



# Distorted Reality: A Commentary on DiMarco et al. (2022) and the Question of Male Sexual Victimization

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## Abstract

Our commentary responds to claims made by DiMarco and colleagues in an article published in this journal that the majority of victims of rape are men and that 80% of those who rape men are women. Although we strongly believe that studying male sexual victimization is a highly important research and policy endeavour, we have concerns with the approach taken by DiMarco and colleagues to discuss these incidents. Specifically, we critique their paper by addressing the definitions of rape used by the authors, questioning their interpretation of national victim surveys, evaluating their analysis of the underreporting of male rape, and highlighting the heteronormative framework they use to outline the landscape of male sexual victimization. With this commentary, we call for a holistic, nuanced, and balanced study of male sexual victimization that recognizes the reality of both female-on-male and male-on-male violence, the experiences of survivors, and multi-layered barriers that male victims often encounter.

**Keywords** Rape · Made to penetrate · Gender · Male victims · Reporting and disclosure

## Introduction

In a recent article, DiMarco et al. (2022) argue that men are raped just as frequently—or more frequently—as women and that these crimes are mostly perpetrated by women. DiMarco and co-authors make several statements, many of which we agree with. For example, they note that (1) the sexual victimization of men is a common, serious problem; (2) men who are victimized suffer emotional and psychological harms; and (3) all victimizations, regardless of gender, should be treated

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with equal seriousness. We also recognize that there is an ongoing, pressing need to both study and address issues of male sexual victimization and treat it with ample care, concern, and compassion.

Yet, in the context of DiMarco et al.'s (2022) article, the arguments used to support these statements are ambiguously constructed, based on erroneous interpretations of statistical data, and overlook decades of research on sexual violence, broadly, and the crime of rape, specifically. As such, we detail below the inconsistencies within this article and review the literature by focusing on definitional issues, presenting prevalence data both in the US and globally, and highlighting essential theoretical frameworks overlooked by DiMarco and his colleagues. We argue that the authors present the problem of male sexual victimization exclusively within heteronormative frameworks, thus, perpetuating some of the stereotypes that the authors themselves argue prevent men from disclosing sexual victimization. We also contend that by claiming that most male rape is perpetrated by women, DiMarco et al. are minimizing the prevalence and severity of male-on-male sexual victimization, a crime affecting straight men, gay men, men who have sex with other men (MSM), sexuality minority men, and underage male victims who have been sexually abused by male perpetrators. We, therefore, summarize our critique of DiMarco et al.'s arguments around four key areas: (1) definitions of rape; (2) interpretation of prevalence rates; (3) the reporting of male cases; and (4) their heteronormative analysis of male sexual victimization. Before doing so, we wish to stress that our critique and response do not aim to minimize or disregard any issues related to male sexual victimization, including those rightly highlighted by the authors. Instead, we seek to highlight the methodological and statistical concerns related to this study, as well as the potential implications of such research and the misinterpretations it may provide to others in academia and the wider public.

### **Critique 1: Definitional Issues**

DiMarco and his co-authors introduce their article by citing Thornhill and Palmer's (2000) definition of rape as "copulation resisted to the best of the victims' ability..." (p. 465) followed by, "A person who has sex with someone who is drugged, intoxicated, passed out, incapable of saying 'no' or unaware of what is happening can be charged with the crime of rape" (p. 466). The use of Thornhill and Palmer's (2000) definition, and DiMarco et al.'s extension, exhibits a problematic and outdated viewpoint of rape that has historically been challenged within the criminal-legal system (Levine, 2018). Historically, instances of rape were only seen as 'true' when victims could provide: (1) evidence of resistance, (2) third-party corroboration of the victim's narrative, and (3) an unquestionable reputation and sexual history (Corrigan, 2013; Estrich, 1987; Levine, 2018; Spohn & Horney, 1992). Defining rape upon the basis of the victims' efforts or inability to defend themselves has routinely opened the door for victim-blaming and the dismissal of many rape cases in the U.S. legal system. Prior to the 1970s, victim resistance was often used as an evidentiary requirement in many states (Estrich, 1987; Levine, 2018; Spohn & Horney, 1992). Using victim resistance as a legal qualifier led to somewhat of a legal grey

**Table 1** Definitions of rape in the UCR pre-/post-2013 and NCVS

UCR legacy definition (pre-2013) <sup>a</sup>	“The carnal knowledge of a female forcibly against her will”
UCR post-2013 <sup>a</sup>	“Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim. Attempts or assaults to commit rape are also included; however, statutory rape and incest are excluded”
NCVS <sup>b</sup>	“Unlawful penetration of a person against the will of the victim, with use or threatened use of force, or attempting such an act. Includes psychological coercion and physical force. Forced sexual intercourse means vaginal, anal, or oral penetration by the offender. Also includes incidents where penetration is from a foreign object, such as a bottle. Includes male and female victims, and both heterosexual and homosexual rape. Attempted rape includes verbal threats of rape”

<sup>a</sup>U.S. Department of Justice, 2014

<sup>b</sup>Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d

area where questions were raised of whether the victim’s resistance was ‘enough’ to qualify for a ‘true’ incident of rape. As such, advocacy starting in the 1970s pushed for rape law reform in the U.S. which changed many states’ evidentiary standards and legal definitions/requirements (Levine, 2018; Spohn & Horney, 1992). While these reforms’ ability to shift perceptions of ‘true rape’ have been called into question (Estrich, 1987), continuing to use victim resistance as a qualifier within legal or extra-legal definitions, continues a problematic legacy that undermines victims’ experiences.

Indeed, in many instances, victims of rape, regardless of gender/sexual identity, do attempt to resist their assailants (Tark & Kleck, 2014; Weiss, 2010; Wong & Balemba, 2016) for a variety of reasons. Victims’ resistance, or lack thereof, is influenced by many factors, including concerns about death or serious injury, substance use, being in a relationship with the assailant and wishing to avoid the escalation of violence within that relationship, and experiences of tonic immobility (Brecklin & Ullman, 2010; Chopin & Beauregard, 2022; Coxell & King, 2010; Harrell, 2012; Kalaf et al., 2017; Messinger, 2017; Moller et al., 2017; Moor et al., 2013; Weiss, 2010). DiMarco et al. are correct to identify that victims of all social identities may not resist their assailants, but such a fact should not serve as a prerequisite to defining a rape occurrence. Scholars and advocates have long challenged the notion of requiring victim resistance as a legal factor as it undermines victim autonomy and often leads victims to be blamed for their assault (Berger et al., 1988; Spohn & Horney, 1992). DiMarco et al.’s construction of rape as the outcome of victims’ lack of resistance is problematic, as it fails to recognize the importance of consent within rape occurrences; a factor that has become fundamentally important in legal and extra-legal definitions of rape.

Table 1 provides a list of the rape definitions used by major crime/victimization data sources in the United States. DiMarco et al. specifically express disagreement with definitions of rape in the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey

(NISVS; Black et al., 2011) and Uniform Crime Report (UCR; U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). However, both definitions explicitly include *consent* as a factor in determining the occurrence of rape, which is something that Thornhill and Palmer's (2000) definition excludes. As the authors point out, for over 80 years, the UCR emphasized female victims in their definition of rape (see, Table 1). However, the revised UCR definition has made great strides towards gender-neutrality and the inclusion of consent. The extent to which the definition focuses on being penetrated versus forcing to penetrate is less clear.

Nevertheless, because the UCR is just a data tool, it does not stipulate what the law is in each U.S. state. Therefore, across states, the *label* of the offense and the *types of behavior included in the offense* may vary. First, not all states use the term *rape* to categorize the most serious sex offense in the state. For example, what would be legally defined *rape* in Arkansas (§5-14-103) is known as *sexual assault* in Nevada (§ 200.366), and *sexual battery* (§79.011) in Florida. Beyond the terminology, however, is the reality that states might use multiple terms to refer to varying degrees of sexual victimization. For example, Ohio has a marital exemption clause that states that if two people are legally married and one spouse substantially impairs the other spouse by deliberately administering intoxicants to impair their judgment or control and penetrates them, this is not considered rape but a lesser charge of sexual battery (O.R.C. § 2907.03; Luminais et al., 2021). Further, in only six states does the penetration statute in the state explicitly criminalize forced-to-penetrate cases (AEquitas, 2022). Other states, however, may criminalize these incidents under penetration statutes, but it is less clear (AEquitas, 2022). Thus, the inconsistency of terminology used to define sexual victimization and the types of behaviors that are “counted” certainly adds to the challenges in discussing sex crimes. Nevertheless, it is precisely for this reason that clarity in the terminology and definitions used for any form of sexual victimization is important. Whilst we agree on the importance of examining the history of legal definitions in denying and overlooking male sexual victimization, it is important to recognize that these are only partially responsible for how forced-to-penetrate cases are viewed by society more broadly.

Sexual violence is also labelled differently by various victimization surveys. For example, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) describes *sexual assault* and *rape* as two distinct types of incidents, the former involving unwanted sexual contact and the latter involving unlawful penetration without one's consent (Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.; Table 1 includes the full NCVS definition of rape). The NISVS (Smith et al., 2018) does not reference *sexual assault* at all. Rather, sexual violence is categorized as *rape*, *being made to penetrate someone else*, *sexual coercion*, and *unwanted sexual contact*. Others have disaggregated *rape* into *forcible rape*, *drug or alcohol facilitated rape*, *incapacitated rape*, and *statutory rape* based on the characteristics surrounding the incident (e.g., intoxicants, threats; Daigle & Muftic, 2019). Put simply, there is no one, agreed-upon definition or terminology to describe rape. However, transparency related to what is included and why it is included in any given study is paramount, as is ensuring the definitions used do not perpetuate the myths that scholars studying sexual violence have worked so diligently to combat. Therefore, whilst we recognize that the ways in which rape has been defined have led to the invisibility of some types of offenses (i.e. forced/made

to penetrate), DiMarco et al.'s decision to discuss the sexual victimization of men by using outdated and ambiguous definitions of rape fails to acknowledge the complexities of the debates surrounding labeling and terminologies of sexual offenses, as well as limiting the range of incidents which are, rightly, considered to be sexually violent.

## Critique 2: The Interpretation of the CDC Report

Some of the challenges highlighted in DiMarco et al.'s use of theoretical and legal definitions of rape re-emerge in their analysis of the CDC report on sexual violence. Here, the authors claim that women and men experience sexual violence, more specifically rape, at the same rate. Rather than invest in the process of requesting access to the NISVS data available under restricted use from the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), the authors largely base their assertions on a re-analysis of a summary CDC report on sexual violence, reaffirming some of the findings of male victimization made by Stemple and Meyer (2014). DiMarco and colleagues submit that the number of men who were forced to penetrate someone else was equivalent to the number of women who experience rape.

They are not the first to compare forced-to-penetrate with rape cases and, with this essay, we do not intend to minimize or dismiss this critical discussion. Indeed, the literature clearly emphasizes the seriousness of forced-to-penetrate cases, the substantial harms experienced by male victims, and the prevalence of female-to-male sexual violence (Depraetere et al., 2020; Weare, 2018a, 2018b, 2021). Despite these truths, we also refer to a recent study by Smith et al. (2021) in which they analyze the 2010–2012 NISVS data and report that, despite having similarities in outcomes, rape victimization and forced-to-penetrate cases among US male victims differed significantly in patterns of immediate and lifetime health consequences. In their analysis, Smith et al. argue that rape and forced-to-penetrate cases have unique consequences on male victims and call for “examining and measuring rape and MTP [made to penetrate] separately to provide a more nuanced understanding of male SV [sexual violence]” (Smith et al., 2021, p. 13). Such findings highlight the theoretical and practical challenges in arbitrarily comparing victims' experiences. Therefore, we question how DiMarco and his co-authors use outdated and disputed definitions of rape (see Critique 1) to seamlessly equate the two forms of sexual violence without providing a detailed explanation as to how they conceptualize related, yet distinct, experiences of sexual victimization. In doing so, DiMarco et al. overlook critical evidence and misinterpret the findings from the NISVS report. Furthermore, DiMarco et al. state that “the per capita rate of rape was actually 4.37% higher for males than it was for females...” (p. 468). We cannot, nor do we, assume the intent of the authors, but had their objective been genuine to describe and present the landscape of male sexual victimization provided by the NISVS, more relevant findings from Smith et al.'s (2017) analysis of the NISVS 2010–2012 report should have been discussed. Smith et al., (2017, p. 18 and p. 26) report that 36.3% of women experienced contact sexual violence, compared to 17.1% of men (see Table 2). Specifically, 1 in 5 (19.1%) women experience rape during their lifetime, while 1 in 66 men (1.5%)

**Table 2** Summary of prevalence rates of rape and made to penetrate (lifetime and last 12 months) and gender of the perpetrator for rape (lifetime and last 12 months), adaptation of Smith et al.'s (2017) findings

	Data source <i>NISVS 2010–2012</i>	Cited by DiMarco et al. (2022)* (yes/no)
<b>Lifetime prevalence</b>		
<i>Contact sexual violence</i> (includes rape, being made to penetrate, sexual coercion, and/or unwanted sexual contact)	Women: 36.3%; Men 17.1%	No
<i>Rape</i> (includes completed and/or attempted forced penetration, or alcohol/drug-facilitated completed penetration)	Women: 19.1%; Men: 1.5%	No
<i>Made to penetrate</i> (includes times when the victim was made to, or there was an attempt to make them, sexually penetrate someone without the victim's consent)	Women: 0.5%; Men: 5.9%	No
<b>Last 12 months</b>		
Contact sexual violence	Women: 4.3%; Men: 3.7%	No
Rape	Women: 1.8%; Men: 0.2%	Yes
Made to penetrate	Women: NA (unreliable estimates); Men: 1.5%	Yes
<b>Female victims of sexual violence (lifetime)</b>		
Rape	Male perpetrator: 97.3%	No
Made to penetrate	Male perpetrator: 92.5%	No
Sexual coercion	Male perpetrator: 96.3%	No
Unwanted sexual contact	Male perpetrator: 94.9	No
Non-contact unwanted sexual experiences	Male perpetrator: 92.3	No
<b>Male victims of sexual violence (lifetime)</b>		
Rape	Male perpetrator: 86.5%	No
Made to penetrate	Female perpetrator: 78.5%	Yes**
Sexual coercion	Female perpetrator: 81.6%	No

Table 2 (continued)

	Data source <i>NISVS 2010–2012</i>	Cited by DiMarco et al. (2022)* (yes/ no)
Unwanted sexual contact	Female perpetrator: 53.0%	No
Non-contact unwanted sexual experiences	Female perpetrator: 37.6%	No

There is a more recent NISVS survey (2015) and accompanying report (released November 2018) (Smith et al., 2018) but DiMarco et al. (2022) could have referenced but did not. For this reason and for brevity, we only present data from the 2010–2012 NISVS study. Readers should also note that a new NISVS report was released in June 2022 (Basile et al., 2022) and that a report on sexual victimization by sexual orientation is also expected by the end of 2022

\*DiMarco et al. (2022) provide estimated numbers instead of weighted percentages, which is more typically provided in the literature and in Table 2

\*\*However, DiMarco et al. (2022) argue the estimates from the last 12 months should hold for lifetime estimates—an argument that Smith et al. (2017) in the NISVS report does not make and that might not hold given that differences in rates from last 12 months versus lifetimes, as demonstrated in the above table

experience rape and 1 in 17 men (5.9%) were made to penetrate someone. We are unsure as to what led to the omission of such fundamental information, particularly that which demonstrably and directly counters the authors' assertion that men and women experience rape at the same rate, or that men experience rape or being made to penetrate at a higher rate than women experience rape and other sexual offences.

DiMarco and his colleagues are quick to highlight sections of the CDC report framing women as the perpetrators, yet they neglect to provide an unbiased description of the pieces that denote men as the offenders. More importantly, a cursory examination of Black et al. (2011) NISVS 2010 summary report depicts three types of incidents perpetrated by men only. Specifically, men were identified as the suspect by 97.3% of female rape victims, 92.5% of "female victims of sexual violence other than rape," and "the majority of male rape victims (93.3%)" (Black et al., 2011, p. 24).

The methodological rigor of DiMarco et al.'s analysis of the CDC report is, at best, questionable. The reliance on dubious sources (i.e., *Daily Mail*) aside, making broad claims about female-perpetrated-male rape without an impartial evaluation of the report used, or an examination of the original data, is concerning. As the authors heavily rely on Stemple and Meyer's (2014) analysis of the CDC report, we take this opportunity to invite DiMarco et al. to review a clarification made by the authors themselves in 2017:

Our findings might be critically viewed as an effort to upend a women's rights agenda that focuses on the sexual threat posed by men. To the contrary, we argue that male-perpetrated sexual victimization remains a chronic problem, from the schoolyard to the White House. In fact, 96 percent of women who report rape or sexual assault in the NCVS were abused by men. (Stemple & Meyer, 2017, para. 6).

Lifetime statistics illustrate the far higher incidence of rape experienced among women, and thus, to even attempt to construct an argument counter these facts and to do so without the precision warranted is clearly problematic and must be addressed. Again, by providing this clarification in statistics we do not intend to minimize the experiences of male survivors. Rather, we aim to highlight concerns we have with DiMarco and colleagues' analysis of the CDC report, clarify the information that can be gleaned from the report, and underscore the unique experiences of sexual violence survivors, regardless of gender identity.

### **Critique 3: Challenges to Disclosure and Reporting**

In examining FBI data from 2018 and observing a discrepancy between arrests for rape of male and female perpetrators, DiMarco et al. state, correctly, that men rarely report experiences of sexual violence. They argue that men's reluctance to report is due to public disinterest, feminist essentialist narratives, and a series of stereotypes that closely resemble established rape myths. Whilst we generally agree with the authors' analysis, we argue that the problem of reporting requires a nuanced understanding of the many barriers that exist around disclosure and reporting to criminal



justice agencies. Firstly, underreporting of sexual offenses is a consistent finding for both male and female victims, with evidence suggesting that nearly two-thirds of rapes are not reported to the police (Morgan & Thompson, 2022). Victims offer many reasons for not reporting, including not labeling their own victimization as something criminal, fear of retaliation from the abuser, believing it was a personal matter and not wanting others to know, or having concerns that the police could not help or would not think it was serious enough (e.g., Depraetere et al., 2020; Fisher et al., 2003; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Put simply, the traumatic nature of sexual violence *itself* often shapes victims' reluctance to involve the criminal-legal system. In framing their analysis of low arrest rates *only* within socio-cultural discourse and a reductionist view of sexual victimization, DiMarco et al. overlook the shared issues affecting *all* victims of sexual violence and specifically dismiss the importance of examining men's lived experiences of sexual victimization and particularly reporting to the police.

A recurrent issue in DiMarco et al.'s article is their cursory assessment of the male sexual victimization literature, which has explored and detailed the issue of men's reluctance to report to the police for over three decades. For example, King and Woollett (1997) found that 85% of their male sample did not report to the police. Respondents reported being ashamed, afraid, unable to talk about the assault, desire to forget the event, and a mistrust of the police. In 86% of the cases, participants knew the abuser, which is indicative of the recurrent challenges for male survivors in reporting against potentially intimate partners, friends, or acquaintances. Male victims are also 1.5 times less likely to report than women (Pino & Meier, 1999); a closer analysis of the data showed that men were by 5 to 8 times more inclined to report only when physical injuries/need for medical assistance could be demonstrated to the police. More recently, Weiss (2010) examined sexual victimization narratives from the NCVS and found that men's likelihood to disclose increases three-fold when substance use was present in the incident. Men were more likely to disclose when they could prove they were physically incapacitated, particularly in cases where the perpetrator was a woman (Weiss, 2010, p. 284). Clearly, men's desire to have irrefutable evidence of their victimization (e.g., injuries, physical incapacitation) is indicative of how male survivors often frame their experiences around gendered narratives that portray men as strong and powerful, thus serving as barriers to disclosing experiences of interpersonal violence (Widanaralalage et al., 2022).

The literature is clear: men have several understandable anxieties and fears around reporting to the police in addition to the issues noted by DiMarco et al. In other words, men who experience violence in intimate relationships encounter unique challenges around help-seeking and report several psychological barriers, including a need for independence and control (see Yousaf et al., 2015 for a review). For example, men are *typically* less likely to share their vulnerabilities (Stanko & Hodbell, 1993) akin to the ones developed in the aftermath of sexual abuse. Men are also *consistently* less likely to seek formal psychological support for mental health issues (Galdas et al., 2005). Simply put, when examining reporting of sexual offenses, it is vital to recognize that men are unlikely to involve the police in the first place. Norms attached to masculinity are routinely brought forward in the literature to explain men's mistrust and fear of the police (Javaid, 2015). Norms include being

mentally and physically strong, assertive, sexually independent, dominant, and being able to protect oneself against any physical threat (e.g., Levant et al., 2010, 2013; Mahalik et al., 2003; McCreary et al., 2005). Masculinity is a vital concept that must be discussed in understanding not only the socio-cultural barriers encountered by male survivors but also when discussing the harms experienced by all-male victims (Widanaralalage et al., 2022). Surprisingly, however, DiMarco et al. fail to examine this vital component of men's lived experiences in sufficient detail. This is a key limitation of their analysis of male sexual victimization that results in overgeneralization of low levels of reporting as solely caused by socio-cultural barriers and exclusionary paradigms, which incidentally exist also for female victims (Mennicke et al., 2021). It also demonstrates a narrow understanding of how both men's and women's experiences of trauma are shaped by internal coping mechanisms designed to recapture a sense of agency and normality in their lives, and ultimately increase their reluctance to engage in the long and arduous process of reporting to the police.

#### **Critique 4: The Heteronormative Analysis of Male Sexual Victimization**

As our understanding of gender and sexuality has evolved to recognize these are continua rather than categories, so, too, has the language we use to describe them. Victimologists have moved away from an over-focus on the male/female gender binary and studied how sexual violence impacts gender non-conforming and transgender people. Additionally, scholars have argued against examining sex differences discretely, as such efforts fail to appreciate and give insight into within-group differences (Addis, 2008; Addis & Cohane, 2005; Addis & Mahalik, 2003). DiMarco et al. do not acknowledge the long-established notion that gender is something one does or performs within a socio-cultural context (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In discussing male sexual victimization, the authors avoid any discussion of the importance of men's sexuality, a key within-group difference, in their experiences of sexual violence. Further, the authors neglect to discuss how the report they so use, focuses on cis-hetero men, when sexual minority men are also included in those counts. This is despite historic evidence suggesting that 1 in 4 gay men experiences sexual violence at some point in their lifetime (Hickson et al., 1994) and MSM are six times more likely to experience sexual abuse in adulthood (Coxell et al., 1999). When developing an argument regarding male sexual victimization, particular when it is based on the NISVS, DiMarco and colleagues should have been more deliberate and included recent iterations and/or drawn from Chen et al.'s (2020) analysis of the prevalence of sexual violence across sexual orientation groups in U.S. adults. Indeed, by reducing male sexual victimization to instances of forced-to-penetrate, DiMarco et al. dismiss the very real experiences of gay and bisexual men and overlooks that LGBTQ+ people "experience a higher prevalence of various forms of violence compared to heterosexual individuals," (pg. 8). Prior studies support these claims. Edwards et al. (2015) compared the 6-months incidence of sexual assault<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sexual assault was measured with two items (i.e., "during this school year, how many times has someone had sexual contact with you when you didn't want to?" and "during this school year, how many times have you had sexual intercourse with someone when you didn't want to?").

among students who do and do not identify as sexual minorities: 15.5% of male sexual minority students reported incidents of sexual victimization against 6.5% of heterosexual students. Similarly, data from the United Kingdom suggest that 45% of gay and bisexual men have been sexually assaulted in their lifetime (Survivors UK, 2021).

The literature consistently demonstrates that men who identify as a sexual minority are at increased risk of sexual victimization (Beaulieu et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2016; Snyder et al., 2018). DiMarco et al.'s failure to acknowledge these important male groups is serious, particularly as there are additional socio-cultural barriers and challenges to be considered in the study of male sexual victimization. For example, studies often show that the presence of prior consensual activities (e.g., kissing) between MSM significantly predicts anal rape (Hickson et al., 1994; Survivors UK, 2021). This finding exemplifies how MSM are more exposed to sexually aggressive men (Johnson et al., 2016), given how sexual violence often occurs within initially consensual relationships (Chen et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is indicative of the added challenges for self-recognition of sexual victimization within communities that stereotypically are falsely portrayed as promiscuous and masochistic (Nagoshi et al., 2008). In presenting male sexual victimization as primarily the result of female perpetrators, DiMarco et al. present a false and overly narrow overview of the landscape of the phenomenon.

As discussed in Critique 2, the available literature clearly indicates that men are overwhelmingly raped by other men. DiMarco et al.'s attempt to describe male sexual victimization as primarily perpetuated by women displays a heteronormative and exclusionary understanding of the reality of many male victims. Therefore, we invite readers to refrain from exclusively viewing male sexual victimization within heteronormative frameworks. Again, we are clear that the phenomenon of female-on-male sexual violence must be treated with equal seriousness; however, to assume that all male victims are cisgender and heterosexual is extremely damaging as it neglects the reality and lived experiences of men who are sexually victimized by other men (see Widanaralalage et al., 2022). Most importantly, it dismisses the experiences of male communities who are already routinely marginalized in our society.

## Conclusion

In this article, we reply to DiMarco et al.'s (2022) analysis of male sexual victimization and presented four critiques. Firstly, DiMarco et al.'s use of outdated and problematic definitions of rape affects their overall appraisal of the legislative discourse and policy surrounding sexual violence in the US. Secondly, DiMarco et al. present only a partial overview of the CDC report, resulting in an overestimation of the incidence of forced to penetrate cases and an underestimation of the proportion of *all* sexual offenses that are committed by male perpetrators. Thirdly, DiMarco et al.'s analysis of the underreporting of rape cases indicates a superficial understanding of the multiple barriers encountered by male victims when deciding to involve the police. This includes overlooking issues experienced also by women and ignoring

within-group factors which suggest that men encounter gender-specific barriers to involve and engaging with criminal justice agencies. Finally, DiMarco et al.'s analysis portrays the phenomenon of male sexual victimization within heteronormative frameworks, a generalization that marginalizes several groups of sexual minority men who experienced childhood and adult sexual abuse. As Smith et al. (2021) note "previous literature used mostly nongeneralizable samples to examine the health consequences of male rape victimization" (p. 13). Broadly, we believe that DiMarco et al.'s article fails in its key objective of raising awareness on the prevalence of male sexual victimization and the importance of not considering male victims as secondary to women. They do so by failing to discuss recent contributions in the forced-to-penetrate literature (Weare, 2018a, 2018b, 2021) which provide balanced and comprehensive discussions of the issues surrounding terminology, prevalence rates, symptomatology, and underreporting of forced-to-penetrate cases. Crucially, such efforts focus on highlighting men's unique support needs, rather than providing ambiguous comparisons between different victim groups. Indeed, besides providing an erroneous reading of the CDC data, DiMarco et al. overlook the fact that the study of sexual violence is concerned with more than just prevalence rates. Indeed, our recent academic efforts are increasingly moving towards inclusive and intersectional understandings of sexual victimization and trauma in different marginalized and unheard voices, including men who are forced to penetrate. We wholeheartedly support original research and new publications on the phenomenon of forced to penetrate and female perpetrated sexual violence. However, such efforts must provide a truthful and unbiased representation of the landscape of sexual victimization, without creating a conflict between the needs and rights of different victim groups.

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