

Alleged Rape at Nordstrom Was Hoax, Police Say

January 16, 1993 | TONY PERRY | TIMES STAFF WRITER



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SAN DIEGO — An alleged rape in a Nordstrom fitting room that shocked the city was a fabrication by a 49-year-old woman who is "an unhappy person," police officials said Friday.

At a crowded news conference, police said the woman who had reported being raped and robbed at knifepoint on Jan. 3 recanted after being confronted with evidence that contradicted her story.

Although San Diego had nearly 500 reported rapes in 1992, the alleged incident at the Nordstrom in the Fashion Valley shopping center got more public reaction and press attention than all others combined because of its brazen nature and the location, a store in one of the city's safest and most popular shopping centers.

Faced with a drop-off in business, Nordstrom and other retailers had offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to an arrest. Women reported being afraid to shop in Nordstrom and other stores despite assurances of increased security.

Police officials declined to provide details about what kind of evidence contradicted the woman's account, what motive the woman may have had or whether she had made other false allegations. Sgt. Steve Hinton said offering more information might discourage women who have been raped from cooperating with police.

The woman, described as married with grown children, recanted after being promised that she would not be prosecuted for filing a false police report, a misdemeanor.

The woman was found in a store fitting room bound and gagged with duct tape. She told police that she had been raped by a man hiding in the fitting room who then stole her gold wedding ring, her packages and \$133 from her purse.

It was unclear how the attacker could have gotten into the women's fitting room unnoticed by other shoppers or surveillance cameras. While defending their security measures, Nordstrom officials had stopped short of suggesting a hoax.

Police declined to say how the woman could have bound herself.

Asked to explain why the Nordstrom case received such attention, Assistant Police Chief Dave Worden said: "Nordstrom on a Sunday afternoon? During the January sales, when the store is extremely crowded? . . . If this case had happened like it was reported, we had a desperate, violent type criminal out there."