

---

## RESPONSE TO E-MAIL: "WHAT RAPISTS LOOK FOR ..."

By Susan Bartelstone, Safetyologist

---

**Warning: always be cautious about what you read on the Internet; try to corroborate it first before acting on the information!**

I received an e-mail entitled "What Rapists Look For.." from three different people over a period of several months. It is supposedly written by a woman who had taken a Self Defense course sponsored by her company. She said she liked the course and felt she had learned a lot from it, so she wanted to pass along the information to all her friends and their friends and so on. With the power of the Internet it has probably reached unknown thousands of women.

I believe this e-mail contains quite a bit of inaccurate or misleading information. Below are some excerpts from it and my comments -- pro and con:

- **The e-mail said:** "The [instructor] is a black belt in karate and trains twice a year with Steven Segal. He and others in this group interviewed a bunch of rapists and date rapists in prison on what they look for ..."
- **Fact:** It is not easy to get into prisons and jails and do studies -- no matter who you are. I had questions about how this self defense instructor got the approval for his "study," who funded it, how many inmates he interviewed, how were they selected, what scientific method he used to base his conclusions on, and was this method valid? **[I would love to see this study if anyone knows anything about it.]**
- **The e-mail said:** "The #1 thing men look for in a potential victim is hairstyle. They are most likely to go after a woman with a ponytail, bun, braid or other hairstyle that can easily be grabbed. They are also likely to go after a woman with long hair. Women with short hair are not common targets. The second thing men look for is clothing. They will look for women who's clothing is easy to remove quickly. The #1 outfit they look for is overalls because many of them carry scissors around to cut clothing and on overalls the straps can be easily cut off."

- **Fact:** All the studies I have ever seen stated that in stranger-to-stranger rapes, the rapists had only a vague idea of what their victims looked like, and could not describe their victims clothing in any great detail either. I have never heard anything about a preference for long or short hair either, or about great numbers of rapists carrying around scissors.



- **The e-mail said:** "They also look for women on their cell phone, searching through their purse or doing other activities while walking because they are off guard and can be easily overpowered...always be aware of your surroundings...if you see any odd behavior, don't dismiss it, go with your instincts. You may feel a little silly at the time, but you'd feel much worse if the guy really was trouble."
- **Fact:** This information was correct. Alertness is critical in terms of reducing being selected as a target, and a person should always listen to their instincts because they are the best early warning system you have for avoiding problems.
- **The e-mail said:** "If you carry Pepper Spray (this instructor was a huge advocate of it...) yell 'I HAVE PEPPER SPRAY' and hold it out in front of you." He said this would be a deterrent.
- **Fact:** I agree with the Instructor's advice to carry a defense spray like Pepper Spray (which is recommended) or Mace, but I don't agree with his instruction that you should hold the device out in front of you and warn the attacker to back off. You lose the *tremendous* advantage of surprise by forewarning your attacker you have a weapon, and he will probably attempt to take the device from you -- especially if you are holding it out in front of you.

A better tactic would be to hide the spray canister unobtrusively in your hand, ready to use, while yelling for the attacker to back off and leave you alone. If he continues to approach, wait until he comes close enough to harm you (about two arms-lengths) then spray him without warning. Aim for the face and the upper torso so the fumes stay on the clothes.

An important point to remember is that the attacker might not drop to the ground like a bug you just sprayed with Raid. He may only be weakened and slow but still dangerous. Furthermore, if the person is drunk, high, acting crazy, or enraged neither type of spray may have much effect at all, and may make him more angry and violent so be prepared to take further defensive action if the spray does not stop him.

Each state has different laws and regulations regarding the possession and use of defense sprays. Be sure to check with local police before you purchase one.

- **The e-mail said:** "These men said they will not pick on women who have umbrellas, or other similar objects that can be used from a distance, in their hands." Keys are not a deterrent because you have to get really close to the attacker to use them as a weapon. So the idea is to convince these guys you're not worth it."
- **Fact:** Never heard of any such thing. A man who wants to rape you won't be deterred by an umbrella, especially if he has a weapon; and keys certainly are a great weapon even if they are not a deterrent. Many weapons can be found in the environment. Hot or caustic liquid like coffee, cleaning fluid, or hair spray can be thrown in the eyes; sharp objects can be jabbed in the eyes, ears, or throat; pillows, cushions or packages can be used as shields or thrown into an assailant's face.
- **The e-mail said:** "If you put up any kind of a fight at all, they get discouraged because it only takes a minute or two for them to realize that going after you isn't worth it because it will be time-consuming...Most of the rapists this man talked to said they'd leave a woman alone if she yelled or showed that she would not be afraid to fight back. Again, they are looking for an easy target...If someone is coming toward you, hold out your hands in front of you and yell '**Stop or Stay back!**' ... but the thing these rapists told our instructor is that they want a woman who will not cause a lot of trouble. Start causing trouble, and he's out of there. "
- **Fact:** The best way to deter criminals from selecting you as a target is to adopt a non-victim body language and manner and learn how to respond assertively (as opposed to timid or aggressive) in a confrontation. It's true that the majority of criminals (about 80%) do want an easy target and will not select those they think will put up a fight. Don't be embarrassed to yell, be rude, or make a scene to attract attention to yourself if you suspect danger. However, about 20% of the criminals (categorized as "Predators") will not be deterred by a strong demeanor and they will often hurt their victims -- even if they have cooperated fully. Remember that it is ok to submit to a rape if that is what you feel will save your life. Fighting is always the last thing you should choose to do -- if you have that choice.

If you have no choice but to fight for your life, strike at the most vulnerable targets -- eyes, ears, nose, throat, groin, knees, shin, instep. These targets take the least amount of strength or ability to hurt. Get angry, yell, and fight as dirty as you can.



The most important thing is your intention not to be raped, assaulted or abused. If you choose to fight, you must fight to win, and that means being willing to do anything you have to to hurt this attacker and stop him. I believe this "non-victim attitude" is even more important than years of martial arts training. Many people fear they would be too afraid to fight even if they found themselves in a life-threatening situation.

Taking a realistic scenario-based Self Defense or Rape Prevention course, that stresses developing this inner resolve, is the best way to overcome your fears.

***If you received this e-mail, or do so in the future, please consider this response and feel free to circulate it. And, please send me e-mails like the one on this page. I would like to see them and comment on them and publicize the good ones.***

© Copyright 2002, The Safety Solutions Company, All rights Reserved

Any of the material from this website may be used or reproduced, all we ask is that you credit your source and include our contact information.