CRIMINAL LAW IN THE NEWS

In January 2016, Oklahoma police officer Daniel Holtzclaw was convicted on eighteen of thirty-six counts, including four counts of first-degree rape and four counts of forced oral sodomy, and was sentenced to 263 years in prison.

Thirteen witnesses ranging in age from seventeen to fifty-seven testified against Holtzclaw and described a pattern over the course of seven months in which he stopped African American women in one of Oklahoma City's poorest neighborhoods and upon discovering that they possessed criminal histories subjected them to sexual assaults ranging from groping to oral sodomy and rape. Holtzclaw apparently singled out these women because he believed they would conclude that no one would believe their claim of sexual abuse and for that reason they would be reluctant to file a complaint against him.

One victim asked, "Who are they going to believe?" . . . "It's my word against his . . . , he's a police officer. So I just left it alone and just prayed that I never saw this man again, run into him again, you know." Another woman stated, "I didn't think nobody was going to believe me anyway. And I'm a drug addict, so the only way I knew to handle it was to go and get high to try to block it out, to make it seem like it didn't happen."

A twenty-four-year-old woman testified that she was intoxicated when arrested by Holtzclaw and was handcuffed to a hospital bed to detox when he violated her. He allegedly continued to pursue her following her arrest and stalked her on social media.

A fifty-seven-year-old grandmother of twelve who neither was poor nor had a criminal record recounted that Holtzclaw pulled her over on a false charge of "swerving." He directed her to pull her pants down to her knees and shined a light on her privates. He then ordered her into his squad car and forced her to perform oral sex. It was this victim's complaint to the police that led to the discovery of Holtzclaw's pattern of sexual abuse of women.

Holtzclaw, the son of a white police officer and a Japanese mother, was convicted by an all-white jury whose recommendation for a 263-year sentence was followed by the judge. A number of Holtzclaw's victims have filed a civil suit.

Holtzclaw was a former football player at Eastern Michigan University who first began sexually harassing individuals whom he stopped in December 2013. He was fired from the Oklahoma City police in January 2015 following an internal investigation. Oklahoma City police chief Bill Citty wrote in Holtzclaw's termination letter that his "offenses committed against women in our community constitute the greatest abuse of police authority I have witnessed in my 37 years as a member of this agency."

Sexual offenses are the third highest cause of termination of police officers behind unnecessary violence and financial crimes. The Associated Press obtained records from forty-one states and found that between 2009 and 2014 1,000 police officers were disciplined by decertification for sexually related activity. Decertification is an administrative process in which an officer's law enforcement license is revoked. Roughly 550 officers were decertified for sexual assault, including rape and sodomy, sexual shakedowns in which citizens were extorted into performing sexual favors to avoid arrest, or gratuitous pat-downs, and roughly 440 officers lost their badges for other sexual offenses, such as possessing child pornography and indecent exposure, sexting, or being a "peeping Tom." Was Holtzclaw a "bad apple," or was his behavior part of a larger pattern of behavior by the police?