WOMAN ABUSE ON CAMPUS

Results From the Canadian National Survey

Walter S. DeKeseredy
Martin D. Schwartz

SAGE
Sage Series on Violence Against Women

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Sage Series on Violence Against Women

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Preface

Many North Americans view Canada as a "peaceable kingdom": a place where it is safe to walk the streets, go out at night, and in general live a normal life. This perception is partially correct. Compared with their neighbors south of the border, Canadians are less likely to be victimized by predatory street crimes such as robbery or stranger assault. However, at least for women, this safety might not extend to intimate relationships. Here, Canadian men may be the equals of U.S. men. Several widely read and cited representative sample surveys, such as those conducted by the late Michael D. Smith, show that Canadian men are just as, if not more, likely to beat their spouses as American men. However, it is not only women in marital or cohabiting relationships who are in danger of being abused. The research presented in this book shows that the same can be said about women in university and community college dating relationships.

As we shall see in this book, there has been some investigation in the United States as to the extent of woman abuse in postsecondary schools. But how many Canadian female undergraduates are physically, sexually, and psychologically attacked by their boyfriends or dating partners? Prior to the Canadian National Survey (CNS) outlined in this book, several small-scale surveys, which are briefly reviewed in Chapter 1, provided important clues to the answers to this question. The problem was that the results of these studies could not be generalized to the Canadian

student population at large. The CNS, a heavily funded federal government project, was an attempt to do for Canada what Mary Koss's famed research into dating violence did in the United States—but also to go beyond these data to provide the answers to many other questions.

An important role of the CNS, then, is to fill this major research gap left by the smaller and local victimization surveys that are not generalizable to the nation's population of college and university students. The CNS also constitutes an attempt to uncover some of the key sources of male-to-female victimization in postsecondary school courtship. The hope of the researchers is that the results of this study will motivate criminal justice officials, policymakers, students, faculty, and campus administrators to struggle to make unsafe learning environments and gender relations in these contexts safer.

Still, there have been strong attacks on the data that have been coming in from across North America indicating that there is a high degree of victimization of women. One of the strongest attacks has been the accusation that women are violent also. "But women do it too!" is the battle cry. "Why do we avoid admitting that women are as violent as men?" One of our discoveries in examining these data is that the question is much more complicated than it seems to many people. Although many women do in fact strike blows against men, we have included in Chapter 3 the CNS data on the meanings and motives of female-to-male violence. Contrary to popular belief, we found that a substantial amount of women's violence was in self-defense, or "fighting back." Such data throw doubt on the argument that dating violence is fully symmetrical or "mutual combat."

Although the purpose behind this book was to explain the major findings of the Canadian National Survey, it seemed to leave too much unsaid to avoid drawing some implications and to avoid making policy recommendations. Thus, in Chapter 5 we have drawn these conclusions and made these suggestions.

We have, individually and together, written journal articles on some of the data generated by the CNS, and we wanted to merge them in one source. This objective could not have been met without the kind and scholarly assistance of Claire Renzetti and Jeffrey Edleson. We are also indebted to Terry Hendrix and Dale Grenfell of Sage, who more or less patiently waited for us to complete this book.

Although we enjoy doing empirical and theoretical work, we knew that behind the statistics scattered throughout this book are female survivors, real people who have endured a terrifying amount of pain and

suffering. Analyzing their experiences can be a deeply depressing experience, especially when we thought of the inadequate ways in which most survivors are treated by many campus administrators, police officers, and other agents of social control. Thanks to the support of our families, however, we were able to muster up enough energy to complete a book on one of North America's most pressing social problems. Once again, we are especially indebted to Carol Blum, Patricia, Andrea, and Steven DeKeseredy, Marie Barger, and Eva Jantz. For us, these people personify what social support is all about.

As you can imagine, completing a study like the CNS requires the assistance of many friends and colleagues. Our strongest thanks go out to Katharine Kelly, Daniel Saunders, and Shahid Alvi, who were essential in the analysis of some of the data reported in this book. Molly Leggett was of invaluable support on a wide variety of tasks, and we truly appreciate her very important contributions. The following people went well beyond the call of duty to help CNS researchers gather and analyze data, collect lists of social support services, cope with the antifeminist backlash, and help present the results of this study: Diane Aubry, Bente Baklid, Meda Chesney-Lind, Kim Cook, Dawn Currie, Jurgen Dankwört, Linda Davies, Desmond Ellis, Karlene Faith, Darlene Gilson, Eva Hegmann, Ronald Hinch, Mary Koss, Lisa Leduc, Vera Legasse, Brian D. MacLean, Linda MacLeod, James Messerschmidt, the Ottawa Regional Coordinating Committee to End Violence Against Women, John Pollard and his colleagues and York University's Institute for Social Research, Claire Renzetti, Les Samuelson, the late Michael D. Smith, Betsy Stanko, Noreen Stuckless, Jo-Anne Taylor, Victor Valentine, Barry Wright, and the many wonderful people who worked at Health Canada's Family Violence Prevention Division. Because many of these people disagree with one another, we assume full responsibility for the material presented in this book.

The research reported in this book was supported by a grant from the Family Violence Prevention Division of Health Canada to Walter DeKeseredy and Katharine Kelly. The views expressed in this book, however, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Health Canada or Katharine Kelly. Financial assistance to gather information on several sections of this book was provided at Carleton University by the Office of the Dean of Social Sciences and by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, while some of the research and writing was supported by sabbatical leaves provided by Ohio University and Carleton University.

Of course, *Woman Abuse on Campus* would not have been possible without the assistance of the students and instructors who participated in the CNS. Their courage, support, and honesty will always be remembered.

Parts of Chapters 1 and 2 include material adapted from Walter S. DeKeseredy, "Addressing the Complexities of Woman Abuse in Dating: A Response to Gartner and Fox," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* (1994); Walter S. DeKeseredy, "Enhancing the Quality of Survey Data on Woman Abuse," *Violence Against Women* (1995); Walter S. DeKeseredy and Katharine Kelly, "The Incidence and Prevalence of Woman Abuse in Canadian University and College Dating Relationships," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* (1993); and Walter S. DeKeseredy and Martin D. Schwartz, "Locating a History of Some Canadian Woman Abuse in Elementary and High School Dating Relationships," *Humanity and Society* (1994). Some sections of Chapter 3 were adapted from Walter S. DeKeseredy, Daniel G. Saunders, Martin D. Schwartz, and Shahid Alvi, "The Meanings and Motives for Women's Use of Violence in Canadian College Dating Relationships: Results From a National Survey," *Sociological Spectrum* (1997). A few pages of Chapter 4 were adapted from Walter S. DeKeseredy and Katharine Kelly, "Woman Abuse in University and College Dating Relationships: The Contribution of the Ideology of Familial Patriarchy," *Journal of Human Justice* (1993) and Walter S. DeKeseredy, "Woman Abuse in Dating Relationships: An Exploratory Study," *Atlantis* (1989). Some material in Chapter 5 includes reworked material from several pages in Walter S. DeKeseredy, "Making an Unsafe Learning Environment Safer," in C. Stark-Adamec (Ed.), *Violence: A Collective Responsibility* (pp. 71-94), Ottawa: Social Science Federation of Canada (1996). Permission to use or reprint this material is gratefully acknowledged.

To Pat and Carol

Contents

1

The Historical, Social, and Political Context of the Canadian National Survey on Woman Abuse in Dating

> We have a vision of college here in the United States. You see it in movies: a cultural icon of what college is like. The vision, more or less, includes a beautiful, quiet, rural setting, and in that setting is a small college with perfect buildings, and a kind of idyllic peaceful environment for the pursuit of higher learning. The dorms are comfortable, each has its own dining room, laundry service, and sensitive and caring counselors. Professors, all of whom seem to like each other as well as the students, live in gingerbread houses near the gingerbread village. What could be better. (Schuman & Olufs, 1995, p. 31)

Like their U.S. counterparts portrayed in the quote above, many Canadians share a vision of colleges and universities as peaceful sanctuaries from the "real world." Universities and community colleges are commonly seen as places where students, faculty, administrators, and support staff strive constantly to provide "practical solutions to the problems of the day" (Strong-Boag, 1996, p. 105), while a growing number of people, especially those who hold conservative values and beliefs, view postsecondary schools as little more than "ivory towers" or bastions of political correctness.

To some extent, all of these perceptions are correct. For example, some campuses are beautiful; some members of campus communities try to help policymakers, the media, and members of the general population come to terms with major social, cultural, and economic change. Some faculty, students, and administrators are strong proponents of political correctness. However, colleges and universities consist of a diverse range of people, attitudes, and beliefs. In fact, the campus is a place where "everybody brings something different, seems to expect something different, and often reacts in different ways" (Schuman & Olufs, 1995, p. 17).

Still, every North American university or college, regardless of its philosophy or mission, scholarly and pedagogical approach, reputation, size, and demographic characteristics, mirrors in some ways the broader society in which it exists (Currie & MacLean, 1993). For example, schools rationalize and legitimate ethnic, class, and gender inequality (Curran & Renzetti, 1996; Gomme, 1995). These actions do not make them any different than governments, large corporations, hospitals, police and fire departments, and a host of other formal organizations. This is not only important to understand in the broader sense that every citizen must appreciate certain things about his or her own culture and society. In a narrower and more specific sense, these inequalities have been found to be strongly related to woman abuse in a variety of adult heterosexual relationships (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997). For that reason, many sociologists are not surprised by the fact that the incidence and prevalence rates of woman abuse in university and college dating (which will be described in Chapter 2) are alarmingly high. Unfortunately, for reasons described later, these high figures are *underestimates* and are not likely to decrease unless progressive policy proposals such as the ones discussed in Chapter 5 are implemented throughout society.

Everyone knows that students are taught academic skills, such as reading, writing, and mathematics. However, these students are also exposed to a powerful "hidden curriculum" (Parkinson & Drislane, 1996) that teaches them many other things about society, such as how to maintain racism, sexism, and a variety of other practices within society. Children are not born racists or sexists, and they may or may not learn such attitudes at home. However, from an early age, children learn such things as that boys and girls cannot play together (Thorne, 1993), that sports such as Little League are designed to teach boys that girls are inferior (Fine, 1987), that the Boy Scouts are designed to teach boys that only certain kinds of masculinity are allowed and those are the kinds that

harm human relationships (Thorne-Finch, 1992). These lessons and others legitimate and perpetuate the abuse of women in heterosexual relationships.

In another book, we discussed how attitudes on the college campus later serve to promote or at least fail to contradict the physical and sexual abuse of women (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). For example, it is not unusual for faculty and staff to maintain attitudes that promote acquaintance and date rape. This can be seen in the "boys will be boys" attitudes of fraternity advisers and dorm supervisors who treat serious law violations as minor pranks. This might consist of campus judiciary systems that treat serious felony crimes such as forcible rape as events that might at worst require an apology or, more likely, be dismissed if the victim has not hired a team of investigators to develop the facts to prove her case (Bernstein, 1996; Warshaw, 1988). Sometimes these are not subtle attitudes that professors or administrators pass on to students. Consider Matin Yaqzan, a University of New Brunswick professor who published an article in a student newspaper alleging that "male aggressiveness" and "the male drive for sex" are part of "human nature" and "therefore the reason and need for the so called 'date rape' " (cited in Hornosty, 1996, p. 35). Would male students considering whether to force their dates into sex find any comfort in articles such as this by respected professors? Would they give male students the implicit message that woman abuse is tolerated on college and university campuses (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997)?

Sexist statements and the injurious behaviors described throughout this book foster an atmosphere of fear and insecurity and serve as a powerful means of social control (Hornosty, 1996). Thus, it is no surprise that when asked how safe they felt on campus, many women who participated in the Canadian National Survey on woman abuse in dating relationships (CNS) reported feeling unsafe after dark on their campuses and the immediate surrounding areas. Of the 1,835 women who participated in this study,

- 36.1% felt unsafe and 25.9% felt very unsafe walking alone after dark;
- 35.7% felt unsafe and 12.9% felt very unsafe riding a bus or streetcar alone after dark;
- 34.8% felt unsafe and 38.7% felt very unsafe riding a subway alone after dark;
- 42.5% felt unsafe and 25.7% felt very unsafe walking alone to a car in a parking lot after dark;

- 41% felt unsafe and 31.2% felt very unsafe waiting for public transportation alone after dark;
- 36.3% felt unsafe and 38.9% felt very unsafe walking past men they don't know while alone after dark (Kelly & DeKeseredy, 1994).

Female undergraduates' fear of "stranger danger" and woman abuse in college and university dating are not new problems. Nevertheless, until recently, most North Americans viewed universities and community colleges as "sanctuaries from violent crime and other social problems" (Currie & MacLean, 1993, p. 1). Physical and sexual assaults on female students have generated some concern about women's safety on and near college campuses. However, these offenses are typically seen by most academics, criminal justice officials, campus administrators, and many students as the irregular and infrequent acts of strangers (Currie, 1994). Even such shocking events such as the December 6, 1989, mass murder of 14 women at the University of Montréal, École Polytechnique, did little to challenge the popular notion of universities and colleges as "peaceable kingdoms."

Because very few abusive acts in dating relationships are reported to them, campus officials are able to conclude that women's fear of crime is out of proportion to their risk of assault (Currie, 1994). Further support for this assertion is provided by a few "new generation" feminists (e.g., Roiphe, 1994) and some conservative academics such as John Fekete (1994) and Neil Gilbert (1991, 1994), who argue that the articles and research results published in refereed journals and scholarly books showing high rates of woman abuse on campus have greatly exaggerated the case. These backlash writers have been referred to by the authors of this book as "people without data" because they have no expertise in the area of woman abuse, have never conducted a victimization or self-report survey, and have never (aside from their attacks on research scientists who study rape) revealed any knowledge of this complex area (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1994b). In a rather extraordinary argument, Roiphe and Gilbert both assert that they certainly would have heard about it if sexual assault and other abusive acts against women were really widespread. Because they haven't heard about it, it cannot be happening. At the same time they attack findings that as many as 50% of rape victims never told even their best friend about their victimization, conservative writers are upset that rape victims are not confiding in large numbers in people who attack and belittle rape victims.

It is most unfortunate that in the current political atmosphere, which Faludi (1991) terms the "backlash," there is enormous support for campus administrators, conservative authors, politicians, students, academics, and media personnel who mock, taunt, and disregard female survivors of abuse in postsecondary school dating. Such a response is ironic at a time when crime discussions are dominated by calls for support for victims, more prisons and longer sentences, the reinstatement of the death penalty, which was abolished in Canada in 1976, and even caning for minor offenders. However, as in the United States, enormous support remains in Canada for belittling crime victims if they happen to be women. As legal scholars have noted (e.g., Estrich, 1987), this is done by claiming that only certain "facts" constitute "real woman abuse" (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1994b).

In other words, if a woman is a victim of the stereotypical crime that people have decided is truly a crime, then her victimization is accepted. For example, in forcible rape, the woman should be attacked by strangers, preferably more than one, should be physically harmed (to show that she wasn't enjoying it), and should report the crime immediately (Adler, 1987). If she was raped by a man she knows, she was probably doing something to deserve it, so it isn't actually rape. Susan Estrich, the law professor who popularized the term *real rape,* points out that when she herself was raped, she was pretty lucky: The rapist stole her car. The police quickly decided that although women might cooperate in being forcibly raped in public by a stranger, they certainly would not agree to having their car stolen. Thus, she was treated like a "real" victim (Estrich, 1987). In stranger rape, there are a number of factors that convince many people that rape is justified, or at least isn't real: The woman was dressed sexily; she used bad language; she was hitchhiking; she was in a place where women should not be (Scully, 1990).

However, the situation is very much worse on campus, where virtually all of the sexual assaults uncovered in surveys are committed by other students, men who not only know the victim but actually just might like the victim (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Under these circumstances, where the victim almost always is located in a private place (his or her room, for example), it is very easy for many people simply to dismiss the case as a noncrime, because the victim could have avoided it. Of interest, few people would argue against prosecuting a thief who stole unprotected money or stole a car left unlocked in broad daylight, or against prosecuting someone who badly injured a person he did not like