Stubborn Boors and Lying Whores: The Effects of Gender, Race, and Victimization on Student Perceptions of False Rape Claim Prevalence

Tracey Steele, Wright State University - Main Campus

1 00:00:01,760 --> 00:00:10,340
It might be kind of interesting at our next CoLA faculty meeting to adopt the same survey and see

2 00:00:10,340 --> 00:00:15,960
which of the habits of mind our faculty think that they need to work on the most.

3 00:00:15,960 --> 00:00:22,080
I wonder if the results would parallel what our students say.

4 00:00:22,080 --> 00:00:27,500
I'll be thinking about that one too. Our next speaker is Tracey Steel.

5 00:00:27,500 --> 00:00:36,820
Tracey is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and chair of the Departments of Sociology and Anthropology.

6 00:00:36,820 --> 00:00:44,160
Her research and teaching focus in criminology, deviance, gender, and sexuality studies.

7 00:00:44,160 --> 00:00:53,540
which made her a perfect selection to direct the undergraduate program in Criminal Justice, which she did until she became department chair.

8 00:00:53,540 --> 00:01:01,740
She is the editor of a book titled Sex, Self, and Society: The Social Context of Sex.

9 00:01:01,740 --> 00:01:13,640
The really great title of Tracey's talk is Stubborn Bores and Lying Whores: The Effects of Gender, Race, and Victimization on Student Perceptions of False Rape Claim Prevalence. Tracey. [applause]

10 00:01:13,640 --> 00:01:19,800
of False Rape Claim Prevalence. Tracey. [applause]

11 00:01:19,800 --> 00:01:25,280
Alright, welcome everybody. I want to thank Dean Sobolik and the entire crew for making this possible.
I feel like a kid in the candy store getting to talk to an audience that is not a classroom or a typical conference presentation.

So thank you for the opportunity to talk about my research.

I was involved in three projects while I was on sabbatical and this is one of the three.

This is the quantitative project that I was engaged in and I'll talk a little bit about the background here shortly,

but I want to give you a sense of where we're going today. So first of all I'm going to talk about some basic background about

sexual assaults, sexual assault statistics, then we'll talk about false reporting, and then get into the meat of my presentation, which is the qualitative analysis.

and before you get too scared, I really am making this basic, because I know the audience may not have an appreciation for linguistic regression and such.

So this is pretty fundamental and I just want to give you a basic sense of some of the things that help us understand the particular research question here.

about why there's such variance in our attitudes and expectations of false reporting for rape claims. Alright.

I want to begin by saying first of all that I think we know that sexual assault is a very serious social issue and social problem.

It's very pervasive, it's very insidious, and throughout this particular presentation, I'm going to using the term 'sexual assault' and 'rape' fairly interchangeably,

though there are really important differences in how those exist and the definitions across state boundaries and federal
but suffice it to say for this presentation I'm going to be using them interchangeably and I am aware that there are significant differences, but it's more encompassing for me to do both, without getting into the nuance of difference. So please accept my apologies for those of you who might be offended at that slippage there.

Alright, so let's talk about prevalence of sexual assault in society first. We know that sexual assault is as I've said, is a pretty pervasive social problem.

One of the issues that we have though is getting a real sense of how much sexual assault is out there, is problematic.

The primary source of data resources that we have for understanding the pervasiveness of sexual assault are the Uniform Crime Reports.

and there are some real limitations to using that data set, because it relies on people reporting crimes to the police.

Right? And as we'll talk about here shortly is that sexual assault is a crime that is very often not reported to the police.

But the UCR: Uniform Crime Reports, are one of the oldest and most reliable data sources that we have. So those are used very frequently.

I'm going to be contrasting data from that with the other primary data set we have, which is the National Crime Victim Survey,

in setting up this background to understanding the research task I'm going to do today.

Alright, so people don't always report sexual assault and there are also some other methodological issues intrinsic to the way
that data is collected that really limit us in understanding the pervasiveness of sexual assault from official sources.

That is, police sharing their statistics about people who have reported sexual assault publicly and are seeking criminal solution, alright. Estimates that we have out there once we take into account some of these other data sources beyond the UCRs,

such as the Nation Crime Victim Survey, the NVCS, which is mentioned is the other big data source that we have,

as well as some other national and local surveys that on average sexual assault will affect 1 in 4 people in the United States. That's sort of the high estimate.

The other estimate, the other fairly reliable estimate end of range there is 1 in 6.

There are lots of critics of these numbers, but consistent and reliably we have found that those numbers really do hold up once we put some methodological rigor into looking at the numbers.

That's for females. For males the estimates are about 1 in 10 to 1 in 15.

Again, it depends how we're defining sexual assault, how we're defining rape. Are we including attempted rape? Are we including only forced situations?

You have to pay a lot of attention to how these different data sources define the problem and that accounts for a lot of the variance from source to source in what we see for the prevalence issue.
Once we start looking at specific categories of difference, we find that there are really significant important victimization correlates.

Now I'm going to talk briefly about age race and victimization here. For boys, they're at greatest risk under the age of 12.

Once they hit adolescence the victimization rates tend to decrease. They don't entirely go away, but we find that decreases pretty significantly.

For girls it stays pretty high under 12. The rates are disturbing and alarming, higher than victimization rates for boys, but what happens puberty for girls is that those already very high rates actually escalate.

And in fact, the highest risk is for women between ages of 18 and 24; college age, right?

So this particular study as I'll talk about later, is the perfect population to use Wright State Students for, because this is a time at which victimization risk is highest for women and though it's not the highest for women and though it's not the highest rate for men, we do still find rates of sexual victimization occurring on college campuses for men as well. Alright.

We see a statistic also that I want to highlight just in terms of global victimization. Almost... a good proportion, 80% are still under the age of 30. So it very much is a crime perpetrated upon the young, although I have to give that important caveat that anybody of any age, any body shape, any body type, any race, any demographic characteristic, anybody can be victimized.
because this is primarily a crime of power and not of one of sex.

One last figure here I do want to mention. Women of color, particularly Native and African-American women are very highly susceptible to victimization for this crime.

I've mentioned that UCR; the Uniform Crime Reports are much less accurate for victimization than the victimization surveys that we have.

Non the less, it is the data source that most people point to when we talk about whether or not a rape really occurred.

It's one of the forms of statistics that appears in your newspaper, if you if you hear about crime increasing or decreasing, if you check the little citation there, usually it will say form your UCR or your local police department.

These are official statistics and they're useful, but for a crime like this it can be really misleading to rely only on this form of data, because as we've said, most people do not report crime.

And you see that there on the next item here. Sexual assault is actually more likely not to be reported than it is to be reported.

How do we know that? From the victimization surveys. We go and talk to people about their experiences of crime.

and they say "well yeah okay, I experienced that" particularly if we don't call it rape. That's a whole another... if you just describe the situation. people are much more likely

to say "yes that happened" than if you ask directly "have you been raped?" Doesn't go over too well.

Anyway, so sexual assault is actually more likely not to be reported to officials than it is to be reported.

We know that from the victimization surveys. Almost 70% of people don't report sexual assault/rape to officials,
which is really disturbing, right? Okay, and another pertinent fact here is that among college aged students,

people who are attending college are actually less likely to report than people who do not attend college.

Really, really fascinating and really, really disturbing.

One of the other things I want to mention here before we get into the false rape reporting, is why people don't. There are tons of reasons.

Fear of reprisal, you know I don't want Someone finding out that I reported them and having them do me physical harm or come back and assault me again

or take other forms of retribution upon me. So fear is a real reason, a really valid reason and there are tons of other reasons as well.

Damage to ones reputation, embarrassment, feelings of culpability, "well I was out drinking, it was my fault",

even though we know that those sorts of attributions are problematic, still very often in an attempt to feel control, people will not report, because they do feel in some way contributed to the commission of the crime.

A lack of faith in is another one. "It's not going to do any good".

Also many people are engaged in illegal or problematic behaviors at the time.

If you're drinking, if your using illegal drugs, you may hesitate to report, because well then the police would find out that you've been doing illegal things.

So that's another motivation. There are tons of other reasons, I've just quickly gone over some of them, but
please do understand that it is more than normal not to report than to report.

So false rape prevalence. We're getting at the meat of my research question here.

Most crimes that are in what the UCR sort of considers their top eight crimes, have false reporting. There may be different motives for that. Maybe you're looking for insurance claim, falsely report that your car has been stolen.

False reporting happens, but for some reason false reports related to sexual assault and rape are given a weightiness that other false reportings simply do not exist.

There's a vehemence to our reaction to false reports of sexual assault that we typically don't get with the other big crimes and in fact, most crimes that we talk about in social space.

What we know about false reporting -- let me back up and get the definition here.

Romney gives a really good definition of what we're talking about in terms of false reporting of sexual assault and that's that the complainant knows that it never occurred and reports it to officials anyway.

And there's this sense that there's a maliciousness, an intentionality about that of going ahead and reporting even though you know it didn't happen,

this maliciousness that seems embedded in this particular definition. And there are real consequences to false reporting.
It damages reputation, there are financial costs, there are very often a sequella of negative health effects that happen.

It can literally ruin one's life. So we need to take false reports very, very seriously in our analysis.

So we have to balance though, this risk of false reporting and the harm to wrongly accused perpetrators or reported perpetrators against the cost of not believing a legitimate victim. These are both devastating situations and in the absence of proof, you know this big red light going off saying "I'm a rapist", we don't know. Very often it's he said, she said or he said, he said or she said, she said or any combination there of, that we don't actually know the truth. So the criminal justice system is the arbiter here.

Where do you error and why do we error that way? That's some of what I'm going to be looking at today.

One other note, police can file charges when people do falsely accuse. That does happen and increasingly this is used as a device to convince people that they feel like are making false accusations to just go away.

"We can put you in jail if you're lying". Some form of that intonation, of that veiled threat is very discouraging for many people who do come forward to report and some of them do indeed change their minds about reporting. Some of them may have been making it up, some of them may not have.

But none the less, it is a tool that's increasingly used by police officials as leverage. So the question remains: What factors help us to understand why prevalence claims appear to be so widely diverse? Alright.
There's an intensity to this debate, which is fascinating. When I've raised this in class when I talk about false rape,

the estimates, the feelings that students would have, there was a passion there that is suggestive.

You know, when people get this emotionally involved in an issue in class, usually that suggest that there are underlying issues.

So this was my initial motivation to really exploring this area was that the tenure of this debate was so intense and people were so certain that all women lie or all people who report rapes are exaggerating to no one would ever make this up. It's serious, it's a horrible process, why would anybody do it?

Well both of these extremes have some merit, but both are very polarized and probably and again, probably suggest underlying dynamics,

which I am arguing, are tied to gender and sexual normative expectations that we have in society.

How am I doing on time? Alright, I'll speed this up a little bit. Alright, so gender and attribution.

We very early our expectations as sexual and gendered beings in society.

How we're supposed to be, how we're supposed to act as men and women and as sexual beings.

Contemporary constructions of gender intertwine gender and sexual expectations and also criminal expectations, right?

Men are criminals, women are victims. From a very early age women learn to be fearful of the night, to be fearful of strangers, to be fearful period, right?
And men, when there's something that comes on TV saying this crime happened and it's a male perpetrator or male suspect, we're not surprised.

When it's a woman, we are surprised, right? So this is this combination of gender and criminal and sexual -- when we start talking about sexual assault crimes --

factors and socialization in our society that shape these dynamics. I should also mention that these constructions are largely hetero-normative.

So we assume men are sexually aggressive and predatory towards women and women are the targets of men's sexual violence

Being a woman means to be ever vigilant against sexual victimization and to be a gatekeeper of sexual access, right?

"I'm supposed to say no, it's my job to keep you hands off", right?

And again, the invisible perpetrator or aggressor is assumed to be a man in these social constructions.

Alright, so to be a man is to be sexual, to push the boundaries, to get sex. Sex is a resource, something that makes me manly, get past those gates.

And woman increasingly do have some sexual agency. I don't want to deny that, because some of these norms are changing.

So women can aggressive and women can be predatory in the sexual realm and we're still working out sort of the gender expectations here,

but we don't code that as problematic in the way that we do for men, that aggressive sexuality for women: "you're lucky". That's sort of how we code that particularly for men, right?
But if we flip that it's not so pretty, it's not so acceptable. If men are aggressive,

it's normative, but we interpret that very differently. And in fact, much like women's violence in general,

we don't take women's sexual aggression in as serious way as we take men's.

Take any scenario where we're talking about women's sexual aggression, put a man in that person's place and it reads differently.

Alright, "oh a woman came up and put her hand on my butt" some guy says. Well flip that. "A guy came up and put his hand on my butt".

Do we code that differently, do we interpret that differently? Very often. Alright okay, so our ideas about gender, sexuality, rape, and sexual assault
differently position men and women's interests and fears in terms of sexual agency, access, and victimization.

So primary research question: Is there a relationship between respondent sex and estimates of rape reporting?

Is there something about being a man or a woman that affects how often we think people lie about reporting for sexual assault.

And secondarily, are there other correlates that shape this: age, race, and prior sexual victimization?

There's a ton of other variables that I looked at. If you're curious you can ask me, but I'm trying to keep this pretty streamline for today.

So a little bit about my methodology, I told you I talked with Wright State students. We had a total sample of 3,000. The first was an initial randomized sample of all students at Wright State.
We got pretty good response rates, but big enough, so we repeated it, 3-500 person draws.

There were emails, which had an opt out link as well as a link to the survey.

Lot's of... because of the sensitive natures of the questions and because we asked about sexual assault, we did have a lot of bridging questions, a lot of resources provided, we took great care to be sure to try and be certain that the impact of taking this survey would not be traumatic at all.

to the respondents and then that they knew the risks going in. Alright.

Our final N was for the email part was just over 300. we wanted a bigger survey,

so my coauthor open up his intro to sociology classes and we got 198 respondents from there.

Some people had crack-pot answers, so we thinned that down a little bit. Our final sample was 559

and there were not significant differences between the in class option -- they were emailed survey options too -- there were no differences between the those two data sources, the random and the class based.

So here's the key dependent variable, which this is what people were asked, just basically give a percentage form 0 to 100 of how often you think reporting of sexual assault is false.

Okay. I did a second dependent variable, because frankly the data were highly skewed and irregular. So this is a way statistically of compensating for that.

I'm not going to go into the details, but this is sort step on to the way of doing higher order analysis that I thought I would show you today.
What this really is about is when we lay out the differences between 0 and 100, you know where people estimated what this frequency would be,

we're talking about tale end here. Those who said you know, 65% and above.

Are these people different than those who had lower estimations? This is technically two standard deviations away.

So I wanted to see is there something about these folks that is particularly different than the rest of the sample. So you'll get results for both of those.

Here are the independent variable and how they're coded. For time's sake I'm going to skip over those, but pretty straight forward articulations of these.

And here are the results. The results are highly intriguing for me.

There were some I expected and some that I did not. I've bolded the ones that were significant and let me just give you the highlights here on the next slide.

Being male, African-American, and having experience to forced sexual assault significantly increased peoples estimates of false rape reporting.

In other words, if your black, if your African-American, you estimates of false rape reporting tend to be higher than if you are not African-American.

If you're male, which was the real thesis going into this, it was confirmed, yes if you're male you're more likely t have higher estimates than not.

This is true in both the generalized as well as the two standard deviation sample, okay, or analysis.

Pretty interesting stuff. The most most counter intuitive finding here, was that if you experience sexual assault, you're actually going to have higher -- forced sexual assault -- you're actually going to have higher estimates of false rape
However, for sexual contact, that is touching, sexual touching, it's going to significantly lower your risk.

I am dumbfounded by that. I would have expected that if there was going to be a difference, those would have been flipped. I would have expected those to be in the same direction.

and both to be significantly lower. To have those negative numbers in front.

I am excited to say that the next phase of my research is going to be some qualitative interviews to try and understand what it is about experiencing sexual assault that seems to be so strongly associated and this is really strong association, with actually increasing you thinking "okay,

people lie about being sexually assaulted". I find that just fascinating and it's not a small N. I don't think this is an artifact of the data. 98% respondents who experienced forced sexual assault.

Pretty amazing stuff. I was also, I have to say disturbed by the number of people who experienced unwanted sexual contact. That was over 400 of a 559 person sample.

and it was not significant by, once we broke that down by sex. No differences between men and women.

There are a couple other results. I wan to cut this short so I'll have a little bit of time for questions, but fascinating data that I found.

I'm still playing with it. The possibilities are endless here, but I do want to follow this up with some qualitative data and try and get an understanding what's going on with this experience of sexual assault victimization that seems to have such counter intuitive results for false rape reporting.
So I appreciate your patience with my discussion here and I'll open it up for questions. Yeah.

On the forced sexual assault group, did you have whether or not they reported? because that seems like it could be a mediating variable.

Yeah, we did and it did not affect it. Yeah. Yes.

You said that 98 out of you 550 respondents had experience with sexual assault.

Yes.

Did you expect that number? It seems incredibly high.

The perimeters say between 1 in 4 and 1 in 6 people will experience sexual assault.

Although that typically includes attempted, the 1 in 4 generally includes attempted as well.

So I wasn't entirely surprised, I was disappointed of course.

When you get those numbers it's one thing to read the statistic, but to know that you know, nearly 100 students out of 559 have had forced sexual assault.

There are three variables: forced sexual assault, unforced sexual assault, and unwanted sexual contact.

and all three of those numbers were higher than I would like. It's sobering, it's really sobering. Yeah.

You didn't ask when [inaudible]
No, no.

194 00:27:16,820 --> 00:27:19,060 [inaudible]

195 00:27:19,060 --> 00:27:29,700 Yeah no, there are so many things would like to do from this point on and that's one question. We initially had it in, but the survey was already too long. So it's one of the questions I had to cut out.

196 00:27:29,700 --> 00:27:34,760 Because we know, again, this is highest risk age, between 18 and 24.

197 00:27:34,760 --> 00:27:36,400 The first three weeks of college.

198 00:27:36,400 --> 00:27:45,140 Yeah, freshman year in.. Yeah exactly. So I would have loved to think we've come further, but no. Yeah, Karen.

199 00:27:45,140 --> 00:27:57,820 I [inaudible] if the official 66 include like threats and attacks? Is your measure actually including forced contacts or whatever, but I mean did you include like threats and attacks [inaudible] that can kind of change [inaudible].

200 00:27:57,820 --> 00:28:07,280 Did not include threats, it was experience and it's self defined. It is self defined, so you know. Great question. Yeah.

201 00:28:07,280 --> 00:28:17,780 Considering there are only 9 reported sexual assault cases on campus last year, what do you think our university can do to encourage the reporting process to make it more accessible to students?

202 00:28:17,780 --> 00:28:23,520 I love that question. I think there's a lot our university... any university can do.

203 00:28:23,520 --> 00:28:31,440 One is to make sure that both the policing forces, the campus policing forces,

204 00:28:31,440 --> 00:28:36,560 not only undergo training, which you know they do,

205 00:28:36,560 --> 00:28:41,820 but also that they are actively involved in prevention
and I would also like to see them involved in discussions with survivors,

to have survivors actively involved with the police in coming up with a plan to make

the campus atmosphere more responsive. But it's not just the police. I don't think we can put all of our nuts in that

basket and blame them, because it's really about the culture of the university and I think you know, us having the
Women's Center for example, is a great help, but I don't think enough students know about it or the services that can be
provided.

We have orientations... A lot of this is proforma, but I really think

opening up discussions in classrooms and letting people know what these statistics are, making sure people are
comfortable about talking about their experiences.

That's on thing that I've noticed in the last probably ten years, is a willingness of students in classes...

I teach classes where it's more frequently probably going to come up than say I don't know, physics class.

But you know, talk about issues of sexual assault and both women and men are now opening up about it instead of
coming in after office hours and

expressing you know, telling their stories, looking for resources.

You know, people are talking about it in class and I think there's a healthy -- anger's the wrong word, but there's a
healthy

willingness to talk about it and to recognize that this is a serious problem
and these discussions are happening and I think they need to keep happening. So did that answer your question? Yeah.

Berkley actually strictly has a new program last year that they require all incoming freshman to attend a sexual assault prevention -- where as in a summary of resources, what it is -- training program that they have to do or they withhold on their registration for the following semester.

Absolutely

I should also mention Dr. Twill is here. Sorry I'm putting you on the spot, but I know she was involved with in an imitative last year, campus wide to try and find some ways to make more effective change.

We'll see what happens going forward, but there are a lot of really great people who are really concerned about this issue

and I'm hoping that numbers like these will decrease over time. And crimes going down, that's the good news, in all categories crime is going down.

But I think the consequences of sexual assault in particular is so devastating and long term that we've got to pay more attention to it for so, so many reasons. Yes ma'am

[inaudible] false accusations [inaudible]

Yeah really good question, because that gets into the sort of politics of this and where a lot of the resistance is, right?

Men are fearful of that very scenario and women are fearful of the force,
So bottom line that's what the law says. Now what the prosecutor will move forward, that's a whole different story,

but those really aren't false reports. Where we get into a lot of trouble and one of the things I glossed over on the slide for time sake was the way that policing agencies count false reports.

There's a category called unfounded. So once a crime is reported to the police and a sort of initial investigation happens, if for some reason the accused does not move forward for any variety of reasons. Maybe they're ill, maybe they're fearful, maybe they feel bullied by the police, maybe they're embarrassed. maybe the did make it up.

Very often these would be labeled in a category called "unfounded" and many people take unfounded to mean false.

But in fact it's not and you know, police are trained to, in very limited ways about what goes in that unfounded category, but unfortunately in practice what happens is a lot of cases which shouldn't be listed as unfounded get put in the unfounded category and then those get translated in later discussions as false and they're not. In fact, most of the cases that are unfounded are not false accusations.

So in your specific case, that's not false reporting. No is no, no means no, regardless of when it happened prior to the actual event.