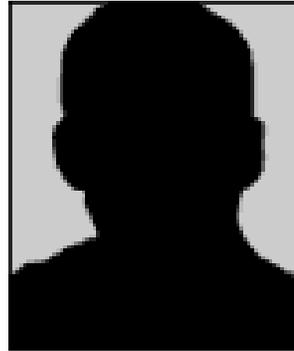


The Undetected Rapist



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False stereotypes and misconceptions about who rapists are and how rapists behave undermine our society's ability to respond effectively to sexual violence. These stereotypes and misconceptions stem from decades of social science research and media coverage that have focused on the tiny handful of rapists whose crimes are reported by victims and who are then subsequently successfully prosecuted. Some of these rapists committed acts of grievous violence. In many cases, their victims were total strangers, and often these cases received considerable media coverage. As a result, there is a widespread belief that rapists typically attack strangers, use weapons, and inflict extensive physical injuries.

However, twenty years of research on so-called "undetected" rapists – men who commit rapes but who are either not reported or not prosecuted for their crimes – has clearly demonstrated that the old stereotypes about rapists are false. These undetected rapists represent the vast majority of rapists, and account for the vast majority of rapes. These men almost never inflict visible, physical injuries on their victims. However, their crimes are characterized by extensive planning and premeditation, the frequent use of alcohol and other drugs to render their victims vulnerable, and the use of sufficient force and threats to terrify their victims into submission. Further, a majority of these rapists are serial offenders, and a majority commit other forms of violence, such as battery and child abuse.

Understanding the similarities and differences between undetected and incarcerated rapists is essential both for successful prosecution and effective prevention of sexual violence. Successful prosecution of these cases requires different strategies and a different focus than stranger rape cases, and a very coordinated effort by all those involved in the investigation and prosecution effort. The focus must be squarely on attacking the inevitable "consent defense." Similarly, prevention efforts can be more effective when they are consistent with the reality of who sexual offenders are, and who can and cannot be reached by education and outreach programs.

This presentation will combine research on rapists and detailed information from cases and prosecutions to illustrate these issues and to help attendees to reframe their thinking about the investigation, prosecution, and prevention of nonstranger rape.