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The Discovery of Sexual Victimization

In the public's mind, the college campus retains the image of an "ivory tower." It is often said that students graduating from college are now entering the "real world," which implies that campus life is detached from the hard obligations and unpleasant experiences found beyond the school's boundaries. When a heinous crime occurs—a coed is slain or a shooting rampage occurs such as at Virginia Tech—it is shocking not only because of the nature of the offense but also because of the context in which it transpires. Colleges are supposed to be safe havens—places in which young adults mature through scholarly study and by leading social lives in which risky youthful indiscretions, such as drinking too much, do not have enduring consequences. Tragic victimizations thus are unnerving and prompt us to wonder how such things could ever happen "here." Campus crimes have broader disquieting implications as well. After all, if someone can be victimized in the ivory tower, can the rest of us be certain of our safety in our own homes and communities?

The ivory tower stereotype further shapes how serious campus victimizations are explained. These events are not seen as being bred by the college environment itself—as one might say about the crimes whose roots are deeply implanted in the disadvantages and disorganization found in inner-city neighborhoods. Rather, campus crime is typically attributed to individual pathology—that is, to a "disturbed" student who goes on a rampage or to a criminal intruder who ventures onto the campus to victimize the innocent. These offenders are treated as newsworthy precisely because they are perceived as the exception to the rule—as anomalies within the pristine ivory tower of the college campus.

Stereotypes, of course, not only reflect but also distort reality. In particular, the image of the pathological offender diverts attention from the way in which students' victimization might flow from the everyday routines of college life. Marcus Felson (2002, p. 12) reminds us of the fallacy of assuming that crime is always "part of a larger set of social evils, such as unemployment, poverty, social injustice, or human suffering." His routine activity theory suggests that in most settings, it is risky to fail to provide an "attractive target" with an appropriate level of "guardianship." There usually are enough "motivated offenders" located across society to take advantage of such a situation (Cohen & Felson, 1979). This is one reason that theft is prevalent on college campuses (Fisher, Sloan, Cullen, & Lu, 1998). Unthinking students leave books and cell phones unguarded and, when departing their residence hall rooms, leave the door unlocked if not open. Not surprisingly, their property may well be missing when they return (see, more generally, Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2007).

More significantly, this insight helps us to understand why college campuses are social domains conducive to students' sexual victimization, including rape. There are times when coeds walking alone at night are sexually assaulted by a stranger. But beyond these disturbing crimes, the risk of female students' victimization is ingrained in the very fabric of normal college life. Higher educational institutions are places where large numbers of males and females come into daily contact not only in the classroom but also in social settings—in bars, in fraternity or sorority houses, in residence halls, and in apartments at the school's edge. Encounters in these settings are characteristic of most students' lifestyles and might lead to much-welcomed flirting, dates, and intimate relationships. But predictably, this routine, everyday activity also may lead many women into situations—such as being alone in a room with a male student—where they are, to use Felson's terms, an attractive target with no guardianship. In these circumstances, women risk facing unwanted sexual advances that can escalate into assault if not rape. Scholars have used the terms such as *acquaintance rape* and *date rape* to describe this type of rape victimization.

This book explores how sexual victimization makes women unsafe in the ivory tower. When female students embark on a college career, they bear the unwarranted cost of the threat and reality of being raped, sexually assaulted, harassed, and stalked. For many years, this cost remained hidden from public view. Victims were left to suffer in silence; their voices were not heard and their pains were ignored.

As we show in this chapter, however, the sexual victimization of women, including on college campuses, gradually was "discovered." This discovery was hastened by highly publicized prosecutions that raised consciousness—both in society generally and on college campuses—about sexual victimizations in which the perpetrator was not a stranger but known to the victim. Scholars, starting most notably with Mary Koss, also played an integral role in providing empirical data showing the prevalence of female students' victimization. In particular, the finding that many females were being raped sparked demands that colleges do more to protect their coeds. This claim also triggered a countervailing movement, led mostly by conservatives, that attributed the attention accorded women's victimization to a feminist plot to make college campuses politically correct. These commentators accused researchers, such

as Koss, of misreading, if not fudging, their data so as to invent a problem that did not really exist.

Thus, in the pages ahead, we trace this debate—this “culture war”—over women’s sexual victimization. This discussion is the broader context that surrounds any research, including ours, into how college students’ bodies are violated by others. As we move through the remainder of this book, we try to push ideology aside and present empirical evidence on the nature, extent, and consequences of sexual victimization on the nation’s campuses. In so doing, we show that rape and other forms of sexual victimization comprise a real problem that warrants attention and appropriate efforts at prevention.

Before proceeding, let us pause briefly to clarify terminology. First, we are interested in the sexual victimization experiences of female students across postsecondary institutions—from 2-year schools to universities with graduate programs. We use various terms synonymously to refer to this universe of institutions. Most often we call them *colleges*, but at times we utilize terms such as *universities*, *institutions*, and *schools*. Second, we employ the term *sexual victimization* to refer to acts with sexual purpose or content that violates women’s bodies and/or minds. This would include rape and *sexual assault*, a term reserved for unwanted sexual contact that does not involve penetration. Sexual victimization also covers sexual coercion, verbal and visual harassment, and (as we explain in Chapter 7) most stalking behavior. Sexual victimization can be attempted, completed, or threatened. Third, we use the concept of *acquaintance rape* to cover rapes by a perpetrator the victim knows but is neither formally dating nor enmeshed with in an ongoing intimate relationship. The term *date rape* refers to rapes that occur on a date or by a dating partner.

Beyond Real Rape

In 1987, Susan Estrich, then a law professor at Harvard University, published *Real Rape*. Estrich began this volume with a chilling account of a rape she had experienced in 1974, shortly before she entered law school. As she was exiting her automobile in a parking lot, she was abruptly pushed back inside and raped. Her money and car were stolen. When the police arrived, they sized up the situation. Was her account believable? She had no bruises. But her story rang true. She seemed like a “nice girl,” and the perpetrator was a stranger—and a black man at that. They were willing to take her to the police station and have her repeat her story. Later, after a trip to the hospital, she returned to the station to look at mug shots of suspected rapists. Her car was recovered, without tires. Nobody was ever prosecuted for the crime.

Estrich noted that, in a way, she was a fortunate rape victim. “I am lucky because everyone agrees that I was ‘really’ raped. . . . no one doubts my status as a victim. No one suggests that I was ‘asking for it.’ No one wonders, at least out loud, if it was really my fault” (1987, p. 3). This is because she experienced a “real rape”—a sexual penetration to which she “obviously” did not give her consent. A real rape has certain

markers: the perpetrator is a stranger; the act is committed in a public setting; the victim shows signs of resistance or of being overpowered—torn clothes, a bloodied face, bodily bruises.

Ironically, however, Estrich's book was not about real rape. Rather, she conveyed her victimization as a way of illuminating another kind of victimization, which she termed "simple rape." (As noted, others would call this acquaintance or date rape.) Victims of these assaults typically are raped in private settings and by people they know. On the crucial issue of their consent to the sexual act, their testimony that they said "no" often is not sufficient. For victims to be believed, a witness must be present or they must suffer sufficient physical harm that their effort to resist the sexual act cannot be challenged. "To use resistance as a substitute for intent," observed Estrich (1987, p. 96), "unnecessarily and unfairly immunizes those men whose victims are afraid enough, or intimidated enough, or frankly smart enough not to take the risk of resisting physically."

The point of Estrich's book was to show that "a 'simple' rape is a real rape" (1987, p. 7, emphasis added). Her goal was to change the way in which sexual victimization is understood or "socially constructed." In this view, a rape is a crime regardless of whether it is perpetrated by a stranger or an acquaintance, occurs in a private or a public setting, or leaves a woman battered or free of bruises.

This is not to say that the issue of consent is unproblematic. Sexual encounters with acquaintances or dating partners may evolve over an evening's time. Men may misinterpret a woman's willingness to engage in some sexual acts as an expression of her willingness to have intercourse. Cues meant to communicate a lack of consent might not be expressed clearly or fully understood. Research shows that even women who have been legally raped do not always define their nonconsensual sexual victimization as the crime of rape (see, e.g., Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003b; Kahn, Jackson, Kully, Badger, & Halvorsen, 2003).

Nonetheless, this ambiguity on the issue of consent is not a license to ignore that many women, some repeatedly, experience acquaintance or "simple" rapes. As Estrich noted, these victims—and how well they survived a potentially disquieting victimization—matter too. Further, attempts to downplay these nonconsensual victimizations as an "unfortunate misunderstanding" risk nourishing the acceptability of "rape myths." As Chapleau, Oswald, and Russell (2003, pp. 601–602) explain, "rape myths are stereotypical or false beliefs about the culpability of victims, the innocence of rapists, and the illegitimacy of rape as a serious crime" (see also Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). These antisocial beliefs—what criminologists call "techniques of neutralization" (Sykes & Matza, 1957)—give potential perpetrators the justification or permission to engage in forced sex (e.g., "when a woman says 'no' she really means 'yes'"; "she was asking for it").

It is noteworthy that writing in the mid-1980s, Estrich took notice of one positive development. "For the first time," she observed, "colleges are recognizing and trying to deal with date rape on their campuses" (1987, p. 7). To Estrich, "this discovery of date rape is surely an important part of the effort to change the way men and women in our society think about nonconsensual sex." (p. 7). Two decades later, our book is, in a way, a product of this discovery and an attempt to document the extent of the ways in which female college students are sexually victimized.

Sexual Victimization in Context

Estrich's *Real Rape* was not a solitary call for action but part of a larger chorus demanding that female victims be accorded equal protection under the law. Most generally, her book appeared as the civil rights movement was well under way and had expanded its focus beyond racial equality to include gender equality. This campaign argued for the extension of rights to females across social, economic, and political domains—to provide women equal access to higher education, to participation in sports, to employment, and to financial remuneration. Advocates further insisted that the nation's women be free from the control of men not only in public sectors but also in private sectors such as the home and bedroom.

In this latter regard, special efforts were made to recognize and publicize “intimate violence”—the ways in which women were victimized physically in private settings (Gelles & Straus, 1988). Most of this attention was given to domestic violence and to sexual victimization, especially date or acquaintance rape. Writings in this area tended to be informed by three central themes.

First, an attempt was made to show how violence against women, often disquieting in its ruthlessness and effects, had been hidden behind closed doors, rendering victims invisible (Belknap, 1996). In *Domestic Tyranny*, Elizabeth Pleck (1987, p. 182) notes that there “was virtually no public discussion of wife beating from the turn of the century until the mid-1970s.” In the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, the first article on family violence did not appear until 1969, 3 decades after the forum's inception (Pleck, 1987). Similar observations were made about sexual victimization (Brownmiller, 1975; Estrich, 1987; Warshaw, 1988). Second, commentators decried the failure of the criminal justice system to treat women as true victims and to protect them from male perpetrators. The promise of equal protection under the law in the United States was unmasked as an empty promise to half the nation's population. Third, violence against women was portrayed as a fundamental by-product of sex inequality and the sexist beliefs that supported this patriarchal system. Male violence, including rape, was not due to a few pathological “bad apples” but to a “bad barrel” that allowed men to use physical power to maintain control over women and to take what they wanted. Such dominance was so hegemonic that ideology had arisen (such as “rape myths”) that justified women's coercion. In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf (1991, p. 167) expressed this view:

Cultural representation of glamorized degradation has created a situation among the young in which boys rape and girls get raped *as a normal course of events*. The boys may even be unaware that what they are doing is wrong; violent sexual imagery may well have raised a generation of young men who can rape women without even knowing it. (emphasis in the original)

Attributing male violence against women to patriarchy politicized these issues. Showing the extent of, and failure to prevent, females' victimization became feminist causes integral to the women's movement for equal rights. Many women were inspired

not only to write books and articles but also to take to the streets to demand changes. Advances were achieved more quickly in the area of domestic violence, where advocates succeeded in opening shelters for battered women and forcing police departments to arrest male abusers. Sexual victimization, however, also earned attention. Thus, statutes were passed outlawing marital rape (husbands had been legally raping wives with impunity) and the use of past sexual history to discredit rape victims testifying against their perpetrators (rape shield laws). Awareness of date and acquaintance rape also occurred.

This politicization, however, had another consequence. It meant that women's victimization would not be seen as a neutral, bipartisan matter but as part of a culture war between the political left and right. Efforts on college campuses to "raise consciousness" about acquaintance and date rape, to warn that "every man is a potential rapist," and to implement prevention programs were portrayed as radical feminism run amok (Roiphe, 1993). The illumination of wife battering was similarly suspected as a disingenuous leftist attempt to attack the traditional nuclear family in which authoritative fathers worked and nurturing mothers raised children. As Pleck (1987, p. 197) notes:

The New Right identified domestic violence legislation with feminism, which in turn they associated with an attack on "motherhood, the family, and Christian values." They hoped to restore the family as an institution separate from the public world. At the same time, they wanted to win the state over to their own view of morality. This New Right favored federal legislation to outlaw abortion, [to] prohibit teenagers from receiving birth control information, and to reinstate prayer in public schools.

As we will return to fairly soon, the study of sexual victimization, especially acquaintance and date rape, is now always undertaken in a politicized context. Those conducting research risk the criticism that the supposed scientific data they produce are, in reality, a product of their feminist ideology. Because many of those moved to probe the nature and extent of sexual victimization are females if not also feminists, this criticism has a surface appeal. In the end, however, research findings should be assessed based on their scientific merits and not discredited by ad hominem attacks from those harboring alternative political sentiments and, as is often the case, no data of their own.

The Hidden Figure of Rape

On June 3, 1991, the cover of *Time* showed a black and white picture of a college coed, allegedly sexually victimized, partially overlaid with the title, in stunning red, "Date Rape." Inside, the cover story probed how the very concept of rape was being broadened to include this type of sexual victimization (Gibbs, 1991a). Issues around consent were explored. When is it given and not given? When is a "no" really a "no"? It was observed that, while most rapes are never reported, women were now rising up in

protest against their victimization—especially on college campuses (Gibbs, 1991b). This sentiment was captured by the *Time* reporter, Nancy Gibbs (1991a, pp. 48, 49):

Women charge that date rape is the hidden crime; men complain that it is hard to prevent a crime they can't define. Women say it isn't taken seriously; men say it is a concept invented by women who like to tease but not take the consequences. . . . This attitude sparks rage among women who carry scars received at the hands of men they knew. . . . Date rape is not about a misunderstanding, they say. It is not about a woman's having regrets in the morning for a decision she made the night before. It is not about a "decision" at all. Rape is rape, and any form of forced sex—even between neighbors, co-workers, classmates, and casual friends—is a crime.

Time's interest in rapes by dates and acquaintances signaled that this phenomenon had emerged from hiding and was now a public policy issue—something that public officials, from prosecutors to campus officials, could no longer ignore. The national consciousness about such intimate violence, including on college campuses, was heightened by two prominent criminal cases, one transpiring before and the other after the *Time* report.

In 1991, William Kennedy Smith—a member of the celebrated Kennedy clan—was accused of an acquaintance rape. On Good Friday of that year, Smith had sex with a woman, whom he had met that evening at a bar, on the lawn of his Palm Beach home. Bruises, the emotional reaction of the woman, and a lie detector test she took led investigators to believe her charge of rape (Gibbs, 1991a). Three other women claimed that Smith previously had assaulted them, but their testimony was not allowed at the December trial. With the nation's attention riveted on this case, Smith was found not guilty.

The outcome for Mike Tyson, former heavyweight boxing champion, was not so sanguine. In July of 1991, Tyson was accused of luring Desiree Washington, the 18-year-old Miss Rhode Island participant in the Miss Black America pageant, into his Indianapolis hotel room. He claimed that he was explicit in his intent—what he wanted sexually—from the moment they met that afternoon at a publicity event. She countered that she was awakened by his telephone call later in the evening (1:36 a.m.) and enticed into his limousine with the promise of making rounds at parties populated by celebrities. With no witnesses or compelling physical evidence (she waited 24 hours to report the assault), the outcome hinged on the jury's judgment of whom to believe. He was portrayed as a predator; she was portrayed as someone who taught Sunday school and was an honor student. But small factors seemed influential. Before heading to Tyson's limousine, she had grabbed her camera. Who, jury members wondered, would bring a camera to an impending sexual rendezvous? In the end, in February of 1992, Tyson was convicted (Nack, 1992). He would serve 3 years in prison.

In the intervening years, other celebrated accusations of rape, including on college campuses, would grab national attention and increase consciousness about sexual victimization: Kobe Bryant's tryst with a resort employee in Eagle, Colorado; the Duke University lacrosse team scandal; the sexual victimization of female cadets at the Air

Force Academy; and so on. These cases are important for their dialectical quality. They reflect a social context and awareness that make them possible, but they also nourish the conditions that make future investigations and cases likely. Still, in the end, disclosures of alleged sexual misconduct are only suggestive. They are the smoke that indicates that a fire must be raging unseen and underneath—hidden from full public view. But they do not prove that a given problem is sufficiently disquieting to warrant special policy consideration.

Determining the true dimensions and seriousness of a potential social problem thus must move beyond the telling of “atrocious tales” to the collection of hard data—of objective statistical estimates based on rigorous scientific research (see Best, 1990). The stubborn reality, however, is that developing reliable estimates of sexual victimization is a daunting challenge. One option might be to rely on crimes reported to the police, which are compiled and published annually by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in *Crime in the United States: Uniform Crime Reports* (UCR). As is well known, because most rape victims do not report their victimization, such “official statistics” vastly underestimate the extent of the problem. That is, many such offenses remain hidden from law enforcement officials and thus never appear in the FBI’s yearly volume. Another option might be to rely on the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which asks a sample of the public if they have been victimized, specially asking about rape and sexual assault. Victimization surveys have their own methodological difficulties, but they are designed to capture offenses people experience but do not report to law enforcement officials. In the case of rape and sexual assault, however, the questions on the NCVS have serious limitations that prevent their yielding reliable estimates. We discuss this matter in more detail in Chapter 2.

Specially Designed Victimization Surveys

Given that existing national data collected by the U.S. federal government did not allow for reliable estimates of sexual victimization, what could researchers do? Methodological barriers are, in a sense, the mother of invention. Thus, to capture the “hidden figure” of rape and other types of sexual victimization, scholars developed a third approach: they designed self-report surveys specifically devoted to measuring this realm of victimization.

Notably, early attempts at such surveys date back to at least the 1950s. Research at this time by Clifford Kirkpatrick and Eugene Kanin (1957; Kanin, 1957), for example, attempted to define and empirically measure “erotic aggressiveness” or “erotic offensiveness” by males against females in dating-courtship relationships on a university campus. Their methods are still relevant to today’s sexual victimization research.

They developed and distributed a self-report “schedule” to female students enrolled in one of 22 “varied” university classes during the academic year (September 1954 to May 1955). Their questionnaire distinguished five degrees of erotic aggressiveness: attempts at (1) “necking,” (2) “petting above the waist,” (3) “petting below

the waist,” (4) “sex intercourse,” and (5) “sex intercourse with violence or threats of violence.” The questions focused on the extent to which the respondents were “offended” by intimacy level, frequency, and number of men during the academic year (Kirkpatrick & Kanin, 1957, p. 53). In essence, this was a victimization survey. Among the 291 female students, they found that a large portion had experienced a sexual victimization. During the academic year, 55.7% of women reported being offended at least once at some level of erotic intimacy, with 6.2% stating that they had been subjected to “aggressively forceful attempts at sex intercourse in the course of which menacing threats or coercive infliction of physical pain were employed” (p. 53).

Given that their investigation was undertaken in the 1950s, Kirkpatrick and Kanin’s research did not trigger a movement to study women’s sexual victimization. In fact, their work was largely neglected until rediscovered 2 decades later when, sensitized to females’ victimization by a changed social context, scholars returned to this topic. Still, their research is important in showing a finding that would tend to be repeated in later studies: specially designed surveys generally reveal that sexual victimization is not a rare event and is more widespread than found by the FBI’s official crime statistics and by the NCVS’s sexual victimization estimates.

Much of the sexual victimization research—including Kirkpatrick and Kanin’s and the research of those that would follow—has been conducted using college student samples, in part because of their convenience and in part because this is a social domain in which such victimization is elevated. In contrast, Diana Russell (1982) undertook a now-classic project that surveyed adults living in the community. Thus, she randomly selected 930 adult female residents in San Francisco from a probability sample of households. Sixty-four percent of the original sample of 2,000 completed the interview. Sensitive to the possible effects of the gender of the interviewer, Russell employed professionally trained female interviewers; their race and ethnicity were matched to those of each respondent. Whenever possible, she had them interview selected respondents in person and in a private setting. The interviews were conducted during the summer of 1978.

Several features of this study are noteworthy because they informed subsequent investigations—including the pathbreaking study of Mary Koss and our own research (both of which are discussed later). First, previous research had provided respondents, if at all, with only a brief or ambiguous definition of rape. In contrast, Russell’s definition of rape was patterned after the legal definition of extramarital rape in California as “forced intercourse (e.g., penile-vaginal penetration) or intercourse obtained by threat of force, or intercourse completed when a woman was drugged, unconscious, asleep, or otherwise totally helpless and hence unable to consent” (1982, p. 84).

Second, Russell sought to measure whether a person had been raped by using several “behaviorally specific” questions with respect to rape (e.g., “38 questions on sexual assault and abuse,” p. 85). A behaviorally specific question is one that does not simply ask, “Have you been raped?” Rather, it describes a victimization incident in graphic language that covers the elements of a criminal offense (e.g., someone “physically forces you . . . to have sexual intercourse”). Notably, researchers have found that when surveys use multiple, behaviorally specific questions, the respondents disclose

more sexual victimization (see Crowell & Burgess, 1996, p. 35). Her approach thus shaped the content of the questions employed in the most significant surveys that later scholars would develop. So that the nature of behaviorally specific questions is clear, we present the examples of items used on Russell's survey in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Examples of Russell's Questions Used to Elicit Experiences of Rape or Attempted Rape¹

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1. Did a _____² ever physically force you, or try to force you, to have any kind of sexual intercourse (besides anyone you've already mentioned)?
 2. Have you ever had any unwanted sexual experience, including kissing, petting, or intercourse with a _____² because you felt physically threatened (besides anyone you've already mentioned)? IF YES: Did [³] (any of them) either try or succeed in having any kind of sexual intercourse with you?
 3. Have you ever had any kind of unwanted sexual experience with a _____² because you were asleep, unconscious, drugged or in some other way helpless (besides anyone you've already mentioned)? IF YES: Did [³] (any of them) either try or succeed in having any kind of sexual intercourse with you?
 4. At any time in your life, have you even been the victim of a rape or attempted rape?
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SOURCES: Fisher and Cullen (2000); Russell (1982).

NOTES:

1. Russell only provided the wording for these four of her 38 questions.
2. The interviewers asked the respondents these questions three times: first about strangers, second about acquaintances or friends, and third about dates, lovers, or ex-lovers.
3. Russell used the pronoun he here because she had already asked the respondents about any unwanted sexual experiences with females.

Third, for every episode of rape and attempted rape elicited, the interviewer administered a separate questionnaire. Included was a "description of the assault sufficiently detailed to ensure that one of the criteria for defining the assault as a rape or attempted rape had been met" (Russell, 1982, p. 86). Fourth, for the first three questions in Table 1.1, she asked if they had been perpetrated by (1) strangers; (2) acquaintances or friends; and (3) dates, lovers, or ex-lovers.

Russell's development and use of behaviorally specific questions based on the legal criteria for rape set a new standard for the operationalization of rape—one that the best of subsequent research would build on. Her approach potentially reduced measurement error inherent in previous studies. Thus, the use of a legal-based definition of rape meant that she was likely to have assessed victimizations that would qualify legally as a crime. The use of behaviorally specific questions both increased the likelihood that respondents would be cued to victimization incidents that had occurred

and diminished the likelihood that respondents would “read into” and thus differentially interpret the victimization questions they were asked to answer. Russell suggested the importance of using follow-up questions to further explore or to “confirm” responses to initial questions about sexual victimization experiences, thus minimizing the possibility of counting as rape incidents those that did not qualify legally for this categorization. Finally, by asking about victimizations perpetrated not only by strangers but also by intimates, she potentially cued respondents to include acquaintance and date rapes that might otherwise have gone unreported to the interviewer.

All these factors—the number of questions asked, the manner in which they were presented, and her follow-up questions—likely contributed to Russell’s reported rape estimates (1982, p. 85). She found that 41% of the women reported experiencing at least one completed or attempted extramarital rape during their lifetime. This was a remarkable discovery; it suggested that 4 in 10 women would experience the risk of rape in their lives.

Russell also explored victimization experiences over the past year (12 months prior to interview). In this limited time, 3% of the women reported that they had experienced a completed rape or attempted rape. Further, Russell was among the first researchers to compare her survey results with those reported in the FBI’s UCR and the NCVS (then called the National Crime Survey) and to question why statistical discrepancies existed. She tried, for example, to make her incidence rape rates as comparable as she could to the UCR and the NCVS rates. She reported that her rates were higher than both the UCR and the NCVS. Although Russell’s rape estimation and extrapolation procedures and her response rate have been criticized, this critical line of thinking about government-produced “official” rape estimates helped to give direction to future researchers (see Gilbert, 1997, pp. 121–123).

Koss’s Sexual Experiences Survey

In 1976, Mary Koss started her career by exploring a new area of research, which she referred to as “hidden rape.” At that time, the term *date rape* had not been coined. In part, this was, as Koss (1988a, p. 189) later noted, because “there was no convincing evidence that rape or rape-like behavior occurred among ‘normal’ people.” In 1978, she received federal funding to undertake her first research project on this topic. She surveyed 4,000 students attending Kent State University in Ohio, the college where she was an assistant professor. She investigated college students largely for reasons of convenience—that is, for their ready accessibility. But it would prove a wise choice. “As it turns out,” Koss observed, “this ‘decision’ to use college students was fortuitous because the college years happen to coincide with the greatest period of risk for rape” (p. 190).

Koss’s research eventually was described in a piece on date rape in the feminist publication *Ms. magazine*. It was “the first national magazine article to address this issue” (1988a, p. 190). Subsequently, editors at *Ms.* approached Koss about conducting a national study that would assess sexual victimization more widely and thus present a

truly complete portrait of the risks female students faced. In 1983, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) agreed to sponsor the study, but only on the condition that the survey “be scientific, not politicized or sensational” and nationally representative. To guard against any biases creeping into the project, a separate company was employed to “design a plan for choosing a group of schools that would fairly represent the diversity of higher education settings and students” (p. 190). Recall that this potentially controversial, federally sponsored study was being undertaken during the administration of President Ronald Reagan, who inspired the rebirth of conservative politics.

One of Koss’s major contributions to this investigation, which would take 3 years to plan and finish, was her measure of sexual victimization called the Sexual Experiences Survey. This instrument is now widely known in the field by its acronym: the SES. It was this measure that would be used to estimate, in particular, the extent to which college women had experienced rape and attempted rape. The findings would prove controversial—taken by feminists as evidence of the serious risks women faced and by critics as evidence that exaggerated the problem of rape so as to serve political ends. Below, we describe the nature of the SES and of Koss’s findings. In the following section, we examine more fully the controversy her study inspired.

WHAT THE SEXUAL EXPERIENCES SURVEY (SES) MEASURES

In her first study at Kent State University, Koss had developed an initial version of the SES (Koss & Oros, 1982). With her colleagues, she revised this initial scale for her national-level study sponsored by *Ms.* and the NIMH (Koss & Gidycz, 1985; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). The SES was composed of the 10 questions presented in Table 1.2. The respondents were instructed to answer “yes” or “no” to each of them. These items were intended to measure a range of sexual aggression a woman might have experienced, including completed rape and attempted rape. Specifically, let us describe what the SES assessed:

- *Sexual Contact*: a yes response to Questions 1, 2, or 3.
- *Sexual Coercion*: a yes response to Questions 6 or 7.
- *Attempted Rape*: a yes response to Questions 4 or 5.
- *Completed Rape*: a yes response to Questions 8, 9, or 10.

The respondents were classified according to the highest degree of sexual victimization that they reported (e.g., if a person answered “yes” to Questions 2 and 9, she was counted as experiencing rape and not sexual contact). Note that two of the types of sexual victimization on the SES are criminal—completed rape and attempted rape—and one is not—sexual coercion. Sexual contact may be criminal (Question 3) or not (Questions 1 and 2), depending on whether the offender used physical force. In any

Table 1.2 Sexual Experiences Survey (SES)

1. Have you given in to sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because you were overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure?
2. Have you had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because a man used his position of authority (boss, teacher, camp counselor, supervisor) to make you?
3. Have you had sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting, but not intercourse) when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?
4. Have you had a man attempt sexual intercourse (get on top of you, attempt to insert his penis) when you didn't want to by threatening or using some degree of force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.), but intercourse *did not* occur?
5. Have you had a man attempt sexual intercourse (get on top of you, attempt to insert his penis) when you didn't want to by giving you alcohol or drugs, but intercourse *did not* occur?
6. Have you given in to sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because you were overwhelmed by a man's continual arguments and pressure?
7. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man used his position of authority (boss, teacher, camp counselor, supervisor) to make you?
8. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man gave you alcohol or drugs?
9. Have you had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?
10. Have you had sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) when you didn't want to because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you?

SOURCE: Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987).

event, the salient point is this: by incorporating all of these types of sexual victimization, Koss's work could provide insights on experiences that may not be criminal but nonetheless victimize women.

Importantly, similar to Diana Russell's study, Koss employed *behaviorally specific* language in the SES to measure the specific types of sexual victimization. According to

Koss (1993a, p. 209), the use of behaviorally specific questions places “before the respondent detailed scenarios for the type of experiences the interviewer seeks to identify.” Thus, rather than ask a respondent “have you been raped?” the SES used graphic, descriptive language. See, for example, Question 9 in Table 1.2. It starts off by asking: “Have you ever had sexual intercourse when you didn’t want to?” This establishes penetration and lack of consent. Question 9 then proceeds to make clear that the lack of consent was due to physical coercion: “because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force.” It then closes by defining physical force so that the respondent is aware as to what such force might entail: “(twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to make you.”

As noted, measuring a complex act, such as rape, through a survey instrument is quite difficult. In a thoughtful way, however, Koss was using an advanced approach to try to minimize the likelihood that a respondent would misunderstand what was being asked. In methodological terms, Koss was employing descriptive, behaviorally specific items to reduce measurement error. Using a more general statement that merely asks about being “raped” is open to diverse interpretations. What the investigator and the respondent each believes falls under the umbrella of this concept may be quite different. Indeed, in her study, Koss (1989) found that nearly three-fourths of college women who met the legal definition for rape failed to use this term as the label for their experiences.

In this latter regard, Koss wished to avoid the claim that she might bias the results by allowing her own definition of what constitutes a rape to creep into the SES. She wisely defined rape according to the 1980 Ohio Revised Code. Thus, the rape questions in the SES (Questions 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10 in Table 1.2) are explicit as to the legal criteria for rape: type of penetration, force or threat of force, and no consent. To operationalize penetration, Koss used the term *sexual intercourse* and, as can be seen in Question 4 that measures attempted rape, the respondent was told exactly what this means (“get on top of you, attempt to insert his penis”). To measure other forms of penetration that the Ohio rape law also encompasses, the SES asked about experiencing “sex acts—anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis” (see Question 10). Force or threat of force was operationalized as physical force, and examples were provided for the respondent (e.g., “twisting your arm”; see Question 9). Lack of consent was defined for the respondent as “when you didn’t want to” (for example, see Question 8).

The details of the SES might at first seem tedious, but these intricacies had crucial implications. Koss and her colleagues were attempting to develop sound estimates of how much sexual victimization the college women in their sample had experienced. In any scientific study, the results can be due either to *empirical reality* or to *methodological artifact*. If the methods used are rigorous, then we have confidence that the study has produced results that reflect the empirical reality of what actually is happening in the real world. If the methods used are flawed, our confidence diminishes, and we have reason to worry that the study has produced results that reflect biased methods and not objective reality. In this instance, the key methodological issue was *measurement*. Was it possible to develop a scale that could accurately measure the extent of sexual victimization—experiences that were rarely disclosed to local police or campus officials?

Indeed, much was at stake in Koss's investigation. She was attempting to decipher whether the sexual victimization of college women, including rape and attempted rape, was a serious or a trivial problem. If Koss's study yielded the conclusion that a substantial proportion of these women were being victimized, it would be a bombshell. It would suggest that she had uncovered a serious issue that hitherto had been hidden from public view. It would raise questions about why women were being subjected to such aggression and why nobody was doing much to address it.

WHAT DID KOSS FIND?

As noted, Koss and her colleagues conducted a national-level study of college women. They used a two-stage sampling design to choose schools and then students. In the first stage, to select schools, they used a cluster sampling design to sample every Xth cluster, according to the portion of total enrollment accounted for by the region. Ninety-three colleges and universities were selected; 32 agreed to participate. Then, in the second stage, from these schools, classes were randomly selected into the sample (for the details of the sampling design, see Koss et al., 1987, pp. 163–165). The 10-question SES was part of a 330-question self-report questionnaire titled the “National Survey of Inter-Gender Relationships.” It was administered by post-master's degree psychologists (men and women) to those students who attended the selected classes that day. The response rate was 98.5%. The study was conducted during the 1984–1985 academic year.

Koss measured sexual victimization during two periods in women's lives. First, to estimate the prevalence of sexual victimization, she asked the respondents about their experiences *since age 14*. Second, to obtain 1-year estimates, she asked respondents about their experiences *since the previous academic year*, from September to September (for freshmen, this would have been their senior year in high school). The first measure thus probed sexual victimization since moving into the teenage years when dating was likely to begin. The second measured assessed the likely experiences of the respondents while they were college students.

What did Koss find? We present her results first for the prevalence of sexual victimization since age 14:

- More than half of the women (53.7%) reported some form of sexual victimization since age 14.
- Nearly 15% (14.4%) had experienced sexual contact.
- More than one in ten (11.9%) had experienced sexual coercion.
- A bit more than that (12.1%) had experienced attempted rape, and 15.4% had been raped.
- Taken together, these latter two figures meant that since age 14, more than one in four members of the sample (27.5%) had suffered a victimization that met the state of Ohio's legal definition of rape.

And what was the extent of victimization in the 1-year period?

- Almost half (46.3%) of the women experienced some form of sexual victimization in the past year.
- More than one in five (23.2%) had experienced sexual contact.
- More than one in ten (11.5%) had experienced sexual coercion.
- One in ten (10.1%) had experienced an attempted rape, and 6.5% had been raped.
- Taken together, these latter two figures meant that in the past year, 16.6% of the sample had suffered a victimization that met the State of Ohio's legal definition of rape.
- This also meant that the 1-year rate for attempted and completed rape was 166 per 1,000 students. Concretely, a college of 10,000 female students would have, *in any one year*, an estimated 1,666 rape victims walking its campus.

Koss also wondered how her results compared with the major national victimization study administered by the federal government. Again, this is now known as the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS); then it had the slightly shorter title of the National Crime Survey (NCS). To avoid a biased comparison, Koss and her colleagues (1987) recalculated their data to include only those incidents that met the definition of rape employed by the NCS, which limited rape to penile-vaginal penetration (and excluded acts such as oral and anal intercourse and sexual intercourse made possible by intentionally incapacitating a victim). Even under this more restrictive definition, Koss et al. (1987, p. 168) concluded that the rape victimization rate computed from their survey was “10–15 times greater than rates that are based on the NCS.” This finding was truly startling, for it suggested that rape victimization was extensive and thus a serious social problem.

In essence, Koss was arguing that using behaviorally specific, legally based measures of sexual victimization captured an empirical reality masked in previous studies that were plagued by methodological artifacts. Methodological details, conveyed in the section of research articles and books that readers often skip, were placed by Koss at the center of the debate over how many women were raped or otherwise sexually victimized. Good measurement, she showed, revealed a disquieting reality: many women were raped and victims of other types of sexual victimization, and most of these victimizations had remained hidden from public view.

One in Four: Publicizing the Rape Epidemic

Koss's national Sexual Experiences Survey quickly earned—and we believe richly deserved—the status as a classic social science study. In each generation, there are only a few empirical works that not only are of high quality but also define how other scholars will pursue a line of inquiry. Koss's work did so. The SES, and subsequent

modified versions of it, would be used in many sexual victimization studies both inside and outside the United States (see, e.g., DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998; Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1985; Schwartz & Pitts, 1995).

But unlike most academic research, Koss's findings did not remain buried in the arcane, if not musty, pages of an obscure academic journal. Due to its involvement in Koss's study, *Ms.* magazine reported the findings in an article authored by Ellen Sweet (1985). This article carried the title "Date Rape," again using a term that was still sufficiently unfamiliar at this time to be eye-catching. The subtitle was even more telling, because it pointed to the real message of Koss's research: "The Story of an Epidemic and Those Who Deny It."

Sweet begins her piece with a story about a woman she calls Judy, who was a junior at Yale University when sexually assaulted:

Once we were inside, he kissed me. I didn't resist. I was excited. He kissed me again. But when he tried for more, I said no. He just grew completely silent. I couldn't get him to talk to me any more. He pinned me down and ripped off my pants. *I couldn't believe it was happening to me.* (p. 56; emphasis in the original)

Given the dearth of awareness of date rape at the time, Judy's reaction was not anomalous. There is "so much silence that surrounds this kind of crime," observed Sweet, "that many women are not even aware that they have been raped" (p. 56). Few victims, including Judy, notify the police; many blame themselves. According to Sweet, "as long as such attacks continue to be a 'hidden' campus phenomenon, unreported and unacknowledged by many college administrators, law enforcement personnel and students, the problem will persist" (p. 57). How can this silence be pierced? Research is an invaluable weapon. "Statistics alone will not solve the problem of date rape," Sweet noted, "but they could help bring it out into the open" (p. 58). Sweet thus pointed to the disquieting results of Koss's "*Ms. Study.*" These hard facts illuminated the "epidemic" of hidden date rape: "One quarter of women in college today have been victims of rape or attempted rape, and almost 90 percent of them knew their assailants" (p. 58).

Koss's study was publicized even more widely by a popular trade book, based on her data, by reporter Robin Warshaw (1988). The title, *I Never Called It Rape*, echoed the themes of the *Ms.* article, conveying the message that many women who were raped were still unaware about their right not to be coerced into sex. There was a need to puncture rape myths and to raise the consciousness of women, especially those victimized sexually who were prone to self-blame. The back cover of the book carried the message that this was a "ground-breaking report on the hidden epidemic of date and acquaintance rape"; the book would offer "essential new information and insight along with avenues for prevention and healing." Indeed, Warshaw saw her volume as a call to action. Thus, she subtitled her work, *The Ms. Report on Recognizing, Fighting and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape.*

Most telling, Warshaw memorably captured the essence of Koss's work by voicing this key finding: "1 in 4 women surveyed were victims of rape or attempted rape." (p. 11). Recall that in the *Ms.* article, Sweet had highlighted the same finding. This take-away statistic was easily remembered and thus would often be repeated in academic

writings and popular discourse. In many ways, it became an unquestioned social fact—a reality that seemed based on science and that was not to be challenged.

No research, however, should be so easily accepted. A core norm of science is “organized skepticism” (Merton, 1973). Journal articles, such as Koss’s, have a good measure of credibility; after all, they are not mere opinion but are based on a field’s research standards and must pass peer review before earning publication. Still, organized skepticism is an invaluable prescription because it guards against uncritically accepting findings that conform to our preexisting biases. The challenge in science is to probe for a study’s potential weaknesses so as to illuminate the next set of investigations that might use more finely calibrated ways of studying the phenomenon—in this case sexual victimization.

Unfortunately, this did not occur. Koss’s SES was perhaps too readily accepted as a sacrosanct scale for measuring sexual victimization—to be used without question by subsequent researchers rather than subjected to methodological scrutiny. Her findings often were accepted uncritically because they provided a portrait of empirical reality that many readers, especially those with feminist leanings, “knew to be true”—that is, that many women were victims of male sexual aggression. At this point, her followers did not wish to waste time on additional studies or to question the intricacies of Koss’s methods. Rather, for them, the 1-in-4 finding meant that an urgent, hitherto hidden crisis was continuing unabated. With so many women at risk of sexual victimization—an untreated “epidemic” in Warshaw’s words—it was time to act; it was time to take to the streets and to insist that programs be implemented to halt the violence being imposed on women.

In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that Koss’s research, when it was subjected to critical scrutiny, would be accused of being hopelessly biased by her supposed feminist ideology. However, whatever her political sentiments, these should not be conflated with the rigorous science underlying her study, especially with regard to the measurement of sexual victimization. Although Koss’s work had its weaknesses—what study does not?—these were not inspired by her ideology. From the inception of her project, her commitment was to using the best methods available to measure the sexual experiences of women. Nonetheless, Koss would be pulled into a broader culture war in which her view of reality would be stridently challenged.

Two Critiques

Mary Koss contributed to the discovery of sexual victimization by furnishing rigorous scientific evidence that estimated the extent of the problem. Her study gained credence because scientific data are hard to dispute. It is one thing to claim that there is a problem; it is quite another to provide empirical data firmly demonstrating its existence and magnitude. In the subsequent years, two serious criticisms of her work and, more generally, of claims of an epidemic of sexual victimization on college campuses would appear—one by Neil Gilbert and another by Katie Roiphe. Defenders of Koss’s SES and of her study have depicted Gilbert and Roiphe as conservative scholars with

their own hidden agenda. Although we are more sympathetic to Koss's position, we also believe that issues raised by Gilbert and Roiphe are legitimate and warrant careful consideration.

GILBERT: THE DANGERS OF ADVOCACY RESEARCH

In a more general analysis of “problems” that, on closer inspection, prove unfounded, Barry Glassner (1999) suggests that Americans are often “afraid of the wrong things” and thus are enmeshed in a “culture of fear.” In this context, Neil Gilbert accuses feminist scholars of engaging in an ideologically inspired social construction of reality that is meant to spread fear about sexual victimization. He argues that feminist investigations are an example of “advocacy research.” In its most “honorable” form, advocacy researchers engage in “studies that seek to measure social problems, heighten public awareness of them, and recommend possible solutions” (Gilbert, 1997, p. 101). In his view, this “standard of advocacy . . . has eroded since the 1960s” (p. 103). Now, to call attention to their favorite concerns, advocates use “emotive statistics—startling figures that purport to uncover ‘hidden crises’ and ‘silent epidemics’” (pp. 104–105). According to Gilbert, feminist researchers, such as Mary Koss, are exemplars of this practice. After all, have not they purported to uncover that “hidden rape” is of epidemic proportions? Are not they the ones who claim that one in four college women have experienced rape or attempted rape?

Gilbert (1997, p. 123) contends that ostensibly high rates of rape are an artifact of faulty measurement strategies that, among other things, define “a problem so broadly that it forms a vessel into which almost any human difficulty can be poured.” The feminists’ goal, he argues, is to show that sexual victimization is so pervasive that it must reflect structures of inequality in society—inequality that, in turn, is in need of fundamental social change. “They tend not only to see their client group’s problems as approaching epidemic proportions but to attribute the underlying causes to oppressive social conditions—such as sexism,” observes Gilbert (1997, pp. 112–113). “If 5 percent of females are sexually abused as children, the offenders are sick deviants; if 50 percent are sexually abused as children, the problem is the way that males are regularly socialized to take advantage of females.”

Once again, then, we return the issue of methodology—that seemingly mundane, if not boring, part of social science that, in this case, is the source of vigorous, if not inflammatory, dispute. Thus, Gilbert’s (1991, 1992, 1997) central thesis is that Koss’s research, based on the SES, is erected on *faulty measurement* that has exaggerated the extent of rape. He contends further that her findings have been uncritically accepted because they reinforce feminist notions that entrenched patriarchal relationships in America generate widespread sexual exploitation of women. Gilbert rests his case on two main charges.

First, of the five questions in the SES used to measure rape, two involved a man attempting or completing forced intercourse “by giving you alcohol or drugs” (see Table 1.2). Koss used this phrasing to operationalize those acts that qualify as rapes under the Ohio Revised Code, which reads “for the purpose of preventing resistance

the offender substantially impairs the other person's judgment or control by administering any drug or intoxicant to the other person" (Koss et al., 1987, p. 166). Notably, 44% of the rape victims in Koss's study were counted as victims because they answered "yes" to these two questions that involved rape accomplished through purposeful intoxication.

Gilbert characterizes these two rape questions as "awkward and vaguely worded" because they lack any notion of the man's intention, how much alcohol the respondent ingested, and whether the alcohol or drugs led the respondent not to offer her consent. For example, what does having sexual intercourse with a man because he "gave you drugs or alcohol" mean? Did he order a beer or wine for the respondent? Was the respondent too intoxicated to consent to sexual intercourse (Gilbert, 1991, p. 59)? Gilbert goes so far as to suggest that perhaps "the woman was trading sex for drugs, or perhaps a few drinks lowered her inhibitions so that she consented to an act that she later regretted" (1997, p. 116). He contends that the question could have been worded more clearly to denote "intentional incapacitation of the victim" (1997, p. 117). The larger point, of course, is that an unknown number of respondents might have answered "yes" to these two items even though their sexual experiences did not qualify legally as a rape (see also Muehlenhard, Sympson, Phelps, & Highby, 1994).

Second, Gilbert questions more fundamentally whether the SES items developed by Koss and associates are, in any methodologically rigorous way, capable of validly measuring rape victimization. Two troubling anomalies are found in Koss and associates' data. First, nearly three-quarters (73%) of the women categorized as rape victims in the study did not, when asked, believe they had been raped. Second, about 4 in 10 women counted by Koss as rape victims stated that they subsequently had sexual relations with the person who had purportedly raped them (Gilbert, 1997, p. 116). Gilbert argues that it is highly unlikely that such a large portion of college-educated women would be so uninformed or sexually inexperienced as (1) to misinterpret when they had, in fact, been raped and/or (2) to become involved again with a "rapist." The more plausible interpretation, contends Gilbert, is that Koss's SES is hopelessly flawed, cueing respondents to answer "yes" to questions measuring rape even though the nature of their sexual experience would not, if examined in detail, qualify legally as a rape.

Koss has offered reasonable rebuttals to Gilbert's criticisms. For example, Koss and Cook (1993) note that even when the two items involving rape due to alcohol and drugs are removed from statistical calculations, the extent of rape in Koss's sample remains disquietingly high (9.3% of the sample experiencing, in one year, attempted or completed rape). Further, Koss does not find it so implausible that many women, raised with a limited conception of rape as involving only attacks by strangers, might fail to define forced intercourse by an acquaintance as a rape. It also is possible that women might subsequently have sexual relations with their attacker because they blamed themselves for the previous encounter or because this person again attacked them. We might add a contextual factor: Koss's national study was conducted in 1984–1985, a time period before acquaintance and date rape had earned much attention. The fact that many college students of this era might not have been sensitized to the illegal nature of physically coercive sex is perhaps not surprising.

ROIPE: THE MORNING AFTER

A second prominent critical analysis was written by Katie Roiphe in her 1993 book, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus*. Quite remarkably, Roiphe authored this volume not long after graduating from Harvard University in 1990. Its appeal rested in her presenting a critical analysis of campus feminism that lay substantially in her own recent personal experiences with political correctness during college. Her views were an odd mixture of neoconservative polemic and a rugged feminism that sought to reaffirm female individual self-efficacy or agency.

Accepting Gilbert's research without question, Roiphe (1993, p. 51) criticizes the "Ms. survey" conducted by Koss and its conclusion that "one in four college women is the victim of rape or attempted rape." This statistic, in Roiphe's view, not only was deconstructed by Gilbert's scathing rebuttal to Koss but also did not comport with her own personal experiences. She relayed her doubts:

One in four. I remember standing outside the dining hall in college looking at a purple poster with this statistic in bold letters. It didn't seem right. If sexual assault was really so pervasive, it seemed strange that the intricate gossip networks hadn't picked up more than one or two shadowy instances of rape. If I was really standing in the middle of an epidemic, a crisis, if 25 percent of my female friends were really being raped, wouldn't I know it? (pp. 51–52)

What, then, to believe? Roiphe (1993, p. 54) argues that, in the least, Gilbert's research "shows that these figures are subjective, that what is being called rape is not a clear-cut issue of common sense." For her, "whether or not one in four college women has been raped . . . is a matter of *opinion*, not a matter of *mathematical fact*" (p. 54, emphasis added). She goes so far as to claim that "someone's rape may be another person's bad night" (p. 54). Definitions of rape, apparently among researchers and women who have had a supposed bad night, "become entangled in passionate ideological battles" (p. 54). The current rape crisis is thus not an objective reality but socially constructed by those with a broader political agenda. And who might they be—who "is identifying this epidemic and why"? (p. 55). "Someone," Roiphe notes, "is 'finding' this rape crisis and finding it for a reason" (p. 55).

The culprits, of course, are the "rape-crisis feminists" who have infiltrated the nation's campuses (p. 73). In Roiphe's view, "rape is a natural trump card for feminism" (p. 56). Especially when claimed to be pervasive, rape is *prima facie* evidence of patriarchy and men's use of violence to control women. Pointing to the 1-in-4 statistic places university administrators on the defensive and forces them, without further discussion, to fund special feminist programs aimed at curtailing assaults against female students. In short, rape-crisis feminists are empowered by claims of high rates of sexual victimization.

But according to Roiphe, this embrace of victimhood comes at a high cost. It spreads a culture of fear on campuses that exaggerates any objective risk of victimization. It also ironically legitimates sexist "anachronistic constructions of the

female body,” especially about “female purity” (p. 71). Indeed, “all the talk about empowering the voiceless dissolves into the image of the naïve girl child who trusts the rakish man” (p. 71). Roiphe prefers a stronger feminism—one in which women shed their innocence and the umbrella of protections placed over them and instead take control of their lives, including, if necessary, dealing with “bad decisions” and the “morning after.”

At the most uncharted moments in our lives we reach instinctively for the stock plots available to our generation. . . . Now, if you’re a woman, there’s another role readily available: that of the sensitive female, pinched, leered at, assaulted daily by sexual advances, encroached upon, kept down, bruised by harsh reality. Among other things, feminism has given us this. A new stock plot, a new identity spinning . . . around . . . passivity and victimhood. This is not what I want, not even as a fantasy. (1993, p. 172)

We will leave it to others to rebut Roiphe’s claim that rape-crisis feminism has done more harm than good. Our concern is with her narrower claim, but one upon which the foundation of her argument rests: that rape statistics are merely a matter of “opinion” and not of “mathematical fact.” In our view, the key issue is about mathematics—or, in our terms, about the quality of the measurement strategies used to assess the extent of sexual victimization among college women. As we will show in a later chapter, Roiphe’s argument that she would have known if her classmates were being sexually assaulted appears misguided. Many victims do, in fact, tell their friends when victimized. More than this, her critique of Koss’s *Ms.* study and 1-in-4 statistic conflates Koss’s commitment to science with the agenda of campus feminists that flourished, some years later, during Roiphe’s Harvard University days.

Recall that Koss constructed the first version of her Sexual Experiences Survey well in advance of the *Ms.* study and at a time, in the late 1970s, when feminism’s roots were just starting to take hold on colleges campuses (Koss & Oros, 1982; see also Koss, 1988a; Koss et al., 2007). In fact, Koss could not have joined the rape-crisis-feminist club if she had wanted to do so; it did not exist! From the beginning, her motivation was not to artificially inflate rape statistics but to develop an instrument, the SES, that could measure sexual practices that, according to existing state laws, met the criteria of rape (and other forms of sexual victimization). The fact that her study uncovered much hidden rape and sexually coercive victimization was hardly foreordained. Students answering her SES in 1984–1985 were from across the nation—many of them, in fact, from sections of the United States virtually untouched by feminism. Koss did not select the schools sampled, and her data collectors were not radical feminists sent into the field with the mission of urging respondents to get even with their male perpetrators by disclosing their victimization. To be sure, organized skepticism requires that Koss’s SES measure and its findings be subjected to critical scrutiny. But it would be imprudent to ignore the central thrust of her study—that sexual victimization is more prevalent than previously imagined—on the assumption that Koss’s findings are ideologically tainted.

What's Ahead

There are three important lessons to take from this discussion. First, the study of sexual victimization on college campuses is conducted in the context of an ongoing culture war between feminists and their critics (for a recent example, see Mac Donald, 2008). Each side has a stake in the research findings, with feminists anticipating high prevalence rates and critics preferring low prevalence rates. Second, measurement matters. Especially in an ideologically heated context, research will have credibility only to the extent that its design and measures are above reproach. Even then, results that offend those of one ideological persuasion or the other will be criticized. The best defense to these attacks is a rigorous methodology. Third, Gilbert's and Roiphe's criticisms should not be accepted whole cloth but neither should they be dismissed out of hand for their excesses. At the core of their criticisms is the reminder that even classic studies, including Koss's, have features that potentially produce measurement error. When questions are raised—such as whether wording choices on questions inflate the reporting of rape—the challenge is not to defend the original study but to move beyond and improve what was done. Koss herself has done so (see Koss et al., 2007). So have we.

In fact, this book is the by-product of our attempt to develop a methodologically rigorous measure of sexual victimization and then to undertake a large-scale, national study that would allow us to bring fresh data to the question of the extent and nature of sexual assault on college campuses. We learned from the research of Koss, but, as the saying goes, we have tried to “see farther” by “standing on the shoulders of a giant.” But, ultimately, our allegiance was not to Koss or, for that matter, to any side of the culture war on this issue. Rather, our intent was to push aside ideology and to pursue the measurement of empirical reality to the best of our abilities. In the end, our data show that to varying degrees, many female students are unsafe in the ivory tower.

In Chapter 2, we review our methodological adventure into the realm of college student sexual victimization. That chapter conveys how we endeavored to develop a newer way of assessing rape and other types of sexual victimization. Although we integrate much of the existing research into our discussions, the contribution of our book is that we report original data from our project. In Chapter 3, we start our tour through the various dimensions of student sexual victimization. There, we take up the issue so much at the core of the debate over Koss's SES findings: exploring the risk of rape that students face. In Chapter 4, we move beyond the issue of rape to examine how else female students are sexually victimized. This includes probing the extent of sexual coercion, unwanted sexual contact, and noncontact sexual abuse. Chapter 5 illuminates the often neglected issue of revictimization. The data reveal that, to a significant extent and within a limited period of time, women are victimized more than once. We report the factors that place female students at risk of both initial sexual victimization and then of revictimization. In Chapter 6, our attention turns to “victim secrets.” As we have seen, an important issue is whether victims acknowledge that they have been raped and are willing to report their victimization to campus or law enforcement officials. We investigate the extent to which some women disclose their victimizations while others

do not—and why this is so. Chapter 7 then switches focus away from sexual victimization *per se* and onto the closely related topic of stalking. Stalking shares much in common with other types of sexual victimization because a male's unwanted, continuing pursuit of a female typically is fueled by sexual attachment and can evoke fear of harm. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes with a discussion of the policy implications of the portrait we have painted of the extent and sources of sexual victimization. Is it possible to make the ivory tower safer? And, if so, how might this worthy goal be achieved?