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Sexual Assault on College Aged Women: Intersectionality Matters

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SEXUAL ASSAULT ON COLLEGE AGED WOMEN:
INTERSECTIONALITY MATTERS

by

DHANEEN COMEAU

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Sociology
in the College of Sciences
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ABSTRACT

Sexual assault on college campuses is a pervasive issue that continues to affect women from a variety of backgrounds. Unfortunately, the narratives of women of color, especially black women are often marginalized even though data shows that they tend to be more susceptible to sexual assault. Using survey questions concerning traditional gender roles, and situations of sexual assault (while considering race and gender), this study will measure the attitudes of 300 college-aged individuals. Data will be analyzed using a Chi Square test to study the combined effects that race and gender may have on the respondents' perception of victims. Historically, African American/black women have faced unique stereotypes about their sexuality that dehumanizes and normalizes sexual aggression towards them. This study aims to explore perceptions about sexual assault as it relates to college-age black women and expand the scope of research currently being done on victimization.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Sexual assault on college campuses is a wide spread national problem within the United States with 20 to 25 percent of women assaulted while in college (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). Victims are sometimes discouraged from pressing charges by school officials and campus law enforcement to protect the University's reputation (Campus Security Report, 2010). The battle is even more difficult for students of color, who are often overlooked in the conversation about rape on college campuses. Unfortunately, consideration of race and ethnicity is often absent from official reports on college rapes; for example, the U.S. Department of Education does not account for race when collecting data on sexual assault (Murphy, 2015). The gap in the data for black women who undergo campus rape can translate into further marginalization of their experiences. Although black women exhibit higher rates of sexual assault, they are often an afterthought in conversations about sexual violence. Lykke (2016) explains, "Media accounts of gender violence often ignore the interests of Blacks, particularly women. Women of color are especially unlikely to appear in the news as victims of rape." On the other hand, taking sex into account, victim blaming often relies on sexism and/or prejudice to vilify women who have experienced sexual assault. The sexuality and behavior of a victim of sexual assault frequently come into question in order to shift blame from the attacker to the victim. Women are often the target of gender based violence and patriarchy allows men to paint inaccurate pictures of sexual assault while escaping culpability. Since black women are at the intersection of race and gender, they are especially vulnerable to victim blaming and victim stereotypes. It is important to investigate the attitudes of students regarding race and gender as it may provide some insight into what contributes to the prevalence of sexual assault on campus and the failure to obtain justice for victims of all races.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual assault is one of the most common crimes reported on college campuses, with the National Center for Education statistics indicating that they account for 18 percent of crimes on campus; more than robberies, aggravated assaults, or car theft (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The number may be even higher as rape is the most underreported crime, with 90 percent of sexual assault victims choosing not to report the incident (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). When rape victims do report their sexual assault, they may feel stigmatized or have their experiences minimized by law enforcement or school faculty. The use of rape myths and victim blaming perpetuate a cycle of holding the victim accountable for their own assault, while essentially protecting the rapist. In 2015 Brock Turner, a college swimmer, was given only a 6 month jail sentence after he was stopped by two cyclists who witnessed him sexual assaulting a female student. The judge who sentenced him felt that Turner's age and lack of criminal background meant he should receive leniency, regardless of the victim's right to justice (Stack. L, 2016). According to Lutz-Zois, Moler, and Brown (2015), a combination of rape myths and negative views of women can contribute to sexual violence against women. Examples of rape myths include: over exaggerating the rate at which false accusations of sexual assaults occur, perpetuating the false notion that rape occurs to only a certain type of woman, or insisting that women can provoke rape. On a college campus alcohol consumption is commonplace and it is the norm for students to party and get drunk. Women have been blamed for consuming too much alcohol and "contributing" to their own rapes (Fagen, McCormick, & Kontos, 2011). It should also be noted that traditional gender roles dictate that men belong in positions of power and this allows men to distort narratives of the victims.

There is evidence to suggest that the police often subscribe to rape myths when dealing with sexual assault and it is possible that since most law enforcement consists of men that such attitudes about women are commonplace (Lutz-Zois et al., 2015). The biases law enforcement officers may hold in terms of victimology can greatly impact how a case against a suspected offender moves forward. Alluding to the victim's promiscuity by mentioning her sexual past, questioning her choice of clothing or decision to drink are ways that law enforcement transfer blame from the perpetrator to the victim. In a study of 212 police officers by Schuller and Stewart (2000), found that officers decided whether to charge a suspect of sexual assault based on their own assessment of victim credibility. In the study, they presented officers with a vignette (or scenario) that involved a sexual assault victim consuming alcohol. They found that officers based their judgement of victim culpability on the amount of alcohol consumed and that female officers were more sympathetic towards the victim (Schuller and Stewart, 2000). Since women are often required to navigate in male dominated spaces, our overarching patriarchal system continues to foster negative views of victims within our society. For centuries sexism was used to promote the idea that femininity is somehow weaker and subservient to masculinity, which is often associated to strength and dominance. Lykke (2016) states "Fear is a major shaping factor in women's lives, with men as a group—not just men who commit violence against women—benefitting from 'a social system in which women are routinely terrorized by men'" (241). Since men often dominate leadership roles in society, they have the power to discriminate against women because of their perceived inferiority attributed to their sex. Essentially, fear and violence are used to exert power over women and uphold patriarchy. In relation to sexual assault, the feminist theory examines how men have the power to shift blame from the perpetrator to the victim, often using "slut-shaming" to discredit a woman who was

victimized. Slut shaming consists of criticism of an assault victim's behavior, especially if it is deemed provocative. The victim's clothing choice, sexual history, and even their possession of contraceptives like birth control or condoms can be used as ammunition to slut shame. Men benefit from implementing patriarchy in victim blaming because they can use stereotypical narratives about femininity and masculinity to insinuate that victims provoke their assaults. Men are portrayed as overtly sexual beings that cannot control their sexual urges, so when a sexual assault occurs the questions shift from the actions of perpetrator to the actions of the victim (Piatak, 2015). On the other hand, intersectional feminism considers that women of color may have to navigate through different obstacles because of how their race is perceived in society. As Harris-Perry (2011) illustrates in her book that since black women are at the intersection of race and gender they face two forms of oppression that lead to a unique form marginalization. Although women in general are at risk of violence in a male dominated society, women of color are especially vulnerable and frequently face marginalization when presenting narratives of sexual assault (Murphy, 2015). The victim's behavior and sexuality is many times called into question, and this sort of probing is heightened when the victim is a person of color. Black women are oftentimes stereotyped as exhibiting higher levels of sexual promiscuity and are therefore incapable of being raped (Sapp, Farrell, Johnson, & Hitchcock, 1999). These stereotypes stem from slavery, a time where black people, especially black women, had little agency over their bodies. "The idea of black women's sexual wantonness was important to late nineteenth – and early twentieth-century nation-building efforts" (Harris-Perry, 2011). Classifying black women's bodies and sexuality as abnormal allowed for white supremacy to dictate citizenship and class within American society. Harris-Perry explains, "The myth of black women's unrestrained sexuality operated in both slavery and freedom as a means of justifying

racial and gender exploitation” (p. 58). With this historical context in mind, black women are not viewed as ideal victims and are many times absent from dialog on rape. White female victims are much more visible and “are portrayed more compassionately and in greater detail by news media” (Lykke, 2016). Black women also exhibit higher rates of sexual assault, in comparison to their white female counter parts (Lykke, 2016). Unfortunately, reporting rates are also low with black female victims, and besides the historical factors that can lead to hesitancy in reporting, cultural implications may also play a role. Since rape is often an intraracial occurrence, black women would have to report member of their own race in a community where racial solidarity is encouraged (Murphy, 2015). Law enforcement officers are viewed as untrustworthy and ultimately more of a menace to the community than a resource (Prentiss, C., 2015). Also considering the fact that African American men are the majority of the offenders incarcerated in America’s prisons, black women are discouraged from adding to the cycle of mass incarceration in the black community. Black women have had to wrestle with the fact that they are at the intersection of race and gender, sometimes experiencing a struggle between black unity and their own personal concerns (Henry, 2009). In a culture where black women are socialized to put their needs aside for the betterment of their community, reporting a black man for sexual assault can seem like a betrayal. And in spite of alarming rates of rape within the black community, black media often discusses sexual assault in ways that shift focus from black males onto a sort of abnormal evil, frequently mentioning instances of false accusations or cases in foreign countries (Lykke, 2016). This can possibly be attributed to the fact that black men have been historically deemed as hypersexual and were “stereotyped as being genitally over-endowed, [as] being animalistic in their sexual appetite, and lusting after and desiring to rape White women” (George & Martinez, 2002). So in order to cater to black male consumers and dispel stereotypes, black

media outlets ignore or gloss over certain issues. However, some research has shown that black men are no more supportive of rape myths than white men, and that black men were actually less likely to engage in behaviors that would lead to date rape (McQuiller Williams, Porter, & Smith, 2016). But this is not to say that there has not been conflicting data and research on whether men of color tend to victim blame more frequently than their white counterparts. Although black males experience race based oppression, their positions as males in a patriarchal society allows them privilege as men in a patriarchal society. This can influence their attitudes on gender roles, sexual assault and victim blaming.

Unfortunately, the media coverage of victims of sexual assault, the studies that are conducted and the data that is presented frequently focuses on white victims or simply fails to significantly mention race as a factor in victimization. The importance of representation and visibility for rape survivors should be considered when their narratives are being shared with the public. Although rape is a violent act that has the capacity to affect all women, women of color display higher rates of victimization yet rarely appear in mainstream documentaries, studies, and narratives of rape. Lykke (2016) explains that, “victim visibility (or the lack thereof) and denial of sexual violence as an important social problem are mechanisms by which male privilege is preserved and female disadvantage, particularly for Black women, is reinforced and maintained” (253). Narratives of sexual assault in relation to black women are rarely shared in mainstream media. This invisibility and erasure strengthens perpetrators and allows other women to potentially become victimized as well.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

Research Question 1: Do race and gender influence respondent perception on the seriousness of sexual assault on college campuses?

Hypothesis: Gender will affect how students view sexual offenders and victims of sexual violence. Women will be more empathetic in their views of victims, while men may feel more empathetic towards the offender, given that victims tend to be female and the perpetrators are often male. Race may also influence attitudes given the possible cultural and historical differences black and white respondents may have.

Research Question 2: Does the support of traditional gender roles translate to less sympathy towards a victim of sexual assault? How do the responses differ in terms of race and gender?

Hypothesis: Those with higher support of traditional gender roles will most likely be less sympathetic towards victim because of the likelihood of sexist ideology falling in line with these views. Considering the cultural differences of white and black respondents, black respondents may be more supportive of traditional gender role than their white counterparts.

Research Question 3: Does race and gender influence perceived victim culpability? (i.e.: Are black respondents more or less likely to victim blame than white respondents? And are male respondents more likely to support rape myths?)

Hypothesis: Based on previous research, it is possible that internalized racism and internalized misogyny may play a role in how women of color perceive victim culpability. While women in general may be more sympathetic towards the victim than men, women of color may sympathize less with a victim, in comparison to white female respondents, because of how race, femininity, and sexuality are regarded within their culture.

Research Question 4: Does the race and gender of the respondent influence acceptance of coercive sexual practices?

Hypothesis: Women will be the least supportive of sexual coercive tactics and difference in the views of white and black respondents will be significant enough to conclude that race influences attitudes towards said tactics.

Data

Data was collected through a quantitative research survey that was distributed to college students. Email and social media were used where a link to the survey was immediately sent by message or public post. The survey was made available through convenient online access by computer, mobile device or tablet. An online survey allowed for quicker data collection and a larger number of respondents over a relatively short period of time. Students were asked to complete the survey, which contained scenarios of sexual assault, coercion, gender roles and rape myths to measure their attitudes on the actions taking place in said scenarios. The survey was distributed for a period of three months to 321 respondents. Initially only 240 respondents were considered for this study because the focus of the age range was 18 to 29 and some of the respondents failed to answer demographic questions or only partially answered the survey questions regarding sexual assault. An additional 46 respondents who did not identify as “Black/African American” or “White” were removed from the analysis of the racial aspect of the questions but still included for the gender variable for the Chi-Square test (How serious of a problem do you think sexual assault is on college campuses?).

Method of Research

Survey questions on demographics, rape myths, gender roles and a vignette (scenario) were used to measure attitudes on victimization in relation to race and gender. The demographic

questions simply asked for the respondent's age, sex, race, and college enrollment status. This allowed for data to be analyzed while considering the dependent and independent variables and eventually comparing the discrepancies between the variables. The vignette was a hypothetical situation where an African American/black victim is assaulted after being alone with a friend. In the scenario, the victim is kissing and touching the perpetrator and eventually is assaulted by the perpetrator by the end of the vignette. This vignette model was taken from research done by Kristen A. Piatak, who created six vignettes and distributed a one vignette per survey and respondent (Piatak, 2015, 66-71). The race, ethnicity and sex of the victims were different in each vignette. Unlike Piatak's survey, only one vignette was used and it was available to every respondent who took part in the survey. The reason for the use of only one vignette was because this study focused on how the two different groups viewed an African American female rape victim. Also, only two groups (white and black) were analyzed for this study, whereas Piatak's study examined white, black, and Hispanic population samples. For this study, the victim in the vignette was an African American female and her perpetrator was a male of an unknown background. Respondents were also asked varying questions on whether the victim had a hand in their own assault, based on the victim's manner of dress, consumption of alcohol, prior sexual contact, promiscuity, etc. In both the rape myth questions and vignette, respondents were given the option of selecting either "strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree" to indicate their approval or disapproval of the victim's actions. Survey questions regarding gender roles were also included to analyze whether men and women have the similar or dissimilar views on gender roles. The gender role portion included questions about hegemonic roles men and women are expected to perform, like cooking, child

bearing, and hyper-sexuality. Gender roles and support of rape myths were compared and analyzed for a possible relationship between the two.

Research Design

The design of the study was a cross-sectional study in which the responses from the sample of respondents will be taken at one point in time. A sample of college aged students were surveyed once during the year and the data will subsequently be measured shortly after. The advantages of this method is that it takes less time and resources because it is measuring a specific point in time while this is not the case in a longitudinal study, which can take years to complete. The disadvantages of using this design is that it is not ideal for studying change over time and it does not determine cause and effect. The cross sectional design simply establishes that there may be a relationship between the different variables and this allows for further research to determine what causes that relationship.

Population and Sample

The sample population consisted of college aged students, ages 18 to 29 years old. 240 respondents were used for the purpose of this study only the data on questions about sexual assault was pulled from the survey and analyzed for purpose of this particular study. Men and women are both important populations to survey since their attitudes on sexual will be compared to confirm or reject the hypotheses. Women of color, particularly black/African American women, are also an important population to consider since the research will focus on attitudes towards sexual assault in conjunction with race. Black/African American men are also population of interest since there will be a comparison of attitudes across race and gender.

Variables

Dependent Measures

Attitudes on sexual violence among college students served as the dependent variable and it was measured using survey questions on victimization. Respondents were asked “How serious of a problem do you think sexual assault on college campuses?” and given the option of selecting “Not at all a problem,” “Minor problem,” “Moderate problem” or a “Serious problem.” To analyze views on traditional gender roles, a Likert scale was distributed as a part of the survey. The statements “Men are naturally more sexual than women,” “Women are meant to be caretakers while men are meant to work and provide,” “Unlike men, women are more likely to make emotional decisions,” “Women should know how to cook to be effective wives and mothers” were presented to the respondents along with the choices “Strongly Disagree,” “Somewhat Disagree,” “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” “Somewhat Agree,” and “Strongly Agree.” A vignette or scenario was also incorporated into the survey to measure respondent’s attitudes on victim blaming. “Keisha, an African American college student, goes over her friend Eric's place to watch a movie on Netflix. They end up making out, touching, and undressing. Keisha indicates that she does not want to have sex but wants to continue kissing. Eric agrees and they continue making out; he then decides to penetrate Keisha with his penis and then she tells him to stop, but he does not.” After reading the scenario, the respondents were presented with the following statements, “Keisha had some responsibility for what happened at the end of the scenario,” “It is possible that Keisha led Eric on and he couldn't control himself,” “Both Keisha and Eric are equally responsible for what happened at the end of the scenario,” and “Keisha could have prevented what happened to her at the end of the scenario.” Respondents were then given the

option of selecting whether “Strongly Disagree,” “Somewhat Disagree,” “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” “Somewhat Agree,” or “Strongly Agree” with the scenario. Lastly, the Coercion scale survey questions asked, “On a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 indicating strongly disagree, 3 indicating neither agree nor disagree, and 5 indicating strongly agree) please rate your agreement with the statement in context: Two people are on a date and the evening is coming to an end in one of their dwellings. Is it okay for the male to use strength to coerce the female to have sex if...” “She gets him sexually excited,” “She led him on,” “They have had sex with each other before,” “He is so turned on that he thinks he cannot stop,” “She is drunk or high,” “He spent a lot of money on her,” “She lets him touch her intimately,” “She has had sex with many other partners,” “She initiated conversations about sex throughout the night,” “She brought a condom,” “She said she was going to but then changed her mind,” and “They have been in a relationship for a long period of time.”

Independent Measures

Race and gender served as the independent variables in this study, exploring how these two factors impact the respondents’ views on sexual assault. The simple demographic questions in the beginning of the survey established the respondent’s race and gender. Race was divided into 3 categories; White, Black or African American and Other. This allowed for comparisons between the responses of the different race of respondents in relation to their potential differing views on college sexual assault. Also, the survey included scenario questions that mention or allude to the race of a hypothetical victim of sexual assault. This type of question was implemented to measure whether respondents had a racial bias against certain victims of sexual assault. Sex was also used to measure if views differed between male and female respondents.

Control Variable

To insure the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, the current educational status of the respondents was limited to college aged students, ages 18 to 29. The age of the students was limited to this range because students in college tend to encompass a certain mean age range.

Analytic Strategy

The research questions were answered through a series of analyses that consisted of three steps. First, a univariate analysis of the variables was conducted to record the frequency distributions and means. Next, bivariate analyses of the variables are conducted to determine a relationship between the independent and dependent variables. For research question 1, Chi square tests were used to establish whether there was a significant relationship between the race and sex of the respondent and their perception the seriousness of campus assault. For research questions two through four, independent sample T-Tests were used to determine if there was a significant relationship between race, gender and the respondents' perception of a sexual coercive situation, traditional gender roles, and victim culpability.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Research Question #1

A comparison of attitudes on how serious of a problem sexual assault is on college campuses across race and gender showed various results. A Chi-Square test was run to test for the difference in proportion of White and Black respondents who agree with the statement that sexual assault is a serious problem on college campuses. The chi-square test shows a p value of 0.190 which reveals that race (White and Black) was not a statistically significant factor in determining whether respondents found sexual assault to be a serious problem on college campuses. The cross tabulation illustrates that most of the respondents, regardless of race indicated that campus assault was a serious problem. The 2nd most selected response was that the respondent considered campus assault to be a moderate problem. In contrast, the Chi-square test comparing the attitudes of male and female respondents revealed that there was a significant difference in the means and that gender was a statistically significant variable in determining on how serious of a problem campus assault. Women were more likely to view sexual assault as a serious problem than men, who were more likely to view it as a moderate or minor issue.

Table 1: Attitudes on the Seriousness of Sexual Assault Scale (Race)

How serious of a problem do you think sexual assault is on college campuses?				
	Black Respondents	Chi Square	P value	White Respondents
Not at all a problem	0%	8.71	0.109	0.80%
Minor problem	4.30%			11.20%
Moderate problem	26.10%			32.00%
Serious problem	69.60%			56.00%

Table 2: Attitudes on the Seriousness of Sexual Assault Scale (Gender)

How serious of a problem do you think sexual assault is on college campuses?				
	Female Respondents	Chi Square	P value	Male Respondents
Not at all a problem	0%	15.45	0.001	0%
Minor problem	5.70%			23.20%
Moderate problem	27.80%			26.80%
Serious problem	65.30%			50.00%

Research Question # 2

When analyzing the relationship between race and support of traditional gender roles, there was a significant difference in perceptions within a specific race. According to the T-Test, because equal variances were assumed, ($p > 0.05$), the p - value 0.037 in Table 3 indicates that there was a significant difference in the attitudes of black female and black males on traditional gender roles. The black male individuals within the sample had a higher mean (10.24); which indicated that they supported gender roles more than the black female respondents, who had a mean of 8.31. For white respondents, the results were quite similar. Equal variances were also assumed ($p > 0.05$) and the p - value 0.03 indicates that there is a significant difference between male and female attitudes. The results of T-Test for white males was 10.11, higher than the mean for white female respondents (7.66). The higher mean illustrates that white male respondents show more support for gender roles than female respondents. Although the results in the Chi-Square test (Table 1) indicate that race is not significant factor in determining attitudes on the seriousness of sexual assault, race does indeed play a significant role in how individuals view gender roles. The mean difference of white male and female respondents was higher than the mean difference of black male and female respondents. White male and female respondents had a mean difference of 2.44 in contrast to black male and female respondents who had a mean

difference of 1.93. Black male and female respondents tended to have slightly more similar views on gender roles than white male and female respondents, since their mean difference was lower, however overall black respondents did show a slightly higher support of gender roles than their white counterparts.

Table 3: Gender Traditionalism Scale

Black Respondents					White Respondents			
	N	Mean Gender Traditionalism Scale (Std. Dev.)	T	P Value	N	Mean Gender Traditionalism Scale (Std. Dev.)	T	P Value
Male	25	10.24 (3.85)	2.13	0.037	19	10.01 (3.48)	3.01	0.003
Female	42	8.31 (8.31)			104	7.66 (7.66)		

Research Question # 3

For this part of the study, a vignette or scenario was used to illustrate a story involving an African American victim. The victim is alone with the perpetrator, they engage in kissing and touching and the victim is assaulted after even after she states that she does not want to continue. An independent sample T-Test was used to measure whether the race of the respondent influences attitudes of victim blaming towards the assault victim in the scenario. Like the other results, the test indicated that male respondents, white or black, were more likely to victim blame than the female respondents. In terms of the black respondents, there was a significant difference in the means. Black male respondents had a mean of 8.76, the white male respondents of the sample had a mean of 7.47 and white female respondents had a mean of 5.79 (Table 4). White male respondents and black male respondents had the highest means of the sample, indicating higher support of victim culpability in comparison to the white male and black female respondents.

Black female respondents had the lowest means, and showed the least amount of support of victim culpability or blame. Black respondents also had a significantly higher mean difference than their white counterparts, 3.66 verses 1.69. This indicates that black respondents have more polarizing attitudes on victim blaming than the white respondents within the sample.

Table 4: Keisha Scenario

	Black Respondents					White Respondents			
	N	Mean for Keisha Scenario	T	P Value	N	Mean for Keisha Scenario	T	P Value	
Male	25	8.76	3.94	<.001	19	7.47	2.29	0.024	
Female	42	5.09			104	5.79			

Research Question # 4

When measuring the support of the Coercion variable, it was discovered that there was a significant difference between the attitudes of black male and female respondents. Equal variances are not assumed and the null hypothesis of equal variances is rejected. The p-value of 0.05 indicates that the relationship is significant (Table 5) and the means in Table 5 also indicate that black males in the sample were more supportive of the sexual coercion than the black females in the sample. In comparison to the white male respondents, black males exhibited a greater support of sexual coercion and had a larger mean difference than their female counterparts. The mean for black males was 18.67 while the mean for black female respondents was 13.02. The five-point difference between the means indicate that there is a larger margin of different in terms of the support of coercive sexual practices when comparing black men and women. Overall, the higher mean results indicate that Black male respondents were more likely to select answers that condone sexual coercion than any other group in the sample. In terms of sex, female respondents (white or black) were more likely to be less supportive of sexual

coercion than male respondents. White and black female respondents had a mean of 13.70 and 13.03, respectively, in comparison to white males and black males with the means of 14.42 and 18.16.

Table 5: Coercion Scale

	Black Respondents				White Respondents			
	N	Mean Coercion Scale Mean (Std. Dev.)	T	P Value	N	Mean Coercion Scale Mean (Std. Dev.)	T	P Value
Male	25	18.16 (8.16)	3.06	0.005	19	14.42 (4.13)	0.671	0.504
Female	3	13.03 (2.33)			103	13.7 (4.34)		

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Considering race and gender simultaneously when studying campus sexual assault revealed that there could be important knowledge to be gained about victimization in relation to cultural background. Campus rape is a crime mostly impacts women, and gendered oppression plays a role in how sexual assault victim and perpetrator is treated. In a patriarchal society where men are more likely to be in positions of power, sexual assault victims may experience obstacles that can deter them from receiving justice. Slut shaming is a patriarchal tool used to discredit victims and absolve rapists of wrongdoing. Slut shaming often includes criticism of a victim's sexual past, clothing choice, appearance, or attitude. Race may also influence perceptions of the victim and a sexually coercive situation. Since black women are historically hypersexualized, black female victims may be victim blamed at higher rates. Cultural implications, like racial solidarity, also factor into how black victims may and others within the community react to sexual assault. The first research question focused on how race and gender could possibly influence perceptions on the seriousness of campus assault. When analyzing the data from the survey, it was revealed that women were more likely to believe sexual assault was a serious problem than men. The differences in responses shows that women are more likely to be concerned with the issue of sexual assault on college campuses. However, attitudes of black and white individuals in the sample were not significantly different since most respondents chose that sexual assault was a serious problem. For the second research question, support of traditional gender roles and sympathy for victims of sexual assault was assessed by focusing on both race and gender. Men were more likely to support traditional gender roles while women within sample showed lower rates of support. Race also influenced views on traditional gender roles and victim culpability. Black men had the highest support of traditional gender roles, while white

women showed the least amount of support. White men were more likely to support traditional gender roles as well, in comparison to white women. In relation to the vignette or descriptive narrative of the sexual assault victim, Black women were the most likely to show sympathy to the victim, and they did have lower support for traditional gender roles as well, in comparison to black men. Black men showed the least amount of sympathy towards the victim. The last research question focused on the support of coercive sexual practices in relation to race and gender as well. Like the previous results, men in the sample were more likely than women to support sexual coercion. Black men had the highest rate of support for sexual coercive practices while white women and black women showed the least support, with similar responses. Black men also exhibited had the largest gap in terms of mean difference. Their means were about 4 to 5 points higher than any other group in the sample. These results support the hypotheses mentioned earlier stating that men would be more likely to victim blame and be less supportive of the victim than women. Men were more likely to support statements within the survey that meant more culpability for the victim. It was also hypothesized that black male respondents would be the least likely to sympathize with victims and would support traditional gender roles and sexual coercive practices. Black males did support traditional gender roles and this in turn translated to less victim sympathy in terms of the descriptive scenario where an African American female was assaulted. Although it was hypothesized that women of color would be less supportive of a victim of color because of the negative stereotypes associated with their sexuality, black women were the most supportive of the victim in the vignette. The results support many of the findings from previous research on gender, race, and sexual assault. The studies and literature by Lykke (2016), Lutz-Zois, Moler, and Brown (2015), focused on how sexist views about women influenced attitudes on rape myths and victim blaming. Similarly, this

study concluded that men who are supportive of traditional gender roles were inclined to have higher rates of perceived victim culpability. Although there was literature to suggest that black males did not support rape myths or sexual coercion any more than white males or that they were even less supportive, the findings in this study do not reflect those assertions. Black males had the highest rates of the sample in being in support of traditional gender roles, sexual coercion, rape myths and victim blaming. It should be noted, however, that the sample size was relatively small in comparison to previous research done on this topic.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study revealed that there are significant differences in the way men and women, black or white perceive victim culpability, gender roles, and sexual assault. In comparison to men, women were more sympathetic towards the plight of the victim in the scenario and also were more likely to reject the restrictive traditional gender roles used in the survey questions. The fact that male respondents showed more support of traditional gender roles, a concept created by a patriarchal society which benefits men at the expense of women, was not surprising. Since sexual assault is used as a tool to terrorize women, it is safe to say that female respondents identified more with the questions that focused victimization than the male respondents did. Black women in the sample seemed to identify the most with the victim in the vignette/scenario considering they showed the most sympathy for the victim than any other group. But they were more supportive of traditional gender roles than white women in the sample. Black men within the sample surprisingly showed the least amount of support in terms of victimization and the most support for gender roles and coercive sexual practices. Although it was predicted that black males would support certain problematic views on women and sexual assault, it was not anticipated that they would show the highest support out of any other group. Further studies on campus sexual assault and the victimization of women of color, especially African American/black women should be explored. Since the results indicate that there is a difference in the attitudes black and white respondents when it comes to their attitudes on sexual assault, researchers should strive to find out why their views differ. Considering factors like socioeconomic background, household dynamics, and even religious beliefs of respondents in future studies could perhaps provide insight to why they hold certain views. Cultural differences should also be considered, especially since college aged respondents who are black may be

children of immigrants. Respondents who are African American versus respondents who are black first generation Americans may have a significant cultural difference, which in turn can translate to varying views on campus sexual assault. The views of African American males or men of African descent should also be studied and further compared to their white male counterparts in hopes of learning whether there are definitive differences in the way these two group view sexual assault.

APPENDIX: SURVEY

1) What is your age? _____

2) What is your sex?

Male

Female

Other

Decline to state

3) What is your race or origin?

White

Black or African American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other

4) How serious of a problem do you think sexual assault is on college campuses?

Not at all a problem

Minor problem

Moderate problem

Serious problem

5) Please read the following scenario and rate your agreement with the statements below:

Keisha, an African American college student, goes over her friend Eric's place to watch a movie on Netflix. They end up making out, touching, and undressing. Keisha indicates that she does not want to have sex but wants to continue kissing. Eric agrees and they continue making out; he then decides to penetrate Keisha with his penis and when she tells him to stop, but he does not.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Somewhat Agree
Keisha had some responsibility for what happened at the end of the scenario.	1	2	3	4	5
It is possible that Keisha led Eric on and he couldn't control himself.	1	2	3	4	5
Both Keisha and Eric are equally responsible for what happened at the end of the scenario.	1	2	3	4	5
Keisha could have prevented what happened to her at the end of the scenario.	1	2	3	4	5

6) Please indicate to what degree you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Somewhat Agree
Men are naturally more sexual than women.	1	2	3	4	5
Women are meant to be caretakers while men are meant to work and provide.	1	2	3	4	5
Unlike men, women are more likely to make emotional decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
Women should know how to cook to be effective wives and mothers.	1	2	3	4	5

7. On a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 indicating strongly disagree, 3 indicating neither agree nor disagree, and 5 indicating strongly agree) please rate your agreement with the statement in context:

Two people are on a date and the evening is coming to an end in one of their dwellings. Is it okay for the male to use strength to coerce the female to have sex if...

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Somewhat Agree
She gets him sexually excited.	1	2	3	4	5
She led him on.	1	2	3	4	5
They have had sex with each other before.	1	2	3	4	5
He is so turned on that he thinks he cannot stop.	1	2	3	4	5
She is drunk or high.	1	2	3	4	5
He spent a lot of money on her.	1	2	3	4	5
She lets him touch her intimately.	1	2	3	4	5
She has had sex with many other partners.	1	2	3	4	5
She initiated conversations about sex throughout the night.	1	2	3	4	5
She brought a condom.	1	2	3	4	5
She said she was going to but then changed her mind.	1	2	3	4	5
They have been in a relationship for a long period of time.	1	2	3	4	5

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