaults (57 percent of sexual assaults are perpetrated by men and 43 percent by women). The following narratives represent two examples of sexual assaults perpetrated by male strangers.

> Respondent was walking home and was tired. A man pulled up and asked if he wanted a ride. He accepted the ride and got into the vehicle. The offender started asking him if he was sexually active. The offender admitted he was gay and the man asked him to "suck his dick." The offender then grabbed him in the crotch. The respondent pushed him away hard, and because the man was going slow at the time, respondent started to get out. Offender stopped the van to let him out and then pulled away. Respondent did not report the incident. (19-year-old)

> Respondent was returning home from another state, and stopped at a rest area to use the bathroom. An unknown offender was in the rest room and came over to him and grabbed him in the groin area. Respondent knocked offender away and started yelling at him. Respondent left the area, and drove home. He did not report incident to police. (56-year-old)

In addition to male-perpetrated sexual assaults, NCVS narratives also reveal a variety of female-perpetrated incidents that contradict gendered images of sexual victimization that assume women to be the objects of sexual desire and men as the aggressors and voyeurs (Jhally 1995; Kilbourne 1987). Since men are expected to want to see and touch women's bodies anywhere, and anytime, situations such as those demonstrated in the following narratives, where women expose themselves, unexpectedly fondle men, and unabashedly invite sexual activity, challenge accepted gender roles of men as predators and women as prey of the sexual hunt. Clearly, incidents where women are doing the groping and touching and where men are the ones harassed and objectified invert gendered expectations of (hetero)sexuality.

> While respondent was at work, a fellow coworker grabbed his privates at the pop machine. She then pulled her dress over her head and exposed herself. She said "let's go hide on first break." The respondent said "are you crazy; put yourself back together." She did and he walked off. (33-year-old)

> Respondent was fondled by a female at a party. She rubbed her breasts against him. She was about 30-35 years old. Respondent was not injured, and police were not informed. (42-year-old)

While it is unlikely that the men in these previous narratives interpreted what happened to them as criminal, by virtue of revealing these incidents to interviewers within the context of a crime victimization survey it can be inferred that, at the very least, such incidents were not pleasurable experiences for them. Thus, despite the stereotype that men are perpetually ready and able to engage in sex with women, NCVS narratives illustrate various scenarios where men clearly reject and rebuff sexual overtures by women. Taken together, men's narratives repudiate assumptions of women as the exclusive targets of unwanted sexual advances and men as the sole offenders of such indiscretions.

Demonstrating Masculinity

As the previous section demonstrates, men do experience sexual victimization and describe an array of sex-related incidents in their narratives. And while men are clearly sexually victimized at substantially lower rates than are women, within a culture that has been slow to acknowledge male victims of rape or sexual assault, NCVS incidents may vastly underrepresent men's overall sexual victimization experiences. In other words, men who are sexually victimized may not recognize what happened to them as crimes or may be reluctant to admit to being victimized by incidents that are not supposed to happen to "real" men.

For men who do acknowledge sexual victimization and are willing to reveal such incidents to NCVS interviewers, there is a potential of discomfort or embarrassment from revealing situations that contradict the accepted and gendered definitions of such crimes. Thus, during the process of describing potentially emasculating experiences, men may attempt to frame their situations in ways that allow them to repair, reclaim, or reassert masculinity (Mullaney 2007). Two such masculine demonstrations—heavy drinking and fighting—are discussed in the following section.

Too drunk to control the situation. One of the ways in which men can reassert masculinity is to blame their vulnerability for victimization on the consumption of alcohol, essentially providing an explanation for how people who are supposed to be in control at all times could have been (sexually) victimized in the first place. Since alcohol impairs a victim's ability to resist attacks, being drunk provides a plausible explanation for how it was possible for men to be overpowered and unable to defend themselves. Such explanations become particularly relevant when offenders are women who are assumed to be weaker and not very aggressive. In the following narrative examples, the male victims, all young adults, specifically refer to their consumption of alcohol as the reason why they were unable to resist unwanted advances or "control" their situations.

> Respondent was drinking and became intoxicated at a friend's party and fell asleep. While sleeping a female acquaintance sexually forced herself on respondent. Respondent tried to push offender off, but was *unable to control the situation because of his intoxication*. (20-year-old)

> While drunk at a college party, respondent was coerced to have sex with a girl who was also drunk. No injuries and no police. He said *it would not have happened if he hadn't been drunk*. (20-year-old)

> At a friend's home drinking, respondent got drunk. A girl (another guest) started taking his pants off and performed oral sex while respondent was *unable to stop her because he was drunk*. When he woke up, his clothes were off, and the girl was gone. (21-year-old)

By referring to drinking in their narratives, men evoke masculinity in another way. Because heavy (binge) drinking is considered part of the various risk-taking activities encouraged by constructs of masculinity (Carlson 2008; Sabo 2003a, 2003b), men who reveal that they were drinking before they were victimized are able to project a masculine activity that may help counteract the feminine connotations associated with victimization. In other words, a selective emphasis of masculine behavior before, during, and after unwanted sexual incidents can positively affect men's self-presentations and help them to reassert masculinity.[8]

Fighting back. Another masculine behavior that may help men demonstrate masculinity during the disclosure of sexual victimization is fighting back or getting even. Indeed, many men emphasize in their narratives how they successfully fought back and were able to take care of situations themselves, sometimes by violent means. Thwarting an unwanted sexual attack by physical violence allows male victims to demonstrate that they were able to take care of matters in particularly masculine ways. And by emphasizing physical action against their offenders as demonstrated in the following narratives, men are able to disclose victimization without identifying themselves as passive, weak, or "feminine" victims.

> Respondent reports that a male coworker threatened to rape him. *Respondent punched the coworker in the face*. The offender left the area and has not been seen since the incident. (27-year-old)

> Respondent was shopping in a grocery store. Offender, male between 45-55 yrs., approached respondent and asked his help in finding something. Offender then said "you are good looking" and proceeded to sexually express himself. Then, offender slapped respondent on the butt. *Respondent grabbed the offender by the neck and pushed him up against a wall*, and told offender to get lost. (44-year-old)

An examination of men's narratives shows that physical retaliation to sexual threats and attacks are almost exclusively directed against male offenders. The lack of physical redress toward female offenders may reflect the norm that men are not supposed to hit women (ironically often excluding their own intimate partners who "belong" to them). Or it may reflect the additional outrage that heterosexual male victims may feel toward other men who threaten their heterosexuality. In other words, while advances by women may be unwanted and men may feel manipulated or coerced by women, male victims may simultaneously experience some status enhancement by women coming on to them (see Nelson and Oliver 1998). In contrast, being touched, ogled, or sexually forced by another man (specifically when the victim is not gay) increases the threat to the victim's masculine identity. Thus, by physically retaliating, a victim simultaneously denounces that he is gay, affirms that he gets no pleasure from being looked at or touched by another man, and demonstrates masculine strength.

Furthermore, by taking care of incidents and offenders by themselves, men are also demonstrating that they are self-reliant and competent, two additional markers of manhood. In other words, taking care of matters themselves rather than involving outside parties such as the police may be considered a much more masculine response than "snitching" to the authorities or calling others to intervene (Ferguson 2000; Kupers 2001). And it is important that, by taking care of matters themselves, men can avoid the potential embarrassment, stigma, and shame that may await those who report sexual victimization to the police.

The Shame of Sexual Victimization

Few crimes today elicit as much skepticism and victim blaming as do allegations of rape and sexual assault, in large part because of persistent myths that endorse ideas that victims wanted it, deserved it, or precipitated their own sexual assaults (Burt 1980; Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1995; Weiss, forthcoming). For men, the additional ideas that rape and sexual assault happen only to women or that "real" men can't be raped (Davies 2002) further contribute to men's risk of shame and subsequently to their reluctance to disclose unwanted sexual experiences to others. After all, men who are supposed to be strong, virile, and able to protect themselves may simply be too embarrassed to admit that they had been overpowered and forced into submission.

References to shame and embarrassment are evident in several NCVS narratives, mostly in response to why victims did not report their incidents to the police. While there is seldom enough detail to know exactly what it is about an incident that causes men's shame, it is clear that many men are embarrassed by victimization and that their embarrassment, in turn, inhibits them from reporting to police and other officials. For instance, in the following narrative, a man who was assaulted by a male coworker says that the reason he did not contact the police was because he was embarrassed.

> Respondent reported he and a male coworker were having a beer and they went back to coworker's apartment when the coworker came on to him. Respondent was held down by coworker who was a very big guy and took off his pants, and then he started moving down and put his penis in his mouth. Then the coworker made him do it to him. Respondent did not contact police because of *embarrassment*. (33-year-old)

Shame may especially help to explain why men are less willing to report female-perpetrated incidents to authorities than situations perpetrated by other men. For instance, social definitions of (hetero)masculine sexuality expect men to be the pursuers of sex and women to be the pursued. Thus, men admitting that they did not want sex with women or that they were forced to do something sexual by women inverts heterosexual scripts and challenges overall norms of masculinity. This fact, combined with the ideas that women are weak, nonthreatening, and incapable of causing serious injury, may cause men who are overpowered by women and forced to have sex to simply be too embarrassed to report incidents to the police.

The concept of shame is illustrated in the following narrative, where a young man, sexually attacked at a party by two females, indicates that he was too ashamed to report his incident to the police. While the narrative provides little context, the man's shame may be in part because of constructs of male sexuality that assume men are sexually virile enough for multiple women, an idea disseminated in pornography. Of course, the respondent in this narrative also states that he was not hurt by the incident, an additional and reasonable explanation for not reporting an incident to the police. Minimizing injury not only justifies nonreporting (see Weiss, forthcoming) but also is a demonstration of masculinity (i.e., men are supposed to be emotionally stoic and not complain about pain or injury; Kupers 2001; Pollack 2003; Sabo 2003b).

> In March, about 20 miles from home at a party, respondent was sexually attacked by two white females and forced to have sex. Police were not called, since he was not hurt *and he felt ashamed*. (23-year-old)

Another potential reason for men's shame, and certainly a reason that may help to explain men's reluctance to report male-perpetrated incidents to police, is the assumption that men who are raped or sexually assaulted by other men are gay (Doherty and Anderson 2004). Therefore, straight men may fear being labeled as gay, and gay men who are not "out" may fear having their sexual orientation exposed. Meanwhile, self-identified gay men may face homophobic stereotypes that suggest they "wanted it," got pleasure from it, or colluded in their own abuse (Kassing, Beesley, and Frey 2005, 322). In this manner, gay male incidents may especially be trivialized and not taken seriously. The following narrative illustrates one man's reluctance to tell a supervisor about ongoing unwanted sexual advances by a male coworker because of his assumption that, being gay, he would not be taken seriously.

> While at work a coworker on several occasions would try and make sexual advances toward the respondent. He felt so uncomfortable, he finally left the job. *He did not report any of the incidents because "being gay I probably would not have been taken seriously."* (22-year-old)

Certainly, there is a real potential of scrutiny and stigma from reporting unwanted sexual experiences for both male and female victims. Risks include the possibility that victims will not be believed, that their experiences will be trivialized, or that they will be seen as deserving of or will be blamed for provoking their own attacks (Pelka 1995; Weiss, forthcoming). For men, the potential of skepticism may be even greater because of social definitions of sexual violence and ideals of masculinity that deny that real men can be raped. After all, when men report sexual victimization, they are publicly admitting that they were not interested in sex, were unable to control situations, and were not able to take care of matters themselves—all statements that run counter to hegemonic constructs of masculinity. It is not surprising that few men appear to be willing to risk negative scrutiny and potential ridicule.

Conclusion

This study has examined the sexual victimization experiences of men in the general U.S. population. An analysis of NCVS data shows that men experience a wide range of unwanted sexual situations, including rape, attempted rape, and various incidents of sexual assaults. While only 9 percent of sexual victimization incidents revealed to NCVS are perpetrated against male victims, men's victimization incidents are surprisingly similar to women's incidents, in terms of both victim characteristics (e.g., age, Hispanic origin, household income) and incident conditions (e.g., number of offenders, injury, weapon, location, time, resistance). However, there are some significant differences between men's and women's sexual victimization experiences, especially in terms of offender sex and reporting to officials. For instance, men are almost as likely to be sexually victimized by women as by men, whereas only 1 percent of women are victimized by other women. And, once victimized, men are only half as likely as women to report incidents to the police or other authorities.

A closer examination of men's narratives describing what happened reveals a broad range of sexual victimization incidents, including rape by male strangers, attempted rape by female acquaintances, and various unwanted sexual contact by both male and female offenders. An exploration of men's narratives also finds that male respondents sometimes describe their incidents in ways that demonstrate masculinity, most specifically drawing on one of two "masculine" behaviors: getting drunk and fighting back. In the first narrative type, men blame alcohol for their loss

of control and vulnerability. By invoking intoxication, men are able to rationalize their vulnerability to attack while also emphasizing their participation in a risk-taking or "masculine" behavior. In the second narrative type, men emphasize how they fought back against their offenders and were able to take care of matters like "real" men. By emphasizing physical retaliation specifically toward male offenders, men are able to demonstrate a masculine response that also asserts their heterosexuality (i.e., making it clear they are not sexually interested in other men).

Men's narratives also reveal that men are often embarrassed by their experiences and ashamed to report their incidents to the police or other authorities. Perhaps this is not surprising in a society that has been slow to acknowledge male sexual victimization as a real problem and where men who violate codes of masculinity are often negatively sanctioned. After all, "real" men are supposed to be tough, self-reliant, and in control. Moreover, norms of male sexuality expect men to be virile and heterosexual. Thus, admitting to sexual victimization clearly contradicts social definitions of what it means to be a man.

The findings from this study are preliminary, exploratory, and far from exhaustive. Future research is needed for a much more comprehensive understanding of men's sexual victimization experiences. For instance, a more advanced statistical analysis of men's incidents, controlling for age, type of crime, injury, offender sex, and victim-offender relationship, will be necessary to more fully explicate the variables that affect men's experiences and decisions to report to police. In addition, a much more qualitative, in-depth study is necessary to further investigate men's perceptions of their sexual victimization experiences. Indeed, a serious limitation of the NCVS narratives is insufficient detail to help clarify how men really feel about what they have experienced. Future studies that can directly speak with male victims about whether or not they define what happened to them as serious crime and can probe for more details about their physical and emotional injuries will help to better elucidate men's overall experiences, perceptions, and reasons for why they do not report sexual victimization incidents to the police and other officials.

Social implications of the findings from the present study underscore the need to better educate men as well as women about risks of sexual victimization. This means expanding social definitions of sexual violence and dispelling gender stereotypes that obscure recognition of both men as victims and women as offenders. Raising awareness of male rape and sexual assault through education, community services, and scholarship is necessary to expand overall knowledge of sexual victimization beyond its present focus on violence against women. Until practitioners and researchers more readily acknowledge male victims, it is unlikely that men themselves will be readily willing to disclose their unwanted sexual experiences. A collective silence surrounding the topic of male sexual victimization only exacerbates the belief that "real" men cannot be raped.

Notes

1. In another study, Pino and Meier (1999) use National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data to compare men's and women's sexual assaults and reporting behavior. However, because the study draws on data from 1979 to 1987, collected prior to the NCVS redesign, the results cannot be compared to current NCVS data on sexual crime. In addition, there are several studies of male rape and sexual assault in the United Kingdom that look at male rape myths and public perceptions of male rape victims (for an overview, see Davies 2002).

2. Today, most states' rape laws use gender-neutral language as well as broader definitions that include anal and oral penetration as well as insertion of objects. In addition, the FBI's new National Incident Based Reporting System has adopted gender-neutral rape definitions. For instance, forcible rape reads, in part, "the carnal knowledge of a person, forcibly and/or against that person's will" (FBI 2000).

3. The National Violence Against Women (NVAW) Survey also includes men as victims; however, few researchers have analyzed men's incidents from this data set. For notable exceptions, see Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) and Felson and Pare (2005), who include men's rates of sexual assault in their broader examinations of intimate partner violence (using NVAW survey data).

4. Despite the inclusion of teenagers in the sample, the terms *men* and *women* are used in this article to more conveniently refer to the gender of victims.

5. An examination of men's NCVS narratives indicates that male-on-male incidents tend to be accompanied by serious physical injuries more often than female-on-male incidents. However, statistical tests of men's injury or weapon use by offender sex do not show significance, most likely because of small *n* values.

6. NCVS narrative excerpts presented in the following sections have been "cleaned up" for use as examples of men's experiences and demonstrations of masculinity. Clean up included eliminating names of cities and other identifiers, spelling out shorthanded references used by interviewers, and correcting misspellings and grammar. Italics were added for emphasis.

7. Of course, women can also rape men anally with objects. However, none of the NCVS narratives provide examples of such incidents.

8. It is interesting that women who admit to being drunk are often blamed for sexual victimization (Felson and Burchfield 2004; Pitts and Schwartz 1997; Richardson and Hammock 1991), perhaps because getting drunk is seen as reckless behavior that contradicts images of femininity.

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