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A grayscale photograph of a group of people standing in a line, possibly in a museum or gallery, with their backs to the camera.

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Gender and the victim's experience with the criminal justice system

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Abstract

We examine victims' dissatisfaction with the police and the courts as a function of their gender, their relationship to the offender, and whether they were physically or sexually assaulted. Analyses of the National Violence Against Women (and Men) Survey reveal that victims are more dissatisfied with the police when the offender is someone they know than when the offender is a stranger, regardless of gender and regardless of whether the offender is a family member or intimate partner. Victims who know the offender are more likely to complain that the police were too lenient and that the police did not believe them. Victims of sexual assault are more likely than victims of physical assault to be dissatisfied with the police and the courts. They complain more about police insensitivity, but they are not more likely to complain about leniency, skepticism, of their charges or not being taken seriously.

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Keywords: Courts; Gender; Domestic violence; Police; Sexual assault; Victim satisfaction

1. Introduction

Some scholars argue that female victims are treated poorly by the criminal justice system (e.g., Stanko, 1985; Erez, 2002; Belknap, 2001; Koss, 2000). They suggest that when men commit violence against women the police and the courts treat male offenders too leniently and mistreat the female victims. These scholars focus, in particular, on the negative experiences of female victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. They rarely compare these experiences to the experiences of male victims. Gender comparisons, however, are important if one is interested in determining whether the criminal justice system treats women differently.

In this research we use data from a large nationally representative survey to examine whether female victims are more dissatisfied with the police and the courts than male victims and whether their complaints about their treatment are different. We assume that if the police and the courts treat women poorly, then female victims will be more dissatisfied than male victims. To examine this issue it is necessary to consider the type of offense

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and the victim's relationship to the offender. Women are much more likely than men to be the victim of sexual assault and their victimizations are much more likely to be committed by partners and other people they know. There may be characteristics of these offenses that affect the victim's experience regardless of gender. Finally, we examine whether the effects of gender, victim–offender relationship, and type of offense, have changed over time. These effects may have changed due to changes in the criminal justice response to domestic violence and sexual assault and changing public attitudes.

Most research on the response of the legal system to group differences examines discrimination in sentencing and other objective outcomes (and we do so in our other work). Researchers attempt to determine whether the criminal justice system responds differently to offenders (or victims) from different groups controlling as best they can for the characteristics of the offense. We believe that it is *also* important to examine victims' accounts of their experience with the justice system. First, a subjective approach recognizes that victims may have other interests besides seeing the offender punished. Victims may be interested in procedural as well as distributive justice (Mikula et al., 1990; Hickman and Simpson, 2003; Tyler, 1988). For example, they may be satisfied if they believe that the police and the courts did a proper investigation and treated them with respect even if the offender was not punished. In addition, victims of spousal violence may be more interested in obtaining protection, social services, or mediation than a punitive result (see, e.g., Lipsky, 1968; Goldstein, 1977). Focusing strictly on sanctions ignores other victim interests and needs.

Second, the attitude of victims toward their treatment should reflect, to some extent, the behavior of legal actors. For example, if the police are disrespectful or skeptical about their charges, the victim is likely to notice it. Of course, the victim's attitudes reflect other factors as well. For example, victims with low expectations might be satisfied even when they are mistreated while victims with high expectations might be dissatisfied when they are treated well (Chandek, 1999; Wilson and Jasinski, 2004). However, it seems reasonable to assume that victims' perceptions are affected to some extent by how they are actually treated.

Finally, victims' attitudes toward their experience are important because victims are the main consumers of legal services. If victims are satisfied, evidence suggests that they are more likely to report subsequent offenses and more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward the criminal justice system (Reisig and Parks, 2000). The personal experiences of victims may therefore have implications for the legitimacy of the system.

1.1. The experience of female victims of domestic and sexual assault

Numerous commentators argue that female victims of domestic violence and sexual assault have extremely negative experiences with the criminal justice system. For example, Erez and Belknap (1998), based on qualitative research, conclude that the attitudes and behavior of agents of the criminal justice system are often “harmful and demoralizing to victims” and “may cause battered women a deeper despair than the abuse itself” (p. 263). The experience of rape victims with the criminal justice system is assumed to be so negative that some commentators describe it as a second victimization (see Allison and Wrightsman, 1993, for a review).

Scholars and activists complain about leniency toward offenders who commit violence against women and a failure to take the offenses seriously (Erez and Belknap, 1998; Hart, 1993; Koss, 2000; Buzawa and Buzawa, 2003). They accuse agents of the criminal justice system of negative attitudes towards female victims, victim blaming, insensitivity to victims' needs, and unjustified skepticism about charges (Belknap, 2001; Koss, 2000; Stanko, 1985; Searles and Berger, 1995; Gregory and Lees, 1999). Some claim that legal authorities are particularly likely to respond to acquaintance rape with victim blaming and leniency toward offenders (e.g., Barnett et al., 1992; Hart, 1993). Basically, qualitative studies of the experience of female victims of domestic and sexual assault tell a horror story.

Quantitative research, on the other hand, strikes a more positive note (e.g., Apsler et al., 2003; Fleury, 2002; Hickman and Simpson, 2003; Wilson and Jasinski, 2004). For example, a study of 103 women from a shelter in Detroit found that 70% of the victims said that the police were “at least a little helpful in their cases (Kennedy and Homant, 1983)”.

The critique of police handling of domestic violence influenced the passage of mandatory and pro-arrest laws in the mid-1980s and 1990s (e.g., Bachman and Saltzman, 1995; Sherman, 1992). The rape reform movement influenced state legislatures in the 1970s to introduce laws designed to make conviction for sexual assault

easier (Horney and Spohn, 1991). These laws eliminated the requirement that the victim resist her attacker in order to demonstrate lack of consent, eliminated the rule requiring corroboration of the testimony of the victim, and placed restrictions on the introduction of evidence of the victim's prior sexual conduct. Whether these changes and the increase in public attention to these crimes have had an impact is unclear. According to Buzawa and Buzawa (2003) mandatory and pro-arrest laws have had only a minor impact on police behavior (see also, Felson and Ackerman, 2001; Ferraro, 1989). The effects of rape reform laws on conviction rates have also been minimal according to some research (Horney and Spohn, 1991; Polk, 1985).

1.2. Comparing victims' experiences

If female victims of domestic and sexual assault are encountering some or all of the problems described above, then they should be extremely negative about their experience with the criminal justice system, certainly more negative than male victims of violence. Our strategy is to examine gender effects on satisfaction, and to disentangle its effects from the effects of offense type and victim–offender relationship. We also examine variation in the content of complaints about the police. Thus, we use standardized measures to compare the “voices” of female victims to the “voices” of male victims.

Discussions of the negative experiences of female victims of partner and sexual assault with the criminal justice system typically do not address the possibility that victims of any violent crime may have a bad experience. The requirements of due process and bureaucratic procedures may make some victims unhappy, regardless of the crime or who committed it. The victim, as the wronged party, may feel that their grievances are not believed or taken seriously enough, or that offenders deserve more severe punishment. The criminal justice system is, after all, a moderating force in the administration of justice. One should not expect participants to be completely satisfied when third parties decide the outcome. It is therefore important to determine whether female victims or victims of partner and sexual assault have more negative experiences with the police and the courts than other victims, and whether they have special complaints.

The victim's attitude toward the legal system could also reflect inherent difficulties in the prosecution of certain crimes rather than the efficacy of the system. For example, it may be particularly difficult to establish guilt in domestic assaults or sexual assaults where there are often no witnesses other than the victim (Bryden and Lengnick, 1997; Felson, 2002). In addition, the victim's credibility may be more likely to be questioned when they know the accused, and there is more likely to be a motive for lying. Victims of these offenses may be dissatisfied with the way their case is handled as a result.

1.3. Comparative research

We are aware of only one study that compared the experience of victims of sexual assault to the experience of victims of physical assault (Shapland et al., 1985). That study was based on 38 sexual assaults and 198 physical assaults in England. It found that sexual assault victims were *more* satisfied than physical assault victims.

There are also a few studies of gender differences in victim satisfaction. For example, Wilson and Jasinski (2004), using this data set, found no gender difference among victims of domestic violence in their satisfaction with police intervention. Erez and Tontodonato (1992) found no gender differences in the victim's satisfaction with the sentence or the criminal justice system (see also, Shapland et al., 1985).¹

Byrne et al. (1999) compared the experiences of female victims of assaults by their partners with the experiences of other victims of violence, using interview data from 284 female victims. They found that victims of partner violence were more dissatisfied with their experiences with the criminal justice system than other victims. A bivariate analysis suggested that victims of partner violence were less likely to believe that the police had an interest in their feelings or had collected the necessary evidence, or that prosecutors took their opinions into account or encouraged them to attend hearings. However, since the study did not control for whether the

¹ One study found that women have a more favorable attitude toward the police than men (Reisig and Parks, 2000), but the study did not focus on victims.

crime involved a physical assault, a sexual assault, or a robbery, we cannot tell whether the effects are a function of the type of crime or the victim's relationship to the offender. In addition, since the study was restricted to female victims, it cannot show whether the effects depend on gender. Finally, the study did not differentiate a variety of relationships, so it cannot show whether victims of partner violence have a worse experience than victims assaulted by other nonstrangers. Perhaps victims tend to be more dissatisfied when the assault is committed by any family member or anyone they know, compared to strangers. Thus, Erez and Tontodonato (1992) found that victims were less satisfied with the sentence when they knew the offender than when they did not (see also, Shapland et al., 1985).²

Research has also examined the effects of gender, victim–offender relationship, and offense type on legal outcomes, i.e., arrest, conviction, and sentencing. These studies address the claim in the literature that men's violence against women is treated leniently. These studies generally do not support the hypothesis that men who use violence against female partners or engage in sexual assault are treated leniently (e.g., Daly and Bordt, 1995; Curry et al., 2004; Felson and Ackerman, 2001; Myers and LaFree, 1982; Beaulieu and Messner, 1999; Felson and Paré, 2007). In fact, this research suggests that male offenders are *more* likely to be arrested and to receive a harsher sentence than female offenders while violence *against* women is treated more harshly than violence against men.

1.4. *The current study*

In this research, we examine whether victims' satisfaction with the handling of their case by the police and the courts depends on gender, their relationship to the offender, and the type of crime. Our analyses are based on the National Violence Against Women (and Men) Survey. Our equations include measures for the gender of victim and offender, whether the victim was sexually or physically assaulted, and whether the offender was a partner, a family member, someone else known, or a stranger. Similar analyses with different dependent variables have been used in prior research (e.g., Felson and Ackerman, 2001; Felson and Pare, 2005). A multivariate approach allows us to disentangle the effects of these interrelated variables and to examine statistical interactions. Hypotheses about attitudes toward treatment of assaults by male partners and sexual assaults involving nonstrangers imply statistical interactions. We predict that women who are assaulted by their partners and victims of sexual assault, particularly those committed by people they know, are more likely to be critical of the police and the courts than other victims. As a result we expect that female victims are more likely to have negative experiences than male victims.

We explore the source of dissatisfaction with the police by examining the types of complaints victims give about police behavior. If women are particularly dissatisfied with the way police respond to partner assaults or sexual assaults, these analyses can reveal their reasons. In particular, we examine whether female victims of partner assault and sexual assault are more likely to complain that the police were too lenient, too skeptical of their charges, engaged in too little investigation, or were insensitive. These complaints address most of the issues raised in the literature described above and they deal with issues of both procedural and distributive justice. The survey, unfortunately, did not ask respondents about their complaints about the courts. We can, therefore, analyze whether some victims are more dissatisfied with the courts than others, but we cannot analyze the reasons why.

Finally, we use the date of the offense to make inferences about trends over time in dissatisfaction with the police and the courts. By estimating statistical interactions between when the offense occurred and the nature of the offense we can examine whether the experiences of victims of assaults by intimate partners or sexual assaults have changed over time. We are particularly interested in whether victims of these crimes were more satisfied with the legal system if they were assaulted after the introduction of mandatory arrest and rape law reform, and increased public attention to these offenses.

² A number of quantitative studies have examined the attitudes of crime victims generally to their experience with the legal system (Smith and Hawkins, 1973; Bordua and Tift, 1971; Tewksbury and West, 2001; Jordan, 2002; Carter, 1985; Skogan, 1990; Maxfield, 1988). Research shows, for example, that victims are more satisfied when the police engage in more investigative effort, when victims are informed of developments in their case, and when victim expectations are low (Chandek and Porter, 1998; Chandek, 1999; Wemmers, 1999; Brandl and Horvath, 1991).

Our data set allows us to include a more extensive number of control variables than do most studies of criminal justice outcomes. We control for the following variables:

- (1) The seriousness of the incident, as indicated by injury to the victim, weapon use, and the victim's level of fear. Men tend to commit more serious violence than women (e.g., Archer, 2000; Felson and Cares, 2005); victims of serious incidents may be more dissatisfied if they expect more from the criminal justice system.
- (2) Victim precipitation and the number of prior assaults by the offender. These variables address the argument that wives often commit assault in self-defense after a long history of abuse (e.g., Dobash et al., 1992; but see Archer, 2000; Felson and Cares, 2005).
- (3) Legal outcomes, since victims may be more satisfied when the offender is treated more severely (Erez and Tontodonato, 1992; Wilson and Jasinski, 2004).
- (4) Police referrals to social services, since female victims and victims of domestic violence and sexual assault may receive more assistance. This assistance may improve the attitudes of these victims toward the police and offset some of the negative experiences associated with these crimes (Hamilton and Coates, 1993).
- (5) The use of alcohol and drugs by offenders and victims at the time of the incident, since these factors may affect the victim's treatment. Some commentators claim that violence against deviant women is tolerated by the criminal justice system (e.g., Chesney-Lind, 1978; LaFree, 1989).
- (6) Delays in reporting, since this may lead the criminal justice system to be less responsive.
- (7) The age, race, ethnicity, and economic status of victims, since these demographic characteristics may affect the response of the criminal justice system.

2. Methods

The National Violence Against Women Survey involves data collected in 1994–1996 from a nationally representative sample of 8000 women and 8005 men, age 18 and over (see Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000). A computer-assisted telephone interview was conducted with each respondent that included information about his or her victimizations.

Our analyses include incidents of physical and sexual assaults reported to the police. Respondents were asked about incidents of physical assault during adulthood, specifically, whether anyone had: “thrown something at you that could hurt you? Pushed, grabbed, or shoved you? Pulled your hair? Slapped or hit you? Kicked or bit you? Choked or attempted to drown you? Hit you with some object? Beat you up? Threatened you with a gun? Threatened you with a knife or other weapon besides a gun? Used a gun on you? Used a knife or other weapon on you besides a gun?”³

Respondents were asked about incidents of sexual assaults since childhood. Specifically, they were asked: “Has a man or boy every made or tried to make you have sex by using force or threatening to harm you or someone close to you? Has anyone, male or female, ever made or tried to make you have oral sex by using force or threat of harm? Has anyone ever made or tried to make you have anal sex by using force or threat of harm? Has anyone, male or female, ever put fingers or objects in your vagina or anus against your will by using force or threats?”

Respondents were asked about the most recent incidents and could report up to six physical assaults by different offenders and six sexual assaults by different offenders. If a victim was assaulted multiple times by the same offender, only the most recent incident was recorded. From an initial sample of 8849 incidents, we excluded 259 cases with no information on the assault. Thirty incidents involving same-sexed couples were also eliminated from analyses since their omission simplifies the analysis of gender \times couple statistical interactions. We handled cases with missing data by constructing missing data dummy variables. We preferred this method to preserve sample size. However, when less than 1% of the cases were missing, we

³ An examination of the data reveals that some respondents described incidents of physical assault that occurred when they were teenagers, and a few described childhood victimizations.

dropped the cases. After these deletions, our sample included 8143 incidents (6400 physical assaults and 1743 sexual assaults). Our analyses of satisfaction with the police include 1897 cases (23.3%) that were reported to the police. Our analyses of satisfaction with the courts include 801 cases (9.8%) that came to the court's attention.

We treat the incident as the unit of analysis. We estimate equations for satisfaction using Heckman linear selection modeling, and equations for reasons using Heckman probit selection modeling (see *Stata 8 Base Reference Manual*, vol. 2, 2003, pp. 59–84). These techniques are useful to address the problem of selection at each stage of the legal process, i.e., to control for the non-random selection of cases (Heckman, 1979; Greene, 2003). They address the possibility that incidents reported to the police are different from those that are unreported, and those that come to the attention of the courts are different than those that do not. The estimation of the selection process is based on the total sample of victims ($N = 8143$). The estimation requires the use of “instrumental variables,” i.e., variables that predict the selection effect, but are not related to the dependent variable. Variables selected as instruments are identified in *Tables 3 and 4*. Preliminary analyses indicated that these variables predicted sample selection but were unrelated to the dependent variables. Finally, because many respondents reported more than one incident, the assumption of independence of errors across observations is violated. We use Stata's Cluster Adjustment, a method that adjusts the standard errors to take dependence into account (*Stata 8 Base Reference Manual*, vol. 2, 2003, p. 76).

2.1. Measurement

To measure satisfaction, respondents were asked: “How satisfied were you with the way the police handled the case?” If the offender was charged with a crime or the victim obtained a restraining order, the victim was asked: “How satisfied were you with the way you were treated during the court process?” The response categories for these items were “very dissatisfied; dissatisfied; satisfied; or very satisfied” (coded one to four).

The measures of victims' complaints about the police are based on responses to the following question: “Is there anything else the police should have done to help you?” The responses to this question were coded into 11 categories (or complaint groupings) in the survey, and multiple responses were possible. We focused on the four most frequent and theoretically relevant complaint groupings: (1) leniency (“Should have charged, arrested him/her, committed him/her, kept locked up”); (2) skepticism (“Should have taken complaint more seriously, believed me, not laughed at me”); (3) insufficient investigation (“Should have taken a report, followed through with investigation, questioned him/her”); and (4) insensitivity (“Should have been more supportive, positive, provided moral support”). We created four dichotomous variables coded one when a specific complaint was mentioned and zero otherwise.

The principal independent variables of interest include the relationship between the offender and victim, the gender of the offender, the gender of the victim, the type of offense, and the decade the offense was committed. Victim–offender relationship is coded as either partner (spouses, former spouses, partners, and former partners), other family (parents, children, uncle, aunt, cousin, brother, sister, “in-laws”), other known (i.e., friend, date, and acquaintance) or stranger (including people known by sight only; the reference category).⁴ Gender of offender and victim are treated as dummy variables where men are coded one, women zero. Type of offense is coded as either rape, other sexual assault, or physical assault (the reference category). The year the offense occurred is coded as a set of dummy variables: 1980–1989, 1990–1995; and before 1980 (the reference category).

We include controls for the different legal outcomes (based on victims' reports) using a set of dummy variables. Legal outcomes were coded as a set of dummy variables: no arrest (the reference category in the equation involving satisfaction with the police); arrest, but no charge; acquitted/not convicted (the reference category in the equation involving satisfaction with courts); convicted, but not incarcerated; incarcerated for two years or less; and incarcerated for more than two years. In the equation for satisfaction with the courts, we

⁴ Wilson and Jasinski (2004) found that victims were more satisfied with the police when the offender was a current spouse vs. an ex-spouse or live-in partner. This distinction is not important for our purposes here.

also control for whether a restraining order was issued. The equations also include control variables reflecting situational characteristics of the incident: whether the victim was injured or not; whether the offender used a firearm, some other weapon, or no weapon (the reference category); whether the victim was particularly fearful, based on the question “Did you believe you or someone close to you would be seriously harmed or killed during this incident?;” whether the victim was the first to use violence or not (victim precipitation); whether the offender was using alcohol or drugs at the time of the incident according to the victim (coded as “victim believes the offender used alcohol,” “victim believes the offender used drugs,” “victim does not know if the offender used alcohol or drugs,” and “victim believes the offender did not use alcohol or drugs” (the reference category))⁵; whether the victim was using alcohol or drugs at the time of the incident; the number of previous assaults committed by the offender toward the victim (coded as zero, one to four; or more than four, where zero is the reference category); whether the incident was reported to the police within a 24 h period or not; and whether the police referred the victim to social services (such as victim’s assistance, medical clinics, legal aid, or a women’s shelter).

Finally, the equations include controls for demographic characteristics of the victim: race, age at the time of the incident, current level of education, and current victim’s income. Race/ethnicity is coded as a set of dummy variables: Black, Hispanic, other/mixed race, or White (the reference category). The level of education is coded from 1 to 7, where 1 is “no schooling,” 2 is “1st–8th grade,” 3 is “some high school,” 4 is “high school graduate,” 5 is “some college,” 6 is “4 years college degree,” and 7 is “postgraduate”. The victim’s current income (from all sources, before taxes) is coded as high (\$50,000 or more annual income), medium (\$20,000 to \$49,999 annual income), low (less than \$20,000 annual income), or missing, where medium income is the reference category.⁶ Age at the time of the incident is coded as either younger than 18, 18–29 (the reference category), older than 29, or missing.

In general, our conclusions about time trends must be more tentative than our other conclusions because we must infer trends from the date of the offense and because of the possible impact of the victim’s memory. Physical and sexual assaults that are reported to the police, however, are memorable events. Most respondents should have no trouble remembering objective facts and they should at least be aware of the decade the crime occurred. Of course, respondents are given the opportunity to say that they “don’t know” in response to questions if they do not remember.⁷

Perhaps we should have less confidence in the measure of the victim’s dissatisfaction with the legal system or the victim’s complaints about experiences that occurred long ago. However, we think that it is reasonable to assume that people can remember their grievances. If they can remember grievances from the distant past, they can certainly remember whether they were satisfied with how the legal system responded when they were assaulted. It is possible that some victims have revised their opinion and report their current attitude toward their experience. It is not clear, however, that current attitudes have any less validity than earlier attitudes. As indicated earlier, the victims’ attitudes toward their experience can reflect a variety of factors. Finally, it is unlikely that these biases are related to our independent variables, and therefore they should not bias the effects of these variables.

3. Results

The descriptive statistics for the dependent variables are shown in [Table 1](#). They reveal that about 1/3 of victims were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the way police handled their case and about 1/3 were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how they were treated by the courts. The most common complaint about the police was that they were too lenient (12.8% of the incidents). Note that none of the complaints are very common, but that the percentages include all victims who reported to the police, not just those who were dissatisfied with their treatment.

⁵ If the victim thought that the offender was using both alcohol and drugs, we coded the case as “offender used drugs,” since that behavior is more deviant and thus more likely to stigmatize the offender.

⁶ The education and income of the victim at the time of the incident was not available.

⁷ There could be a problem with respondents who think they remember but who are in error. However, these mistakes are likely to produce random measurement error, i.e., they are not likely to be systematically related to our central variables of interest.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for the dependent variables (percentages)

Variable	Police			Courts		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Satisfaction (mean)	2.71	2.85	2.55	2.75	3.00	2.64
% Dissatisfied or very dissatisfied	34.8	29.4	41.2	33.5	23.8	38.9
Complaints (%)						
Leniency	12.8	8.2	18.1	—	—	—
Skepticism	4.3	3.5	5.1	—	—	—
Insufficient investigation	4.4	4.3	4.5	—	—	—
Insensitivity	4.7	3.6	6.0	—	—	—

$N = 1897$ for police sample and 801 for courts sample.

Table 1 also reveals that female victims were more dissatisfied with the police ($t = 6.25$; $p < .001$) and the courts ($t = 4.81$; $p < .001$) than male victims. They were also more likely to complain about leniency ($\chi^2 = 41.8$; $p < .001$) and insensitivity ($\chi^2 = 5.43$; $p = .021$).

The other descriptive statistics, presented in Table 2, show that more than half of the incidents reported to the police involved nonstrangers, 29.3% involved couples, and 13.6% involved a rape or sexual assault. Most of the offenders (88.2%) and more than half the victims were men.⁸

Since these incidents were reported to the police, they include a relatively high proportion of serious offenses. Thus, Table 2 shows that incidents reported to the police were more likely than unreported incidents to involve weapon use and injury (column 2 vs. column 1). They were also less likely to involve sexual assault and people who know each other. Thus, our analyses of reported incidents over-samples some types of assaults and under-samples others. The Heckman selection method addresses this issue.

In Tables 3–5, we present the multivariate results. The equation for victims' satisfaction with the police and the courts are presented in Table 3 while the equations for the victims' complaints about the police are presented in Table 4. The tables only include significant interactions. In Table 5, we present all the interactions that we examined for all dependent variables. Note that in constructing the interaction term, sexual assault includes both rapes and other sexual assaults.

3.1. Satisfaction with the police

The equation for satisfaction with the police is presented in column 1 of Table 3. The results provide no support for the hypothesis that female victims were more dissatisfied with the police than male victims. We do find that victims of assaults were less satisfied with the police when the offender was their partner vs. a stranger. The finding reflects a more general pattern, however, victims were more dissatisfied with the police when the offender was anyone they knew. Finally, the results support the hypothesis that victims of sexual assault were less satisfied with the police than victims of physical assault.

The equation includes no interaction terms because none of the interactions were statistically significant (see Table 5). Thus, we find no support for the hypothesis that women assaulted by male partners were particularly dissatisfied with the way police handled their case. Nor do we observe evidence that victims of sexual assault by nonstrangers were particularly dissatisfied. Finally, we observe no evidence suggesting that the victims' attitudes toward the police handling of sexual assault or partner violence changed over time. None of the interactions involving decade are statistically significant.

The legal outcomes have the strongest effects on satisfaction. In general, the more punitive the criminal justice response, the more victims were satisfied with the police. Specifically, victims were more satisfied when offenders were arrested than when they are not arrested; they were even more satisfied when the offender was incarcerated, particularly when the offender was incarcerated for more than two years.

⁸ Note that 87% of the incidents involving partner violence involved a male offender and female victim.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for the independent variables (percentages)

	Full sample	Police sample	Courts sample
Gender of the victim			
Men	51.7	53.6	38.5
Women ^a	48.3	46.4	61.5
Gender of the offender			
Men	85.1	88.2	89.6
Women ^a	14.9	11.8	10.4
Victim–offender relationship			
Partner	29.3	29.3	44.3
Other family	9.4	3.9	4.2
Other known	30.0	17.5	17.5
Stranger ^a	31.3	49.3	34.0
Type of offense			
Rape	11.3	8.5	15.0
Other sexual assault	10.1	5.1	6.6
Physical assault ^a	78.6	86.4	78.4
Weapon used			
Gun	7.9	17.2	13.4
Other weapon	13.2	21.4	20.3
No weapon ^a	78.9	61.4	66.3
Injury to victim			
Physical injury	28.8	45.4	50.6
No injury ^a	71.2	54.6	49.4
Victim precipitation			
Victim precipitation	6.0	5.2	4.2
Unknown victim precipitation	4.5	2.1	1.0
No victim precipitation ^a	89.5	92.7	94.8
Victim's level of fear			
Low level of fear ^a	60.5	35.2	32.7
Unknown fear	1.4	1.6	1.4
Offender alcohol/drug use			
Offender used alcohol	35.6	34.3	36.1
Offender used drugs	12.0	17.8	23.5
No alcohol and no drug ^a	33.7	19.5	21.7
Victim alcohol/drug use			
Victim used alcohol	19.2	14.4	9.0
Victim used drugs	2.8	2.0	2.0
Unknown alcohol/drug use	1.5	1.7	1.4
No alcohol and no drug ^a	76.5	81.9	87.6
Prior victimization			
5 or more prior victimization	12.0	14.5	20.6
1–4 prior victimization	24.4	21.1	22.7
No prior victimization ^a	54.8	56.5	44.5
Unknown prior victimization	8.7	7.9	12.2
Decade			
Before 1980 ^a	30.7	22.0	22.5
1980s	31.0	32.3	33.2
1990s	34.1	43.0	40.7
Unknown decade	4.2	2.7	3.6
Reporting delayed ^b			
24 h or more	1.6	6.0	5.5
Less than 24 h ^a	21.2	92.7	76.4
Unknown time	.03	1.3	18.1
Legal outcome ^b			
Not arrested (^a for satisfaction with police)	12.4	56.9	—
Arrested, no charge	3.2	13.4	—
Acquitted (^a for satisfaction with courts)	1.5	5.5	13.7
Convicted, no incarceration	1.4	5.4	12.7
Incarceration, 2 years or less	1.1	4.3	10.4

Table 2 (continued)

	Full sample	Police sample	Courts sample
Incarceration, more than 2 years	0.9	3.8	9.2
Unknown outcome	2.6	10.7	20.7
Restraining order (Courts only)	—	—	33.3
Police refer victim to services ^b			
Yes	3.6	15.4	17.4
No/not mentioned	19.5	84.6	82.6
Victim's age at time of incident			
30 and older	28.7	38.0	37.2
18–29 ^a	49.0	49.0	48.8
Less than 18	13.2	8.0	7.9
Unknown age	9.1	5.0	6.1
Victim's education (mean)	4.8	4.8	4.7
Victim's race/ethnicity			
Black	9.5	10.7	11.9
White ^a	76.3	73.2	71.8
Hispanic	5.8	6.1	6.1
Other/unknown race	8.4	10.0	10.2
Victim's income			
High income (more than \$50,000)	11.9	12.0	8.1
Medium income (\$20,000 to \$50,000) ^a	36.5	36.8	37.0
Low income (less than \$20,000)	40.0	38.5	43.2
Unknown income	11.6	12.7	11.7
<i>N</i>	8143	1897	801

^a Reference category.

^b The percentages for the full sample do not add up to 100% because 76.9% of the cases were not reported to the police.

Victims were also more satisfied when the police referred them to social services, suggesting that victims are not just concerned with seeing offender's punished. To explore this issue further we estimated an equation in which referral to social services was the dependent variable (not presented in tabular form). These results suggest that the police were much more likely to make these referrals when the victim was a woman ($b = -.56$; $p = .004$), a victim of couple violence ($b = .58$; $p = .016$), or a victim of rape ($b = .76$; $p = .001$) or other sexual assault ($b = .59$; $p = .033$). The results also suggest that there was a substantial increase in referrals in the 1980s ($b = .96$; $p = .008$) and in the 1990s ($b = 1.33$; $p < .001$). This increase is observed for all types of assaults, i.e., there were no significant statistical interactions between decade and crime type. These results suggest that women and victims of sexual and partner violence get special assistance from the police which they seem to appreciate. However, victims are still relatively dissatisfied with the handling of cases involving sexual assault.

Victims who were older at the time of the incident were more satisfied with the police handling of their case than younger victims. These patterns may reflect better treatment of older victims or more favorable general attitudes toward the police among older people (Reisig and Parks, 2000; Brandl and Horvath, 1991). Victims who experienced high level of fear during the incident were less satisfied with the police. Finally, victims were more dissatisfied with the police if they were drinking during the incident.

3.2. Satisfaction with the court

Equations for satisfaction with treatment by the courts are also presented in Table 3. The results do not support the hypothesis that women are more dissatisfied with their treatment by the court. In addition, we find no evidence that victims were more dissatisfied when the offender was a partner (vs. a stranger) or when the offender was someone else they knew. On the other hand, victims of rape and other sexual assaults were less satisfied with the court process than victims of physical assault. The effect for other sexual assaults is not quite statistically significant, however ($p = .062$), and both effects are weaker than those observed for satisfaction with the police.

Table 3
Heckman linear estimations with selection for satisfaction with the police and the courts^a

	Satisfaction with police (N = 1897)		Satisfaction with courts (N = 801)	
	b	SE	b	SE
<i>Incident characteristics</i>				
Partner	-.408*	.086	.040	.156
Other family	-.410*	.151	-.157	.197
Other known	-.389*	.084	-.143	.120
Rape	-.415*	.103	-.281*	.122
Other sexual assault	-.353*	.110	-.277	.149
Male offender	.044	.074	-.284*	.121
Gun	-.050	.077	-.240	.133
Other weapon	-.094	.066	-.262*	.106
Physical injury	-.068	.059	-.291*	.108
Offender used alcohol	**		.233*	.116
Offender used drugs	**		-.035	.145
Victim used alcohol	-.189*	.073	-.032	.167
Victim used drugs	.023	.179	.063	.229
Victim precipitation	.013	.111	-.070	.179
1–4 prior victimization	-.039	.065	.073	.094
5 and more prior victimization	-.014	.075	-.038	.120
1980s	.013	.067	.029	.100
1990s	.052	.072	-.178	.126
High level of fear	-.191*	.061	**	
Reporting delayed	-.120	.112	-.157	.184
Arrested, no charge	.333*	.071	—	—
Acquitted	.211	.116	—	—
Convicted, no incarceration	.550*	.100	.392*	.141
Incarceration, 2 years or less	.787*	.102	.810*	.137
Incarceration, more than 2 years	.971*	.102	1.284*	.140
Restraining order (Courts only)	—	—	.397*	.127
Referral to services (Police only)	.362*	.065	—	—
<i>Victim characteristics</i>				
Men	-.017	.066	.203	.128
Education	**		**	
Age: 30 and older	.232*	.052	-.017	.082
Age: less than 18 years old	.017	.094	.105	.156
Black	-.085	.081	.218	.118
Hispanic	-.205	.105	-.112	.136
High income	.060	.074	.032	.132
Low income	-.089	.057	.017	.088
<i>Interactions</i>				
Male victim × Partner	—	—	-.660*	.290
1990s × Partner	—	—	.364*	.150
Constant	2.693*	.178	2.469*	.530

^a Notes: Unstandardized coefficients. Estimates of selection models not presented. The following variables are included in the equation but not presented: unknown alcohol/drug use by offender; unknown alcohol/drug use by victim; unknown victim precipitation; unknown number of prior victimization; unknown decade; victim age unknown; unknown level of fear; unknown legal outcome; unknown reporting delayed; other/unknown race; unknown income.

* $p < .05$.

** Variable used as instrument in the selection model. It was not associated with the satisfaction variable.

There is no support for the hypothesis that women assaulted by their male partners were particularly dissatisfied with the courts. There is a significant interaction but it is in the opposite direction. An inspection of the predicted means indicated that men who were assaulted by their female partners were particularly dissatisfied with the courts. In addition, the significant interaction term involving decade (couple × 1990s) and an inspection of the predicted means indicates that recent victims of partner violence were *more* satisfied with

Table 4
Heckman probit estimations with selection for complaints about the police^a

Variables	Leniency	Skepticism	Insufficient investigation	Insensitivity
Partner	.500* (.136)	.379* (.160)	-.308 (.179)	.540* (.189)
Other family	.726* (.208)	.684* (.225)	-.187 (.323)	.253 (.347)
Other known	.698* (.136)	.235 (.164)	-.158 (.177)	.242 (.175)
Rape	-.022 (.142)	.130 (.192)	.248 (.197)	.865* (.236)
Other sexual assault	-.007 (.171)	.373 (.197)	.262 (.206)	.942* (.277)
Male offender	-.164 (.124)	-.007 (.167)	.235 (.208)	-.002 (.178)
Male victim	-.167 (.108)	.028 (.138)	-.176 (.144)	.110 (.157)
1980s	-.243* (.110)	.067 (.145)	.117 (.147)	.112 (.144)
1990s	-.159 (.117)	-.071 (.149)	.353* (.144)	.179 (.149)
<i>Interactions</i>				
Male victim × Partner	—	—	.957* (.341)	—
Sexual assault × Nonstranger	—	—	—	-.638* (.269)
Constant	-1.038* (.382)	-.1463* (.349)	-1.198* (.297)	-2.264* (.412)

^a Notes: Unstandardized coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. Estimates of selection models not presented. *N* = 1897. The weapon variables are used as instruments in all four equations. Other instrumental variables include age in the leniency equation, and education in the equations for skepticism, insufficient investigation, and insensitivity.

* *p* < .05.

Table 5
Interaction terms^a

Variables	Satisfaction with police	Satisfaction with courts	Leniency	Skepticism	Insufficient investigation	Insensitivity
1. Male victim × Partner	-.295 (.173)	-.588* (.292)	.161 (.261)	.238 (.363)	.975* (.348)	.300 (.369)
2. Sexual assault × Nonstranger	.214 (.148)	.087 (.251)	.057 (.249)	-.050 (.296)	.280 (.290)	-.638* (.269)
3. Partner × 1980s	-.199 (.134)	.109 (.184)	-.090 (.209)	.276 (.281)	.286 (.350)	.242 (.295)
× 1990s	.012 (.132)	.394* (.185)	-.147 (.198)	.091 (.285)	.129 (.339)	.134 (.292)
4. Sexual assault × 1980s	.236 (.163)	-.023 (.207)	-.386 (.253)	.306 (.312)	.423 (.378)	-.065 (.304)
× 1990s	.204 (.187)	-.286 (.225)	-.330 (.269)	-.018 (.355)	.065 (.367)	-.594 (.334)

^a Notes: Unstandardized coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. The additive terms for these equations (see Tables 3 and 4) are not presented. Interactive terms were added in four different blocks.

* *p* < .05.

their treatment by the courts than recent victims of violence by strangers. Prior to 1990, victims of partners and strangers were equally satisfied.

The effects of legal outcomes on satisfaction with the courts are similar to the effects of legal outcomes on satisfaction with the police. Victims are much more satisfied when the criminal justice system is more punitive. Specifically, victims were more satisfied if the offender was convicted, particularly if the offender was incarcerated. They were even more satisfied if the offender received a longer sentence. Finally, victims were more satisfied if the court issued a restraining order. Again, these are the strongest effects observed.

There is also evidence that victims of more serious assaults were more dissatisfied with the courts than victims of less serious assaults. Victims were more dissatisfied with court treatment if they were physically injured during the incident or if the offender was armed with a firearm or other weapon, although the coefficient for firearms is not quite significant (*p* = .07). The results suggest that these victims may have had higher expectations. Finally, victims were more satisfied when the offender was drinking during the incident. Perhaps this behavior discredits the offender or increases his or her blameworthiness and leads the court to believe the victims' claims, consequently increasing their satisfaction.

3.3. Complaints about the police

In Table 4, we present results for victims' complaints that the police were too lenient, too skeptical, did insufficient investigation, and were insensitive. To simplify the presentation, we do not present the effects of our control variables. The results we present are based on a final model that excludes control variables and statistical interactions that were statistically insignificant in earlier models. The statistical interactions were the same ones we examined in our analyses of victims' satisfaction (see Table 5).

Table 4 does not reveal any significant main effect for gender. Women were no more likely than men to complain about police leniency, skepticism, insufficient investigation, or insensitivity. Nor do we find evidence that women were particularly likely to have any of these complaints when the offender was their male partner. We observe only one statistical interaction between gender and couple and it is not in the predicted direction. An examination of the predicted means showed that men were much more likely than women to complain about a lack of investigation when they were assaulted by their partners, but they were slightly less likely to make this complaint when they were assaulted by strangers. While the interaction is quite strong, the cell size is small: only five male victims of couple violence had this complaint.

The analyses presented in the previous section showed that victims were more dissatisfied with the police if the offender was someone they knew rather than a stranger. Table 4 reveals why. When the offender was someone they knew victims were more likely to complain about police leniency and skepticism. Five of the six coefficients for victim–offender relationship are fairly strong and statistically significant. The effect of “other known” on skepticism is in the same direction although it is weaker and not statistically significant. In addition, we observe a similar pattern for different types of nonstrangers. We observe one exception: victims were more likely to complain about police insensitivity when the offender was their partner.

The results in Table 4 also help explain why victims of sexual assault are more dissatisfied with the police than victims of physical assault. They suggest that victims of rape and other sexual assaults were more likely to complain about police insensitivity. These are rather strong effects. We also find some evidence that victims of sexual assault other than rape were more likely to complain about skepticism, but the effect is of borderline significance ($p = .058$). On the other hand, victims of sexual assault are no more likely to complain about leniency and insufficient investigation.

We observe only one interaction effect between nonstranger relationship and sexual assault, but it is not in the predicted direction. Victims of sexual assault by *strangers* are particularly likely to complain about police insensitivity in comparison with victims assaulted by nonstrangers.

It might be argued that we lack the statistical power to detect interactions in our analyses of victim complaints about skepticism, insufficient investigation, and insensitivity, since they are not very common (see Table 1). For example, only 82 victims complained about skepticism. An examination of the nonsignificant coefficients and their standard errors in the last three columns reveals that almost all of them are in the opposite direction than predicted. In the case of insufficient investigation, the term for sexual assault \times nonstranger is in the predicted direction but it is lower than its standard error. In only one instance do we observe an effect that approaches statistical significance: a borderline interaction between crime type and decade ($p < .10$). An inspection of the predicted means showed that victims of sexual assaults were more likely to complain about police insensitivity than victims of physical assault if the incident occurred before the 1990s, but there was not much of a difference if the incident occurred during the 1990s.

3.4. Alternative analyses

Since almost all sexual assaults involve a male offender and a female victim and since a large percentage of the intimate partner incidents involve a man assaulting a woman, there may be some concern about multicollinearity. However, correlations between gender, crime type, and victim–offender relationship are not that high. In addition, a VIF analyses confirmed that we do not have a multicollinearity problem. Still, to address such concerns we performed two subsample analyses. First, we examined effects of gender of offender and victim restricting the analyses to physical assaults. Second, we restricted the sample to male assaults on female victims and examined whether the victim's experience was different for sexual assaults and rapes vs. physical assaults. In both cases, the results were similar to those we present.

4. Discussion

Our results show that legal outcomes (as perceived by the victim) are the best predictor of the victim's satisfaction with the criminal justice system. The more severely the offender is treated the more content the victim. Victims apparently feel punitive and are more satisfied when the offender is arrested and convicted, and most satisfied when the offender is incarcerated for a long time. The results support research by Erez and Tontodonato (1992) who found that victims' satisfaction with the criminal justice system as a whole was most strongly influenced by their satisfaction with the sentence.

We do see evidence, however, that the variables of primary interest in this research also affect the victims' attitudes toward their experience with the criminal justice system. We first discuss the evidence regarding gender, then the victims' relationship to the offender, and finally comparisons between sexual and physical assault.

4.1. Gender differences

If the criminal justice system is mistreating female victims, or not meeting their needs, one would expect that women would be less satisfied with their experiences than men. We find no evidence that this is the case. Neither the gender of the victim nor the gender of the offender affected the level of satisfaction. However, we observe gender differences in satisfaction with the police and the courts when all other variables are left out of the equation (see Table 1). Female victims are more dissatisfied with the police and the courts than male victims. The multivariate analyses, however, suggest that the effects of gender are indirect, i.e., that women's higher level of dissatisfaction is due to the types of crimes they experience. Women are more likely than men to be dissatisfied with the police and the courts because they are more likely to be victimized by people they know and more likely to be sexually assaulted. When the relationship and sexual assault variables are added to an equation with gender alone, the effects of gender become statistically insignificant for satisfaction with the police (from $b = .309$; $p < .0001$ to $b = -.025$; $p = .713$) and for satisfaction with the courts (from $b = .294$; $p < .0001$ to $b = .075$; $p = .514$). It is apparently the types of crime women experience that explains their relatively negative experience with the criminal justice system. Note, however, that women are more likely than men to be referred to social services, and that this factor increases their satisfaction with the police.

We also find no evidence that women assaulted by their male partners are particularly likely to be dissatisfied with the police or the courts. Nor are these victims particularly likely to complain about police leniency, skepticism, insensitivity, or the failure of the police to do enough investigation. These findings do not support the literature criticizing the criminal justice system for their handling of violence by male partners. In fact, it is male victims of partner violence who are particularly likely to complain about a lack of police investigation and to be dissatisfied with the courts. The results suggest that the police do not take these offenses as seriously as other offenses. Perhaps they believe that the men can handle themselves and the women cannot.

We cannot rule out the possibility that women suffer gender discrimination in the legal system. First, it is possible that women are treated worse than men but that they expect to be treated this way. In other words, they are just as satisfied because they have lower expectations. This interpretation is contradicted, however, by experimental research which consistently shows that women are *more* likely to register complaints than men facing the same circumstances (e.g., Kowalski, 1996). This literature only strengthens our conclusion that women are not more likely to be mistreated. Second, it is possible that legal actors have more negative attitudes toward female victims than male victims, but they do not communicate these attitudes to victims. The literature on arrest, conviction, and sentencing, however, does not show evidence that police, prosecutors, and judges discriminate. Future research must determine whether legal actors are mistreating women in other ways that victims do not perceive. Still, we believe that an examination of the victim's subjective experience is an important contribution to our understanding of the role of gender in the criminal justice system.

4.2. The victim-offender relationship

Our evidence suggests that victims are more dissatisfied with the police when the offender is someone they know as opposed to a stranger. Victims of assaults by partners are not particularly likely to be dissatisfied with the police. These findings suggest that the literature criticizing the police for their handling of partner violence

may be misdirected. *If* the police are responding inappropriately, they are doing so in response to offenses involving any nonstrangers, not just partners or male partners. At least that is how victims perceive the situation. On the other hand, victims of violence by people they know are not particularly dissatisfied with their treatment by the courts.

Our analyses of victim complaints suggested two reasons why victims are more likely to be dissatisfied with the police when they know the offender than when they do not. First, victims were much more likely to complain that the police were too lenient if they knew the offender. This finding should be considered in light of evidence from this same data set showing that the victim's relationship to the offender does not affect the likelihood of arrest (Felson and Paré, 2007). Together, these results suggest that the police are just as punitive toward those who assault people they know, but they are not punitive enough for angry victims. When victims know offenders, they are more likely to want to see them arrested. Perhaps victims are particularly angry because they perceive violent behavior by friends or family members as more serious violations or perhaps they are more likely to have longstanding grievances with these offenders. However, their punitiveness is not due to a history of violence by known offenders; our equations include controls for the number of prior assaults.

The evidence about victim punitiveness directly contradicts the idea that victims of couple violence are protective of offenders. Some commentators have suggested that women are protective of violent husbands because of their economic dependence, their desire to protect their children, or “sweet talking” apologies after the assault (e.g., Pagelow, 1984). Of course, our analyses are based on incidents that have been reported to the police (by victims or third parties); violence that is forgiven is presumably less likely to be reported. However, previous research shows that victims rarely indicate that the desire to protect the offender was a reason they did not call the police (Felson et al., 2002). In general, research does not support the idea that victims are tolerant of violence by their partners or other people they know.

The second reason victims give for being dissatisfied with the police response when they knew the offender is police skepticism about their charges. Presumably, the police have more difficulty determining whether an offense occurred and who is the guilty party when the victim knows the offender. Anticipation of skepticism may help explain why victims are less likely to report assaults by people they know than assaults by strangers (Felson and Pare, 2005). Perhaps the lower availability of the legal system for victims in these cases sometimes leads them to engage in self-help, i.e., use violence themselves for retribution (Black, 1983). In general, we believe that the literature on responses to victimization does not give enough attention to the problems victims face in proving their case.

We found no evidence that victims of partner violence that occurred after the introduction of mandatory arrest laws were more satisfied with the police. However, we do see evidence of a change in the attitudes of these victims toward the courts. If the incident occurred in the 1990s, victims of partner violence were more satisfied with their treatment by the courts than other victims. Research with this same data set shows that conviction rates for partner assault also increased in the 1990s (Felson and Paré, 2007). Apparently, the courts have become more punitive and more responsive to victim concerns in cases of partner violence whereas they treated them like other cases in the past. We must acknowledge again, however, that the retrospective nature of our data makes any conclusion about changes over time in attitudes tentative.

4.3. *Sexual assault*

Our evidence suggests that victims of sexual assault are more likely than victims of physical assault to be dissatisfied with both the police and the courts. These findings are consistent with the conventional wisdom that the criminal justice system responds less effectively to accusations of sexual assault. It should be noted, however, that the effects are relatively weak and do not justify the description of these experiences as a “second victimization.” In addition, the effects are no stronger when the offender knows the victim. We find no evidence that the alleged difficulties of prosecuting “acquaintance rape” produce more discontent among those victims.

Our analyses of complaints show at least one reason why victims of sexual assault are more dissatisfied with police treatment than victims of physical assault: they do not think that the police show enough sensitivity. Presumably the highly personal and embarrassing nature of sexual assault requires special behaviors that some

police do not provide; they treat the offense like any other. Note that complaints about sensitivity should be relatively easy to address with police training or the assignment of special officers to handle these offenses.

Our evidence suggests that sexual assault victims are no more likely than victims of physical assault to complain that the police were too lenient or that they did not do enough investigation. There is some evidence that victims of sexual assaults not involving rape are slightly more likely to think the police did not believe their charge. However, the effect is of borderline significance and no effect is observed for rape. Police might be less likely to believe victims of non-rape sexual assaults because of a lack of physical evidence in comparison to rapes and physical assaults.

Victims of sexual assault were also more likely than victims of physical assault to be dissatisfied with the courts, although the effect is rather weak. We had no information on the victim's specific complaints so we were not able to examine why. The effect does not appear to be due to the difficulties of conviction since it is observed with controls for legal outcomes. Perhaps it is due to the difficulties experienced by victims when participating in sexual assault trials (e.g., Allison and Wrightsman, 1993; Bryden and Lengnick, 1997). It may also be due to the fact that sexual assaults are usually more serious than physical assaults. The evidence on injury and weapon use suggest that victims of more serious assaults tend to be more dissatisfied with the courts. Perhaps they want more punitive treatment of these offenders.

Finally, we find no evidence that changes in rape law or changes in public attitudes toward this crime have affected the experience of victims with the criminal justice system. The attitudes of sexual assault victims toward the police or the courts generally did not depend on when the offense occurred. The one possible exception is that the police became more sensitive to victims of sexual assaults in the 1990s. While this interaction was not quite statistically significant, it may be that we are not able to show this effect clearly because of a lack of statistical power or measurement error related to our use of retrospective data.

In general, our results show the importance of comparing the criminal justice response to violence against women to its response to violence against men. Some experiences are similar for all crime victims, while others vary depending on the type of offense. The experiences of female victims are special in some ways, but often not in the ways conventional wisdom suggests.

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