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The Denial of Black Victimhood: Examining Attitudes of Sexual Assault and Victim-Blaming on a College Campus, A Continued Analysis

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The Denial of Black Victimhood: Examining Attitudes of Sexual Assault and Victim-Blaming
on a College Campus, A Continued Analysis

Odia Kane

B.A., University of Connecticut, 2019

A Thesis

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for the Degree of

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APPROVAL PAGE

Masters in Public Health Thesis

The Denial of Black Victimhood: Examining Attitudes of Sexual Assault and Victim-Blaming
on a College Campus, A Continued Analysis

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Introduction

Sexual violence has an especially distinct history in the Black community. One such aspect of this violence is rape (Collins, 2005), which, in addition to differing definitions across institutions and organizations, also has had various interpretations of victimhood based upon the notion of the lack of consent from the victim (Brownmiller, 1993). Black women encounter discrimination based on their sex and gender, resulting in both unique and overlapping experiences with Black men and White women (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins 2005). Crenshaw (1989) describes this phenomenon as, intersectionality, the notion that these intersecting discriminations make Black women special victims to doubly sexist and racist treatment— all without receiving proper legal protections and or justice, including in the case of rape.

From the era of colonization and slavery and in the context of what would become the United States of America, Black (enslaved) women have been targets of rape by White men in a complex racial hierarchy inclusive of sexual exploitation (Roberts, 1999; Collins 2005). Their experiences were delegitimized, as their status as “women” was denied through racist stereotypes that framed them as the “Jezebel,” a promiscuous (enslaved) woman with an insatiable sexual desire that caused (White) men to act lasciviously (White 2007). Though this time in history has passed, images of the Jezebel continue influencing how Black women are perceived as hypersexual and “unrapable.” “The law reinforced the sexual exploitation of slave women in two ways: (1) it deemed any child who resulted from the rape to be a slave, and (2) it failed to recognize the rape of a slave woman as a crime (Roberts, 1999: p. 29).” In short, Black women were held responsible for both the causes and consequences of their assault.

In recent decades, college campuses have been grounds for rape cases, wherein, rape victims have called for justice and protection. Between the years of 2005 and 2015, the rate of

sexual offenses that occurred on college campuses has more than doubled (The Campus Safety and Security Data Analysis Cutting Tool, U.S. Department of Education, 2016). By their fourth year, one in every five female students has experienced attempted or completed sexual assaults while in college (Krebs et. al, 2016). As for collegiate Black women, they are the second-most likely group to experience sexual assault on college campuses (Krebs et. al, 2007).

Approximately 9.7 percent of Black women at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and 13.7 percent at Predominantly White Universities (PWI) are sexually assaulted in college before graduation (Krebs et. al, 2011).

The salient presence of sexual assault on college campuses led to the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE) under the Obama Administration in 2013 (Marshall, 2014). The Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act, mandates all institutions of higher learning that receive federal funding produce annual reports on policy and crime statistics both on and off-campus (Marshall, 2014). This includes reporting both the incidences of and efforts to reduce the occurrence of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking incidents (Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act of 2013). Colleges and universities are ideal environments to implement prevention and intervention programs because of the concentration of the highest at-risk sub-population of victims and assailants. Understanding the varying social perceptions of victims and perpetrators on the basis of race, gender, and the situational conditions of which the assault may take place, provides the insight necessary to develop effective learning tools.

Considering the history of race, gender, and the construction of sexuality in the United States and given the stereotypes that people may have about Black women in light of this history, this research asks, “In the 21st century, are Black women considered victims of rape as equally as their White female counterparts on college campuses?”

In light of these dynamics of raced-gendered constructions of sexuality, in this thesis, I argue that, in instances of sexual assault, Black women will be attributed more blame than victimhood, when compared to White women. This argument will be explored through an original survey with an embedded experiment that examines perceptions of Black/White women who were assaulted by Black/White men under varying condition (e.g. victim's intoxication), was conducted using a convenience sample of undergraduates at a university in the Northeast.

This thesis primarily focuses on the second installation of “The Denial of Black Victimhood: Examining Attitudes of Sexual Assault and Victim-Blaming on a College Campus,” originally conducted in February 2019 (Spring Semester 2019). The experiment was conducted again from September to November of 2019 (Fall Semester 2019), also with a larger sample. In my analysis, first, I will define rape, and relatedly, *rape culture* as a concept and provide an overview of the criminal, social, and cultural implications of sexual violence, and rape, in particular (as it pertains to victims and perpetrators), and deconstruct perceptions of rape victimhood (especially, as it pertains to Black women). Second, I will discuss rape in the context of college campuses and its relation to this research, whereupon I present my hypotheses for people's perceptions. Third, I will provide an overview of the Fall Semester 2019 survey and experimental methods. Last, I will discuss and compare the results between the two datasets. The thesis concludes with possible implications for perceptions of Black women and sexual assault on college campuses and considers to what extent these perceptions can serve as delegitimizing biases (if even, a racialized rape culture) that can obstruct justice on their behalves. I will conclude by providing suggestions to expand research on Black women's experiences of rape on college campuses and by offering best practices to campuses and ways to protect them against stereotypes that may hinder them from seeking solace, despite this being a public health issue.

Theoretical Background

The Changing Definition of Rape

The definition of *rape* differs among social and legal institutions and also differs over time (Marshall, 2014). In most legal references, the definition of rape includes some form of forced sexual act, whilst more feminist definitions incorporate the interrelations of power that masculine bodies hold over feminine bodies (Brownmiller, 1993). The act of defining rape itself is critical for determining: (1) if harm was done, (2) what kind of harm was done, (3) who was harmed, and, if it exists, (4) any social and legal repercussions. Without a clear-cut definition, instances of rape are left up to an interpretation that leaves victims, historically women, without justice and their perpetrator(s) free from consequence.

Feminist scholar, Susan Brownmiller, describes *rape* in her book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1993), as "...nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear (Brownmiller, 1993, p.15)." Brownmiller establishes a predatorial relationship between men and women, with men being predators and women their prey. The inherent physical weakness of the woman made her reliant on the protection of men, and, in turn, her body was under command of a man--first her father and, later, her husband (Brownmiller, 1993). Thus, for the majority of history, rape was considered a crime against a woman's father or husband, not a crime against the victim, the woman, herself (Smith, 2004). The semblance of "ownership" over one's body is crucial in determining the victim of rape, as historically women may have faced the violence of rape to their bodies, while their associative-male figures were granted "victim status" and that status allowed the men to seek justice from the legal system.

One of the first legal definitions of rape in the United States was in the Uniform Crime Report (UCR): “carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will (FBI.gov).” This definition immediately genders the victim as female and relies on the inclusion of force to determine whether or not the sexual act was in fact rape. Under this definition, men are not considered to be rape victims, and sexual acts that do not include force, for example, a vocal protest of “no” or “stop,” were also not considered to be rapes. However, in the court system, the requirement of force was difficult to assess. In the case, *Pennsylvania v. Williams* (1982), for example, a woman was approached by a stranger at a bus stop who threatened to kill her twice if she did not give him “a little sex;” as a result, she submitted to preserve her life (Deese, 1995).

The different state courts reached contradictory conclusions and subsequently included non-physical coercion, thus, expanding the legal definition of rape for that state (Deese, 1995). Over 80 years later, the criminal definition of *rape* has changed, with the most recent one of the Federal Bureau of Investigations being “the penetration, 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 (Department of Justice, 2017).” This newer definition is more gender-neutral and clearly identifies the victim from the perpetrator without requiring the use of force, replacing force altogether by highlighting the lack of *consent*. It remains the definition used by the FBI to date.

The public health definition of rape is inclusive of force, consent, and all conditions that rape may occur. Herein, *rape* will be defined as it is in the Center for Disease Control’s National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2018):

Rape is any completed or attempted unwanted vaginal (for women), oral, or anal penetration through the use of physical force (such as being pinned or held down, or by the use of violence) or threats to physically harm and includes times when the victim was drunk, high, drugged, or passed out and unable to consent. Rape is

separated into three types: completed forced penetration, attempted forced penetration, and completed alcohol or drug-facilitated penetration. Among women, rape includes vaginal, oral, or anal penetration by a male using his penis. It also includes vaginal or anal penetration by a male or female using their fingers or an object. Among men, rape includes oral or anal penetration by a male using his penis. It also includes anal penetration by a male or female using their fingers or an object (Smith et. al, 2018).

The conditions of which a rape occurs may vary by circumstance, but the nature of rape, regardless of definition, lies in the notion of a violation. With more modern definitions of rape, the violation is always related to the person whose body has been afflicted, male or female. Rape, like other crimes, invokes a series of social attitudes and cultural responses by people in society, but even with centuries of awareness regarding the crime, the diversity of perceptions about what rape is (and, relatedly, consent) have served as obstructions to its removal from society. The idea of what constitutes the rape victim and rapist are informed by cultural contexts which are often conflicting ideals that can be shaped by fictive and or impossible expectations (Collins, 2005).

“Defining “Rape Culture”

The term, “rape culture,” was coined by second-wave feminists in the 1970s, who assessed the social climate of the United States and deemed it as a society that promotes male-oriented behaviors that contribute to women’s rape (Smith 2004). They used the term to describe a culmination of their experiences as people with feminine bodies navigating different public and private social spaces. In *Transforming a Rape Culture* (1993), Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher, and Martha Roth provided what is now known as the standard definition of “rape culture”:

Rape culture is a complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. Women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women and presents

itself as the norm. In a rape culture, both men and women assume that sexual violence is a fact of life as inevitable as death or taxes. This violence, however, is neither biologically nor divinely ordained. Much of what we accept as inevitable is in fact the expression of values and attitudes that can change (Buchwald et al, 1993).

Rape culture is present in all ways humans communicate from unwarranted sexually-provocative jokes to nonconsensual sexual encounters. Its presence is not limited to women in the 1970s. Beyond what is a “culture of rape,” national data show that rape is a universal threat for all genders and ages. One-in-four women and one-in-ten men will experience some form of sexual or intimate partner violence in their lifetime and for these women (82.5 percent) and men (67.9 percent), they will experience rape victimization for the first time before age 25 (Smith et. al, 2018). The advent of the Internet has given way for rape culture and public resistance to rape culture to be re-manifested through digital social movements that have led to long-term sociocultural change.

An example of resistance is the digital social movement, #MeToo, popularized by Alyssa Milano in October of 2017 as an effort to shed light on the issue of sexual assault in Hollywood. It is known as one of the most high-profile forms of digital feminism with the hashtag¹ being used more than 12 million times within the first 24 hours (Mendes et. al, 2018). However, offline, the “Me Too” movement began as a grassroots movement founded by a Black woman, Tarana Burke, eleven years prior in 2006. Burke was sexually assaulted herself at age 13, and her movement among women and girls of color (specifically, Black women and girls) from low income communities helps sexual assault victims to find pathways to healing by connecting them to resources (metoomvmt.org).

¹ Hashtag (#) is used on various social media platform forms, most notably Twitter. It is a word or phrase preceded by the symbol (#) that classifies or categorizes the accompanying text (such as a tweet) (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Though #MeToo is a popular example of feminist activism through social media, it is not the only case of women using digital tools to share their experiences with sexual violence. The hashtag, #BeenRapedNeverReported, gained attention in 2014, as a platform for women who experienced sexual violence and did not report it to the authorities, as a majority of rape cases go unreported (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). The perceptions that surround the act of rape are as rampant and complicated as the act of sexual violence itself. Moreover, the acceptance of rape culture as an assessment of the United States' social climate is controversial because the definition of *rape* is not unanimous, and the social presence of "rape myths" can ambiguate the role and blame attributed to victims and perpetrators.

Rape Myths

"Rape is controversial because it is a crime that involves sex acts (Smith, 2004, p. x)." Rape is a crime that intersects and sometimes conflicts with perceptions of what may be criminal, social, and cultural interpretations of genders and bodies. In understanding rape, it must be deconstructed as a crime and a social issue, and when non-complementary, produces cultural responses that inform the public how to (or how not to) respond to allegations and instances of rape. This interrelationship, then, yields the (in)tolerance of rape culture, which proliferates with "rape myths."

Rape myths are false, prejudicial, and stereotyped, beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists that create hostile environments for rape victims (Vonderhaar and Carmody, 2014). According to rape myths, women and girls have control over how they are treated based upon the ways that they govern their bodies. These myths stem from Victorian beliefs of female sexuality as respectable, modest, and submissive to males (Stevenson, 2000). Victorian female sexuality

also excludes non-White women, as they are not considered respectable from birth (Stevenson, 2000). To align themselves with the notion of respectability, [White] women and girls are cautioned to dress certain ways or avoid certain behaviors to lessen the chance of getting raped, when in actuality, the promotion of these myths derails blame from the perpetrator and transfers it to the victim.

Therefore, when a woman is raped, she is judged using this masculine-derived construction of femininity in the justice system, wherein any behavior that is not “respectable” is used as evidence to delegitimize the victim. When it comes to rape, any instance of the female victim acting contrary or not optimally as respectable can be used as justification for her rape, therefore, making her blameworthy (Stevenson, 2000). Rape myths continuously make it difficult for victims to gain any form of justice because of the consistent effort to debase their status as victims of a violent crime.

In the study conducted by Vonderhaar and Carmody’s (2014), there were two key findings: (1) those who scored higher on the Just World Belief Scale² also scored higher on the Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) Scale³ and (2) rape victims scored lower on the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale than non-victims. There were also differences based on gender (males scoring higher on the RMAS than females), age (younger people scoring higher), and ethnicity (Asian and Pacific Islander participants scoring higher than other racial groups). These discrepancies are often both culturally-informed and reflective of one’s life experiences. The findings are critical, as they are representative of the general population.

² The Just World Belief Scale measures how much one believes, that in general, people get what they deserve (Vonderhaar & Carmody, 2014).

³ The Rape Myth Acceptance Scale measures generally false attitudes but persistently held beliefs that are used to justify male sexual aggression towards females Vonderhaar & Carmody, 2014).

If there are no measures to debunk rape myths among certain gender, age, and ethnic demographics, those misconceptions about rape leave the victims of those groups susceptible to social mistreatment and injustice. When examined including racial lines, Black people “carry the stigma of promiscuity or excessive or unrestrained heterosexual desire (Collins, 2005 p. 97)”, making them more susceptible to the application of rape myths. Black women get a “double dose” of rape myths because of their race *and* gender, that make the subconscious claim that they are especially deserving of sexual assault (Donovan and Williams, 2002).

Sexual Racism

Sexual racism is the “sexual rejection of the racial minority, the conscious attempt on part of the majority to prevent interracial cohabitation (Stember, 1978, p ix).” Sexual racism is the ideological foundation of which anti-miscegenation laws are enacted and acts of racialized sexual violence are justified. Anti-miscegenation laws date as far back as the 1600s, doubly placing the responsibility of “racial purity” in the hands of the White majority, most critically, White women and reinforcing the racial superiority of the White race (Lay, 1993). “Racial purity” is the notion that to maintain the superiority of the White race, by prohibiting any (sexual) intermingling with other races (Higginbotham and Kopytoff, 1988). Though the laws were upheld to maintain the separation of the races, those who violated the policies faced unequal consequences, with White women, Black men, and Black women being given punitive responses (Lay, 1993). White women were shamed and accused of tarnishing the White race, while Black people fell victim to physical brutality that was inflicted by White men.

Together and historically, Black men and women fell victim to sexual racism inflicted by White men, but the actions of sexual assault were gendered. Black men were targets of lynching, and though lynched, as well, Black women were the primary targets for rape. However, unlike

the notorious outrage that surrounded lynching, Black women did not receive the outward objection, community support, or public exposure, as victims of racialized violence as Black men (Collins, 2005). Additionally, they did not receive the same form of protection either from legal institutions or Black men. As collective rape victims of White *and* Black men, Black women—especially in the case of young Black girls—were pressured to remain silent in response to sexual violence from Black men in an attempt to protect their community from a White society that perceives Black men as sexual predators (Collins, 2005). Regardless of the race of the perpetrator, Black women continued to be silent victims of sexual violence. These raced-gendered perceptions of victims also extend to raced-gendered perceptions of sexual assault perpetrators, and they are integral for our understanding people’s perceptions of victimhood in modern-day society.

Perceptions of Perpetrators: The Significance of Race

Related to Estrich’s depiction of a “real rape” is the notion of the perpetrator being a stranger—a monstrous, ominous, stranger who preys on innocent (White) women. Historically, the people who were considered capable of committing rape were Black men. In *Construction of the Black Male Body: Eroticism and Religion* (2004), Dwight Hopkins articulates how White European, Victorian-Christian ideologies built the image of Black men as primal and sensual caricatures with superhuman genitalia. White religious men depicted Satan as a monster with a large penis and, over time, added Black skin to this depiction: This was the establishment of Black men being evil beasts (Hopkins, 2004). This notion of Black men being ungodly beasts asserts the claim that White people, specifically White women, should be protected—despite the rarity of inter-racial sexual relations between Black men and White women—throughout the majority of United States history (Hopkins, 2004). While White women were considered victims

to Black men's sexual brutality, White men who committed interracial acts of sexual violence, instead, were considered victims of Black women's seduction (White, 1985).

The horrific nature of a "real rape" coupled with the conception of the Black Brute/Rapist stereotype, made Black men victims of lynching (Hopkins, 2004). The existence of the Black Rapist also provided another avenue for Black women to be victims of rape by White men, post-Civil War. At this time, the concept of inter-racial sexual relations between Black men and White women was a concern that then threatened the safety of Black women. "If Black men have their eyes on White women as sexual objects, then Black women must certainly welcome the sexual attentions of White men (Davis, 184)." Black men were deemed as the only ones capable of raping and White women capable of being raped.

With these perspectives, George and Martinez (2002) studied victim-blaming in the context of race for both the perpetrator and the victim, with 90 percent of the sample population being non-Black (60 percent White, 33 percent Asian, and other). Participants were presented with a vignette that detailed a woman who lived alone, goes to look for her cat, and after her search is sexually assaulted by either a stranger or her neighbor. The primary finding was that victims, regardless of race, were blamed more for the rape if it occurred interracial. There was, however, a racial difference in the sentence recommendations; men in the sample recommended longer punitive sentences for Black than White perpetrators (George and Martinez, 2002). Paradoxically, when the Black woman victim was raped by a White man, she was blamed more, and he was blamed less (George and Martinez, 2002). The findings of this study reassert the view of the Black Rapist, treating them more harshly than the White perpetrator. A similar racial bias was present through the attribution of blame to Black women even when victimized.

Perceptions of Black Women as Rape Victims

Forty-one percent of women report having unwanted sexual contact at some point in their lifetime (West and Johnson, 2013), and Black women are more likely to experience rape before the age of 18, and experience sexual assault that involves force and or coercion.

Despite the various amendments to the definition of rape, the social perception of rape victims has not evolved as steadily nor inclusively. Historically, White women were considered to be virtuous, pure, delicate, and the standard of beauty. Black women, however, were considered incapable of having such features (Carby, 1987). Instead, set features were consolidated and ascribed to Black women through the cultural image, *Jezebel*, who is sexually aggressive, a seductress, expected to have increased fertility, and importantly, served as the rationale for sexual assault of Black women, in general (Jordan-Zachery, 2009). The stereotype is extrapolated and used to further oppress Black women, making them all capable of being jezebels (Collins, 2002).

Unlike her White counterpart, Jezebel lacks virtue, and it is in her nature that she is always sexually available. She had charm that lured White men against their typical nature by using her sensuality (White, 1985). This conception of Black female sexuality makes it impossible for Black women to be raped and excuses the actions of any man who inflicts rape on a Black female body. Evidentially, when rape laws were first introduced, many of them were race-specific, stating the law as unlawfully and carnally knowing any White woman against her will (West and Johnson, 2013). Under the system of slavery, a White master raping an enslaved Black woman not only lacked consequence, but if a different White male raped said female slave, that slave master's owner could sue on the grounds of damaged property (White, 1985). The law did not protect nor impose any penalties for White men to continue raping Black women

post-1865. There was no opportunity in U.S. Southern society for Black women to claim ownership of their own bodies nor seek refuge if they had been violated. Post-slavery, the described “unnatural ability of seduction” the Jezebel used, resulted in White men acting against their usually moral judgement, therefore, any sexual acts between the two was always consensual.

Black women were unseen victims of sexual assault both intra-racially, due to the Black male assertion of male dominance *and* interracially, due to White male perpetration of violence via racism, class oppression and patriarchy—and were not effectively held accountable in court (Neville and Pugh, 1997). The most tangible defense Black women had against racist attitudes and sexual violence was to perform the “politics of respectability”. Which is an adherence to Victorian sexuality, wherein Black women present themselves as “super moral” for their protection and the upward mobility, as well as the attainment of respect, justice, and opportunity in the Black community (Higginbotham, 1992). This is done through how women express their “sexual behaviors, dress style, leisure activity, music, speech patterns, and religious worship patterns (Higginbotham, 1992: 272).”

However even for women who were considered to be the utmost “respectable,” like Mrs. Recy Taylor and Anita Hill—Black women victims of two nationally notorious cases of sexual violence and harassment—were not safe. Mrs. Taylor was a devoted wife and mother leaving church one evening when she was gang raped by six White men who “thought she was a prostitute” (McGuire, 2010). Hill was a (socially and politically) conservative lawyer and government employee when she was allegedly sexually harassed by her supervisor, Clarence Thomas, a Black man, who later went on to be a Supreme Court Justice, despite her allegation and testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee. In a poll designed by Mansbridge and Tate

(1992), they found that even with a higher prevalence of feminist beliefs, large majorities of both Black men and women, expressed disbelief of Hill's claims against Thomas. Their experiences suggest that, engaging in virtuous and respectable behaviors may not be strong enough defenses to prevent sexual violence and ensure justice.

Sexual Violence as a Public Health Issue

Historically, sexual violence has not been easily discerned as a public health issue because instances of sexual assault are most commonly addressed in the criminal justice system (McMahon, 2000). The reservation that sexual violence is exclusively a criminal act, overlooks the very costly tangible and intangible consequences of sexual violence for both victims and public health institutions. For most victims, the negative impacts on social activities after an assault are short-term, but the ramifications of the damage from sexual assault can last a lifetime. Victims can suffer from strained interpersonal relationships, psychological distress, or unhealthy coping mechanisms like substance abuse (Basile and Smith, 2011). Sexual abuse in childhood has been linked to extreme obesity and other food-related disorders in adulthood that lead to hypertension and high cholesterol (Basile and Smith, 2011). Sexual violence has direct economic costs from patient hospital fees to the use of various services within the criminal and judicial system (Post et al., 2002).

Victims who choose to report a rape often have to go through the medical and criminal justice systems that then also have to interact with each other. Following a reported assault, the victim typically completes a sexual assault medical forensic exam, popularly known as the rape kit. The process has been described by victims to be both invasive and uncomfortable, with the average kit taking four to six hours to complete (Hansen, 2010). Once the test is completed, it is given to a police officer who is tasked with storing the kit and conducting a forensic test for the

investigation. However, there is no process to ensure that the test is conducted. Enforcement personnel have even admitted to not routinely submitting tens of thousands of tests a year, leaving those victims without any resolution (Campbell et al, 2017). Women, especially African American women, are disproportionately targets of sexual violence and overwhelmingly represented in the number of untested rape kits (Campbell et al., 2018). The criminal nature of sexual violence obscures the reality that rape is a highly prevalent and preventative public health occurrence to which all demographics are at risk, but Black women are especially overrepresented as victims.

When approached as a public health concern, incidences of sexual violence can be better monitored, and later reduced, through public health surveillance and prevention programs (McMahon, 2000). On college campuses, where sexual assault cases are highly likely and prevalent, some higher learning institutions have developed programs in accordance to the SaVE Act. Several universities throughout the United States have adopted Bystander Prevention Programs that cover content related to unwanted sex, sexual harassment, stalking, and physical and psychological dating violence (Coker et al., 2016). The program is completed by first-year students and preliminary findings have reported a strong association with the Green Dot Bystander Prevention Programs and long-term potential positive outcomes for sexual violence prevention on campuses (Coker et al., 2016).

Though some reports indicate positive advancements in regards to sexual violence on college campuses, there has not been enough research completed to address other types of prevention programs or assessments of the university's reporting offices. A decrease in reporting does not necessarily correlate to a decrease in incidences or an improvement in the quality of resources for the emotional and psychological wellbeing for victims on-campus. There must be

public health interventions at the federal, state, collegiate, and local levels to effectively address the sociocultural and governmental structures that continually allow rampant sexual violence to persist. Public health prevention programs in secondary and post-secondary academic institutions can be the start of systemic change because of the opportunity to reduce future offences in the most afflicted sub-population, college students.

College Data on Rape

The prevalence of rape on college campuses has reached epidemic-level concern. Women between the ages of 18 to 24 are three times more likely to experience some form of sexual violence in college, and approximately 80 percent of these victims were acquainted with their offender (Department of Justice, 2014). For female undergraduates, the largest incidents of rapes occurred in the beginning of the school year (September and October) and majority of these rape cases are perpetrated by men (Krebs et al., 2016). Almost all rapes of collegiate women occur in on-campus residencies (Fisher et al., 2000).

Some of the factors that increase victimization of sexual violence are being in places with alcohol, living alone, being in a relationship, and having experienced sexual assault before (Fischer et al., 2000). Despite the prevalence of the issue, many post-secondary institutions struggle to uphold and enforce policies that appropriately protect the victim and punish the perpetrator.

College Sexual Assault Experiences of Black Women

Krebs et al. (2011) collected data to determine the prevalence of sexual assault cases of women on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and compared it to data from women at Predominately White Institutions (PWI). The survey was conducted across four

different institutions and found the women who attended HBCUs were more likely to experience physically-forced sexual assault prior to entering college than their non-HBCU counterparts. Interestingly, Black women at PWIs had a higher rate of sexual assault (13.7 percent) compared to those at HBUs (9.7 percent), but at both types of institutions, Black women report a significantly less prevalent role of alcohol at the time of their assault (Krebs et al., 2011). Even the factors of assault Black women face differ from their White counterparts with the inclusion of physical force and the exclusion of alcohol.

In a different comparative study of sexual assault between HBCUs and PWIs, the researchers measured the rate and type of disclosure post-assault. They found that a majority of victims, regardless of their institution, disclose the details of the attack to someone close to them, while only 10.1 percent report to victim services and 6.4 percent report to the authorities (Palmer and Vil, 2018). Victims are more likely to report, if they were incapacitated at the time of the assault, but as demonstrated by Krebs et al. (2011), Black women are less likely to be incapacitated (which is more prevalent in sexual assault cases on college campuses) at the time of assault than White women; therefore, White women on college campuses are more likely to report to authorities (Palmer and Vil, 2018). Even with studies of this nature, consolidating the experiences of sexual assault among Black women in collegiate environments continues to be a challenge, especially if they turn to their peers and loved ones rather than the formal institutions that have to abide by the federal Title IX policies that protect against gender-based mistreatment and discrimination in academic institutions (Buchanan, 2012).

Black women are faced with a double dose of rape myths, as they continue to confront the Jezebel stereotype. For Black women, dismantling rape culture is one of the most effective tools in fostering protection and addressing sexual assault at its roots. It is because of this that

we must understand how historical and systemic biases built into different social systems affect how people perceive sexual assault victims and their blameworthiness. Based upon the review of the literature, the hypotheses for this study are as follows:

H₁: In comparison to the perpetrator, participants will attribute more responsibility for having prevented the sexual assault to the Black woman victim than to the White woman victim.

H₂: Participants will be less likely to suggest a conviction of the perpetrator, if the perpetrator is a White male than if the perpetrator was a Black male.

H₃: Participants will attribute more blame to the Black woman victim when the perpetrator is a White man than if the perpetrator was a Black man.

Data and Methods

This study builds on previous research pertaining to attitudes about sexual assault in a collegiate setting. It expands the research by comparatively examining the attitudes that people have about the sexual assault experiences of Black women to those about White women, on predominately White campuses. Unlike Krebs et. al (2011), who collected self-reported data from students' individual experiences, this study develops an original, embedded survey experiment to create a hypothetical scenario of sexual assault in an attempt to measure the participants' responses to the victim and the perpetrator of either Black or White racial backgrounds. The experiment asks respondents to react to the interactions of the perceived victim and her perpetrator. An experimental approach was selected for this study to account for victim-blaming and the perceptions of victims by their peers, as opposed to the lived experiences of individual victims and to control for the race of victims in ways the respondents would not be readily aware.

The vignettes were developed using victim-reported data from previous studies. The victim was female-gendered because women are statistically more likely to be victims of sexual assault (Department of Justice, 2014). The two students meet through their assignment as partners for a

class-project, which is a typical learning tool in academic institutions. Setting the relation in this way, establishes the perpetrator as an acquaintance, which is the most common relation to the perpetrator, as opposed to an unknown stranger (Department of Justice, 2014). The assault occurs on-campus because a majority of sexual assault cases of female college students occur on-campus (Fisher et al., 2000). There are manipulations of the victim's race (Black or White), the intersectionality of the victim's race and gender (Black woman or White woman), the perpetrator's race (Black man or White man), and the victim's relationship status (single or in a committed relationship with a boyfriend), in order to determine their effects on victim-blaming.

Study 1

Study 1 (S1) was ran in the Spring Semester of 2019 and consisted of 361 participants (75% women, 23.5% men, 1.4% whom identified as neither) from a university in the Northeast between the ages of 18-25. The racial breakdown of the participants was moderately proportionate to the demographics of the university's student population (Table 1). Students were recruited through a university-wide newsletter for ten-day study period and independently completed the survey on an electronic device. To keep the analysis consistent, those who did not complete the entirety of survey were removed from the sample and not included in the data analysis.

Study 2

Study 2 (S2), conducted in the Fall Semester of 2019, had 1,144 students from the same university in the same age range. Of the participants, there were 786 women (68.69%), 340 men (29.62%), 9 who identified as other (0.79%), and 8 who preferred not to answer (0.70%). In terms of race participants identified as White (64.25 percent), Asian (18.97 percent), Latinx (9.7 percent), Black (6.64 percent), More than one race (5.07 percent), and Other (1.14 percent)

(Table 1). The survey was disseminated through the same campus-wide newsletter for a 40-day period with only surveys that were 100% completed used data analysis.

Table 1. Racial Breakdown by Percentage of Study Participants Compared to the Population								
	Black	White	Asian	Latinx	More than one	Other	None/Unknown	International
Study 1	4.76%	62.75%	19.05%	6.16%	5.6%	3.17%	.87%	-
Study 2	6.64%	57.60%	18.97%	9.7%	5.07%	1.14%	.88%	-
Institution*	6.83%	53.26%	9.89%	12.25%	2.87%	0.14%	3.5%	12.25%
<i>Source:</i> Student Sexual Assault Survey, Demographic Questions and Undergraduate Enrollment by Ethnicity and Gender Fall 2018								

Both studies slightly over-represent White and Asian students at the university and under-represent those of other groups.

The Survey Experiment

Participants completed an original, online Qualtrics survey, the Student Sexual Assault Survey (SSAS), either on a computer or mobile phone. The survey included a 2 (race of victim: Black/White) X 2 (race of perpetrator: Black/White) X 2 (attack scenario: sobriety/ under influence of alcohol or not) X 2 (in a relationship or not) embedded experiment. The vignettes had four variations for the scenario of the attack, either: (1) the victim was attacked when she was sober; (2) the victim was attacked when she was under the influence of alcohol; and (3) it was explicitly mentioned the victim was in a relationship (“*Usually, she takes the 45-minute bus ride back to the apartment she shares with her boyfriend after class...* ”), compared to (not “*Usually, she takes the 45-minute bus ride back to her family’s house after class*”) in the condition where the victim was either sober or intoxicated. In the fourth condition, the victim was both intoxicated and stated to be in a heterosexual relationship.

The element of race was not explicit stated but, instead, was included implicitly in the name selection of the experiments’ characters. The names were selected from the audit study,

“How Black are Lakisha and Jamal? Racial Perceptions of Names Used in Correspondence Audit Studies” (Gaddis, 2017), where names were ranked in correspondence to “mostly Black” and “mostly White” names. The names Taneesha, Jamal, Madeline, and Connor were included in the sample with Taneesha and Jamal in the “mostly Black” name category and Madeline and Connor in the “mostly White” category (Gaddis, 2017). The gender of the victim and perpetrator were alluded to through the use of pronouns (e.g. *Taneesha agreed, seeing that she was familiar with Connor, and he agreed to take her home afterwards....*).

By random assignment, each participant had an equal probability of receiving one of the sixteen varying vignettes from the SSAS (Table 2) which detailed the experience of a 21-year-old female, college student, Taneesha or Madeline (the victim), who was sexually assaulted by her classmate, Jamal or Connor (the perpetrator), at his apartment, while working on a group project (Appendix A).

Victim	Perpetrator	Condition
Taneesha (Black Woman)	Connor (White Man)	Sober
		Intoxicated
		In a Relationship
		Intoxicated and in a relationship
	Jamal (Black Man)	Sober
		Intoxicated
		In a Relationship
		Intoxicated and in a relationship
Madeline (White Woman)	Connor (White Man)	Sober
		Intoxicated
		In a Relationship
		Intoxicated and in a relationship
	Jamal (Black Man)	Sober
		Intoxicated
		In a Relationship
		Intoxicated and in a relationship

Subsequently, the participants were asked five questions to determine: (1) how the participants think the victim should respond (2) how the assault could have been prevented (3) how much blame to place on each victim or perpetrator (4) whether the perpetrator should face legal repercussions and (5) what three-word description at their own discretion (view Appendix A). Following the questions related to the vignette, participants completed additional scales to assess interpretations about the fairness of the world and any biases participants may have towards women and Black people. Thus, the Just World Belief Scale, the Attitudes Toward Women Scale, and the Black Feminist Consciousness Scale, were included in each survey. Also, to assess racial bias, there was an inclusion of the Attitudes Toward Blacks Scale (Appendix B). The scales were measured using a 7-point Likert Scale (1= *Strongly Disagree* to 7= *Strongly Agree*).

Social Consciousness Measures

To quantify social consciousness, four consciousness scales were incorporated into the survey (Appendix B). For the sake of brevity, the scales consisted of five to eight questions to which participants assess the extent to which they “agree” (from “1” = “Strongly Disagree” to “7” “Strongly Agree”). The *Just World Belief Scale* (mean score = 3.782; $\alpha = .715$) comprises six questions that were developed by Dalbert (1999). Each of the statements determine the participants’ internalized and externalized views on the perception of justice outside of a legal context. An adaptation of the *Attitudes Toward Women Scale* (AWS) was incorporated using combined questions from the AWS developed by Spence et. al (1973) and a short scale of attitudes toward feminism (Smith et. al, 1975). The mean score is 5.50, $\alpha = .546$. Participants answered five questions about attitudes toward women in the workplace to those about general behaviors toward women both inside and outside of the home.

The *Black Racial Bias Scale* included five questions derived from Symbolic Racism 2000 Scale created by Henry and Sears (2002) and three additional questions made for the purposes of this experiment, for a total of eight questions (mean score= 1.55, $\alpha = .845$). The scale gauged participants' perceptions of Black people, in general society. The questions were comprised of popularized racial stereotypes of Black people's perceived attitudes about race relations, behaviors, and experiences in the justice system. Finally, the *Black Feminist Consciousness Scale* consisted of five of the six questions (mean score=5.49, $\alpha = .59$) used in the study conducted by the National Black Politics Study (NBPS) from 1993-1994 (Simien, 2006). Black feminist consciousness is the understanding that Black women are discriminated against on the basis of both their race and gender, and experience the world in accordance to these intersecting identities (Simien and Clawson, 2004). Participants answered questions regarding the purpose of Black women to the Black community, the experiences of Black women in the United States, and (if and how) they internalized values that aligned with Black feminist ideology.

Data Analyses

First, the consciousness scales were calculated by the mean response of each participant within each scale, with the mean-score being generated from the Likert responses (“1”=Strongly Disagree to “7”= Strongly Agree). For example, if Participant A responded with “Neither agree nor disagree” for all six questions in the Just World Belief Scale, their JWB score would be (4*6/6). This process was completed for each of the scales and then placed into a table for comparison. Scores ranging from 1-3 represent unfavorable attitudes (for the Black American Bias Scale, low bias), scores 5-7 are favorable attitudes (for the Black American Bias Scale, high bias), and the score of 4 reflects neutral attitudes, as the response “4” on the on the Likert scale was “Neither agree nor disagree”. A comparison of means test was not conducted to measure any

significant differences between the scale responses because the sub-sample sizes were too small for some groups.

Second, to produce a victim-blame score, the response to Question 3, “How much responsibility does [Taneesha or Madeline hold compared to [Connor or Jamal]?” was used where participants selected the response “Not at all responsible” which equaled “1” to “Mostly responsible”, having the highest score of “5”. The individual scores were then averaged by racial group, gender, and raced-gendered groups. Due to the small sample size, for balanced measures of comparison, the vignettes were then clustered into different groups: victim-specific (Taneesha or Madeline) clusters, victim-perpetrator specific (Taneesha-Connor, Taneesha-Jamal, Madeline-Connor, Madeline-Jamal) clusters, inter-racial (Taneesha-Connor and Madeline-Jamal) v. intra-racial (Taneesha-Jamal and Madeline-Connor) clusters, and also by twelve varying vignettes (e.g., Taneesha-Sober-Connor, Madeline-Intoxicated-Jamal). A comparison of means test was conducted to compare the differences within groups and across groups.

Finally, the perceptions of victims were analyzed from the data collected on Question 5: *Describe [Taneesha or Madeline] in three words.* This question was an open response, where participants were able to report anything in a text box. Once the responses were compiled, the words with at least ten submissions, independently, for each victim (Taneesha or Madeline) were documented for comparison. However, both victims each had one word that was not within the “top ten” of the other victim. The word “naïve” was in the top ten for Taneesha, and separately, “studious” was in the top ten for Madeline. Neither of these were in the top ten for both Taneesha and Madeline, so they were included in the analysis for a total of 12 words (Figures 4 and 5).

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine distinctions, if any, in the perceptions of Black female victims of sexual assault compared to White female victims in a college-setting. In the following sections, the results are presented, first, with general findings from the different social consciousness scales, followed by an analysis of victim-blaming attitudes across racial groups and vignette-type within the SSAS, using the mean response of Question 3, “How much responsibility does each person hold in this scenario?” The data are, then, disaggregated and analyzed as intersectional groups, based on race and gender. The data were compiled and means were calculated in STATA, the means comparison tests were completed in Excel.

Social Consciousness

Social consciousness was measured using four attitude scales to account for any biases against women, Black people, and Black women. Due to the sample size and size of the different racial sub-samples, a difference of means test could not be conducted across races⁴. In summation, the average scores represent generally positive attitudes toward women, less belief in a just world, low racial bias toward Black people, and moderately positive Black feminist consciousness. These attitudes are often described to be “progressive” and are reflective of typical Northeastern responses in a Democratic state. The considerably positive attitudes toward women, Black people, and Black feminism assume little to no difference in the perception of victims, when their race is recognized by the participant. However, through further analysis, there still remain racialized differences between the victims, based on their perceived race in Study 1.

⁴ The difference of means tests could not be conducted, therefore it cannot be concluded that there may or may not be significant differences between different race- gender groups within nor across the racial groups regarding their social consciousness.

Gendered and Racialized Differences in Study 1

Generally, the overwhelming majority of participants selected “not at all responsible” when asked about how much responsibility each person held in the scenario, meaning most did not victim blame (Victim Blaming Score >1). In Study 1, there was a marginally, statistically significant difference between the victim blaming scores of men and women ($p < 0.1$), where men victim blamed slightly more than women.

Due to White women being the largest sub-group in the sample, a difference of means test was conducted to compare their victim-blaming scores to that of the remainder of the participants in Study 1 (Table 3). This study is comparing, if any, the racialized perceptions of victims among students at a PWI; therefore, the perceptions that White women have about White and Black female victims of sexual assault has historical relevance considering the history of who had claim to victim status legally and socially.

In Study 1, it was found that there is a significant difference ($p < 0.01$) of victim-blaming means between White women ($M = 1.292$) and Non-White women ($M = 1.487$), where White women are less likely to victim blame (Table 3). Approximately three-fourths (75 percent) of White women attributed no blame to the victim compared to 64 percent of non-White women in the sample.

Table 3. Difference of Means Tests Between White and Non-White Women in Study 1

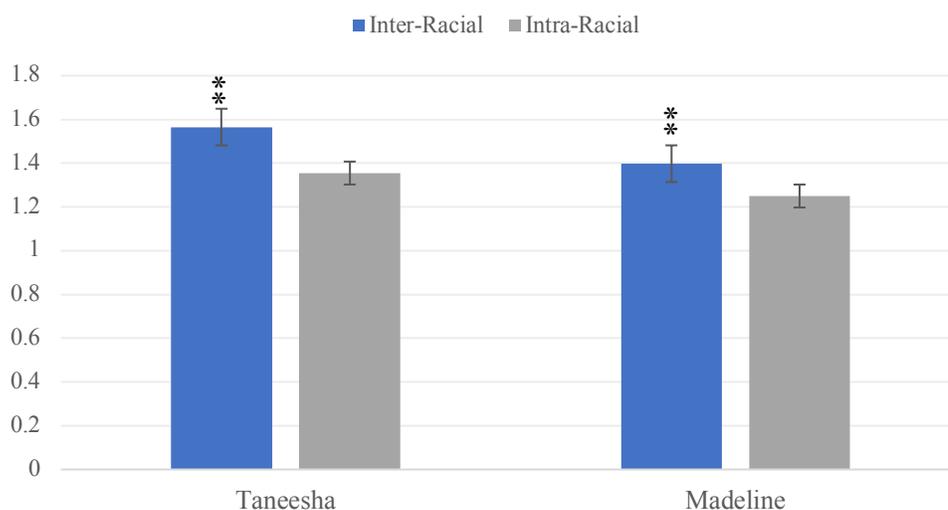
	<i>Non-White Women</i>	<i>White Women</i>
<i>Mean</i>	1.487	1.292***
<i>Variance</i>	0.651	0.361
<i>Observations</i>	191	171
<i>Hypothesized Mean Difference</i>	0	
<i>Df</i>	349	
<i>t Stat</i>	2.618	
<i>P(T<=t) one-tail</i>	0.005	
<i>t Critical one-tail</i>	1.649	
<i>P(T<=t) two-tail</i>	0.009	

*t Critical two-tail*Source: Student Sexual Assault Survey, *Question 3*Note: *** $p > .01$

1.967

In five out of the six matched cases by condition and perpetrator (e.g. Taneesha-Sober-Jamal and Madeline-Sober-Jamal), White women attributed more blame to Taneesha than they did to Madeline. Though both women were described under the same circumstances, White women—who had lower victim-blaming scores than the remaining Non-White individuals in the study, also attributed more blame to the Black victim than the White victim. The same comparison was made in Study 2 and no statistically significant differences were found between White women ($n=464$, $M=1.252$) and Non-White women ($n=320$, $M=1.331$). However, White women, when compared to the remainder of the sample ($n=679$) attributed less blame at a statistically significant rate ($p=0.0001$). Between the inter-racial and intra-racial vignette clusters by victim (Figure 1), there was a statistically significant difference ($p < .01$) between the victim-blaming means, when Taneesha is assaulted by Connor (score: 1.565, $n=92$), versus when Madeline is assaulted by Connor (score: 1.25, $n=84$).

Figure 1: Inter-Racial v. Intra-Racial Victim-Perpetrator
Victim-Blaming Means in Study 1



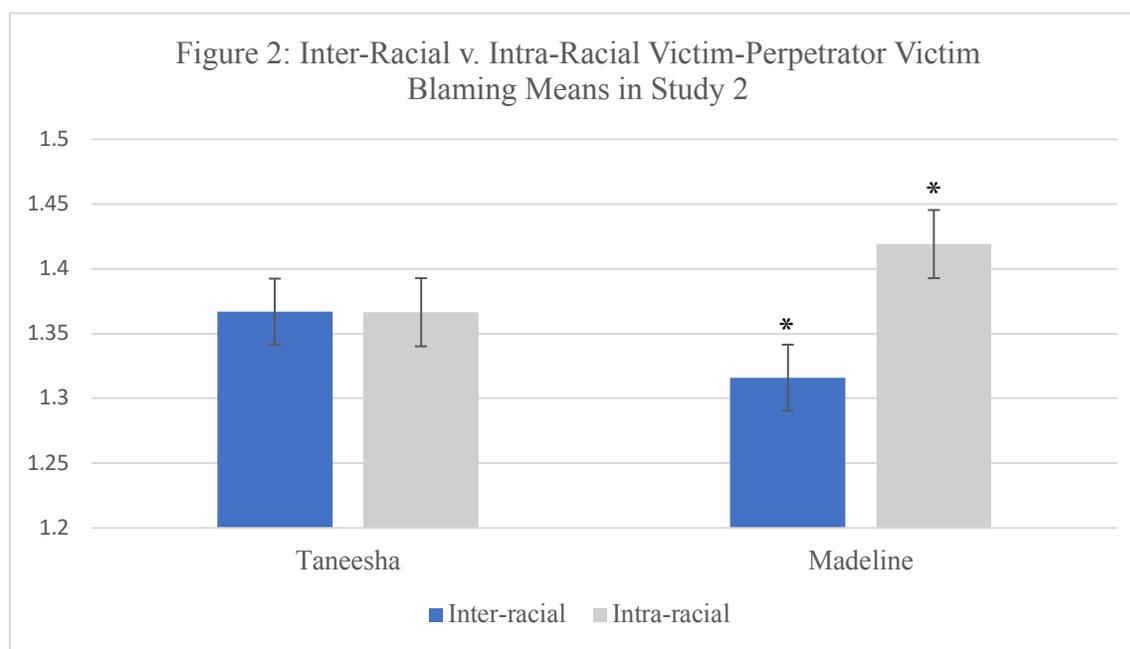
Gendered and Racialized Differences in Study 2

In Study 2, there was also an extremely, statistically significant ($p < .01$) difference between victim blaming scores for men ($M = 1.5$, $SD = .818$) and women ($M = 1.309$, $SD = .654$). When compared, 36% of men compared to 23% of women attributed some blame to the victim. Since, in the past, only White women were legally considered “legitimate” victims and as members of a class of people who should be protected in society, it was expected that they would have lower victim-blaming scores for Madeline. It was also expected that they will have higher victim-blaming scores, and hence attribute more blame, to Taneesha. Upon analysis, there were no statistically significant differences in the overall average victim-blaming mean scores between the two women (Table 4).

	Condition	n	Mean	SD
Taneesha	Sober	138	1.232	.557
	Intoxicated	143	1.364	.656
	In a Relationship	144	1.44	.823
	Intoxicated and in a relationship	143	1.427	.755
Overall Average			1.366	
Madeline	Sober	140	1.236	.545
	Intoxicated	142	1.444	.804
	In a Relationship	145	1.434	.789
	Intoxicated and in a relationship	148	1.358	.65
Overall Average			1.368	

The average victim-blaming scores for Taneesha showed no statistically significant difference when compared to Madeline. However, in this sample more blame was attributed to Madeline when Connor (1.418) was the perpetrator at a marginally statistically significant difference compared to when Jamal (1.318) was the perpetrator ($p < 0.1$) (Figure 2). This result

also correlates with the marginally statistically difference ($p < 0.1$) in the responses for the severity of punishment where participants requested harsher punishments to Connor when Taneesha was the victim ($M = 3.738$) than when Madeline was the victim ($M = 3.619$).



What is consistent across the two samples, is the difference in treatment for the perpetrator as Madeline assumes more blame when her perpetrator is a White man and noticeably, the least when she, a White woman, is assaulted by a Black man. The victim-blaming scores did not correlate with the form of punishment each of the two men should receive (Table 5). The overwhelming majority of respondents in both samples advocated for the perpetrator to be arrested and charged for the assault they committed.

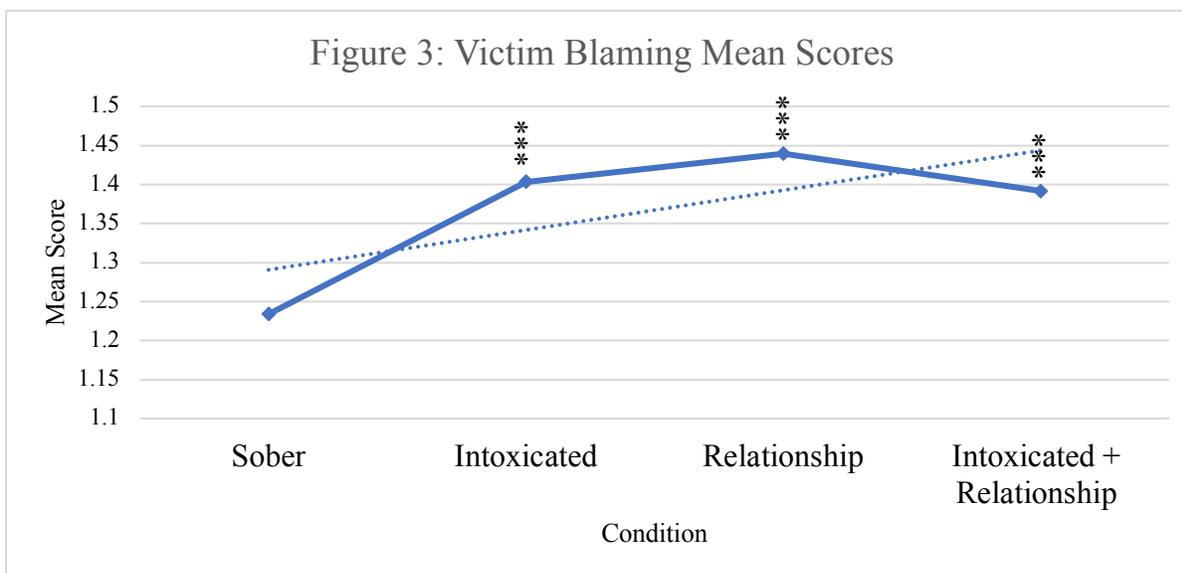
Perpetrator	Blocked	Suspended	Expelled	Expelled and then arrested and charged	Total	Arrested and Charged		Total
						Yes	No	
Jamal	3.16% (18)	5.10% (29)	12.25% (72)	79.09% (450)	569	99.44% (178)	1	179
Connor	3.32% (19)	6.28% (36)	9.77% (56)	80.63% (462)	573	98.36% (180)	3	183

Source: Student Sexual Assault Survey Study 2, Question 4 and Study 1, Question 4
Note: Raw scores indicated in parentheses

Differences Across Conditions

In Study 2, there were stronger reactions to the conditions present at the time of Taneesha/Madeline's assault. At random, participants read vignettes where the female student was either sober (n=278), intoxicated (n=285), in a heterosexual relationship (n=289), or intoxicated *and* in a heterosexual relationship (n=291)⁵. The condition where the victim is sober and not indicated to be in a relationship was set as the control condition, the remaining conditions were compared to the control in Figure 3. Compared to the control, participants attributed statistically significantly more blame to the victim ($p < .01$) when she was intoxicated ($p = 0.0020$), in a relationship ($p = 0.0005$), as well as when she was both intoxicated and in a relationship, ($p = 0.0031$).

The most blame was attributed in cases when the victim was described to be in a relationship (1.44).



Source: Study 2 of SSAS, Question 3

⁵ Note: The fourth condition of intoxication and relationship status was only presented to participants in Study 2

This trend was similar for each victim (Table 6), where the presence of alcohol and indication of being in a relationship resulted in significant increases in victim blaming ($p < .01$). For Taneesha, there was only a marginal increase when she was intoxicated and for Madeline when she was both intoxicated and in a relationship. Again, the conditions and the state of the victim at the time of assault is indicative and highly correlated to how much she is blamed.

	Condition	n	μ	σ
Taneesha	Sober	138	1.232	0.5574951
	Intoxicated	143	1.364(*)	0.6559098
	In a Relationship	144	1.44(***)	0.842721
	Intoxicated and in a Relationship	143	1.427(***)	0.7551654
Madeline	Sober	140	1.236	0.5445705
	Intoxicated	142	1.444(***)	0.8035793
	In a Relationship	145	1.434(***)	0.7889321
	Intoxicated and in a Relationship	148	1.358(*)	0.6495434

Source: Student Sexual Assault Survey, Question 3
 Note: Statistically significant results indicate $p < .01$ (*), $p < .05$ (**), $p < .01$ (***)

Description of Victims

The participant's perception of the victim was documented by the participant responses to Question 5: *Describe [Taneesha or Madeline] in three words.* As expected, the word with the highest frequency was "victim" in both samples, but even with it being the most frequent word used to describe both women. In Study 1, words "innocent" and "trusting" were used 1.5 times more in relation to Madeline, compared to "naïve" which was used twice as much to describe Taneesha. Reflecting on language attributed to White women in regards to sexual assault and sexuality, the word "innocent" had been used exclusively to this demographic and the connotation of the word "trusting" preserves this innocence.

Figure 4: Most Frequent Descriptors in Study 1

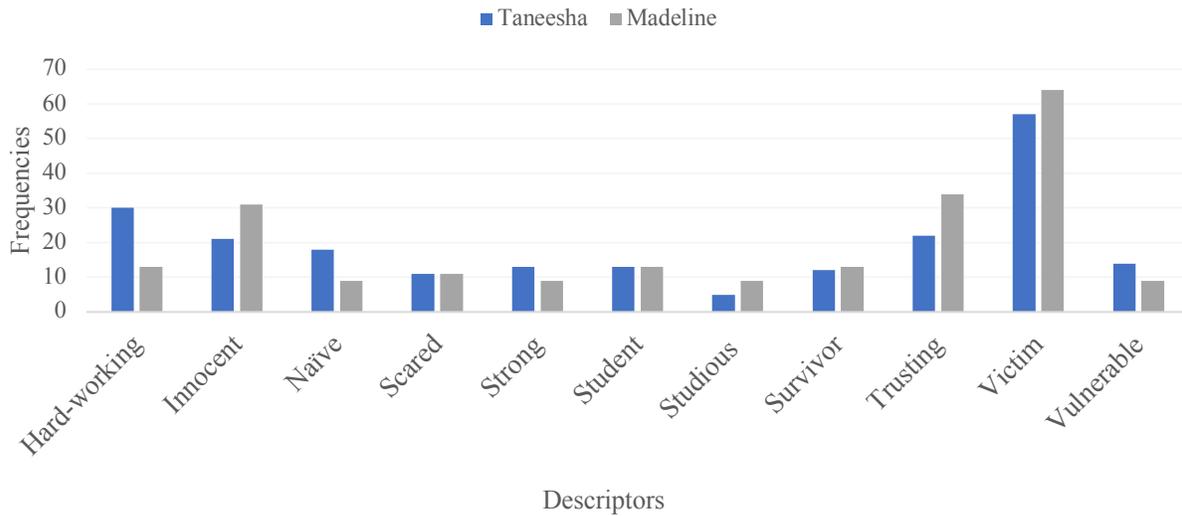
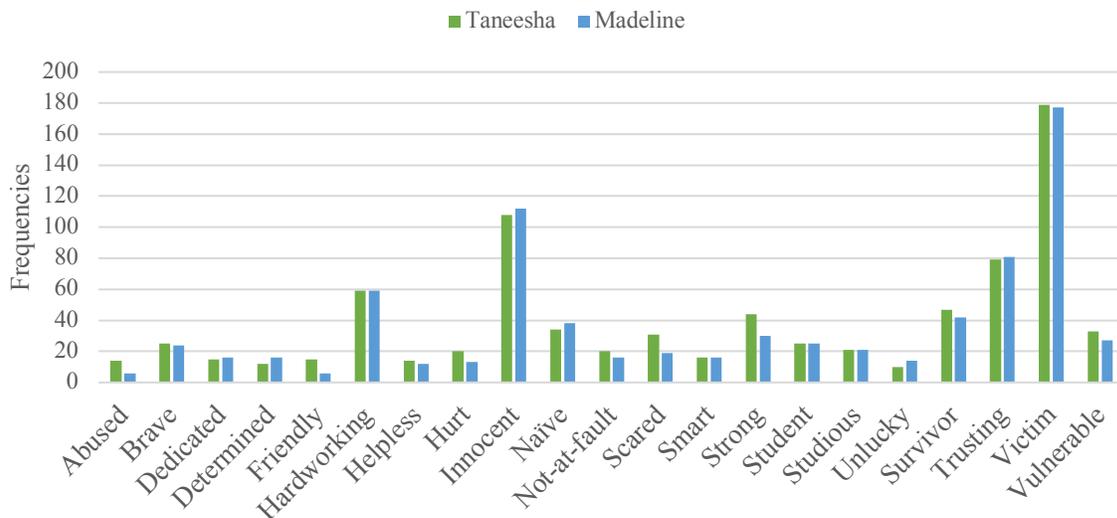


Figure 5 does not show such differences between the descriptors used for each of the women. The frequency of any of the adjectives (submitted ten times or more) for Taneesha and Madeline were nearly equal in usage, with the exception of the words abused and friendly. Taneesha was described to be abused and friendly more than twice as much as Madeline, despite being in identical circumstances.

Figure 5: Most Frequent Descriptors in Study 2



A difference to underscore in Study 2 is the emergence of the descriptor “not at fault” which a total of 36 participants included as a three-word statement in defense of Taneesha or Madeline. Even with the inclusion of terms like “innocent” in Study 1 there were no instances of participants blatantly saying either woman was “not-at-fault” in the first distribution of the study.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine whether the perceptions about Black female students as rape victims on college campuses would be equal to those of their White female counterparts across two samples. To incorporate details that are popular among sexual assault cases in a collegiate environment, the perception of victims was also measured in the case of intoxication and relationship status. The results demonstrate that though the participants have positive attitudes toward women, low Black racial bias, and moderately high Black Feminist consciousness, there are still racialized perspectives about victimhood that is dependent on the perpetrator.

Differences and Similarities Across Studies

Results from the first run of the experiment showed a bias where Taneesha, the Black woman was blamed the most when the perpetrator was Connor, a White male. Months later, when the experiment was conducted on a second, larger sample, Madeline was more to blame when Connor was the assailant. Though it is unclear as to why White women have assumed more of the blame in Study 2, what remains consistent in both samples is the similar treatment of the perpetrator, where victim takes more blame if the perpetrator is a White man. Despite the majority of participants advocating for the most severe punishment for Jamal and Connor, the view of the victim is different, participants are more likely to blame the victim if Connor was assailant. This is reflective of the history of White men being framed as victims of seduction who

stray from virtue when engaging in inappropriate sexual activities with Black women, while accusing Black men of being beastly. The presence of Connor as the perpetrator seems to be an indicator of more victim-blaming for either women in the two samples, whereas in Study 2, victim blaming scores are significantly lower for Madeline when Jamal, the Black man, is the perpetrator. This result suggests that in cases of sexual assault, the race of the perpetrator is equally important to the race of the victim. Connor, was the perpetrator of the violence, but his Whiteness, not his maleness, may have been the reason for the difference in victim blaming means in both studies.

Conditions Matter

Table 6 demonstrates that anything beyond sobriety results in victims taking more blame, the most blame is when she is in a [heterosexual] relationship. According to Stevenson (2000), women and girls have control over how they are treated based upon the ways that they govern their bodies. The experimental conditions challenge the participant's belief in rape myths and ideal victimhood with the inclusion of factors that complicate the circumstances, like the consumption of alcohol. In the case of Taneesha and Madeline, in any condition other than sobriety, arguably the women in some way put themselves in a vulnerable position whether it was entering the apartment of a strange man or going as far as sharing a consensual kiss.

In some feminist literature, it is argued that social systems do not allow women to fully "own" their bodies nor have sexual autonomy, especially when in a romantic relationship with a man (Petchesky, 1995). Perhaps the reason for such an increase in victim-blaming scores when Taneesha or Madeline have a boyfriend that she lives with, was a defensive reaction on behalf of her unidentified partner. The vignette did not indicate whether or not her boyfriend was aware of her whereabouts which gives opportunity for the reader to assume secrecy and deduce that her

presence in an apartment with another man was suspicious. Though low in frequency, some participants in both samples (Appendix C) described the women to be “a cheater” and in one case, claimed that the assault was deserving because of a consensual kiss.

“Not-at-Fault”

The presence of “not-at-fault” in the latter sample can mark the beginning of a cultural shift within the eight-month span between the two studies. In 2019, there were a number of social campaigns that discussed sexual violence and stimulated a national continuous discourse challenging how American society treats victims. Movements like #MeToo conduct social media campaigns that reach the population, especially the college-aged population, at a rapid speed. #MeToo sheds light on the varying circumstances of which sexual assault takes place with victims using their own voices as self-advocates. Understanding that non-rape victims have a higher likelihood of believing rape myths (Vonderhaar and Carmody, 2014), dispelling idealistic “real rapes” through and by testimonies of victims can foster a dialogue. Once rape myths can be dispelled, the normalization of rape can be better deconstructed and met with more resistance from victims and non-victims. The continuous spread of transparency of victim stories and charges for change, challenge the social structures that uphold a rape culture. With the inclusion of social media, college students can mobilize and use similar strategies to make demands of the university. University’s in turn, can circumvent these protests by having more proactive engagement, for example, instituting low-tolerance policies and practicing investigations that prioritize the physical and emotional well-being of victims.

The documentary series, *Surviving R Kelly*, premiered in January of 2019, highlighted the unequal treatment of Black girls in general and in the case of sexual violence. Black women and girls being overseen in cases of sexual assault and manipulation makes them more vulnerable,

which in turn makes them easy targets. Much of the documentary focused on the notion that singer, R Kelly was able to continue his alleged behavior openly and for decades because his victims were young Black girls. There were even individuals interviewed who victim-blamed the girls as well as their families and accused them of seeking notoriety. Critically, the documentary series centered Black girls and women as victims of sexual assault as they share their own stories in ways that were previously unseen (Tillet, 2019). The series was so influential, that it is cited as one of the major reasons why state and federal charges against Kelly were filed, and he is now awaiting trial in jail (Bryant, 2019). *Surviving R Kelly* is evidence of how entertainment and social media can successfully mobilize individuals to seek justice and build an intolerance for certain behaviors.

Limitations

The study was primarily limited by the racial makeup of the participants. Though the total sample sizes were 362 and 1,144, respectively, when divided into raced-gendered groups, there were not substantial numbers of participants across racial groups and vignettes to make comparisons for all categories. This was also an obstacle in measuring the difference between races, specifically Black and White populations because the White participant sub-sample was over 11 times greater than the Black sub-sample. Though the sample reflects closely the institution's student demographics, considering the nature of this study, a more racially-balanced sample size would have led to more reliable results.

The second limitation is the generalizability of the data. Given the sample size and location of the university, these results cannot be generalized to all college students nor all individuals living in the United States. Nevertheless, these results do offer a sense of the

perceptions and attitudes of the students where the study was conducted. There was a pattern of racialized judgement among college students towards Black female victim which reveals a relationship that should be examined in broader arenas with a larger sample size.

Conclusion

In Study 1, Hypothesis 1: When compared to the perpetrator, participants will attribute more responsibility for having prevented the assault, to the Black woman victim than the White woman victim, was supported by the data. Hypothesis 2, however, was rejected because there was no significant difference between the rate of which participants suggested Jamal or Connor be arrested and charged, with 99 percent of participants reporting “yes” to “Connor or Jamal should be arrested and charged” and 80% of participants in Study 2 selecting the most aggressive punishment. Hypothesis 3: Participants will attribute more blame to the Black woman victim when the perpetrator is a White man than if the perpetrator was a Black man, was supported. It was found that Taneesha was significantly victim blamed more when Connor was the perpetrator. In Study 2, all three of the hypotheses were not supported by the data, rather, there was a marginal increase in victim blaming scores for Madeline when Connor was the perpetrator. This study demonstrated that any condition of the assault that deviated from the victim being sober (e.g. being in a relationship), resulted in a significant increase in victim blaming.

Recommendations

Upon these findings, there are three recommendations from this study. Within the academic intuition, first, there must be more curricula developed and disseminated regarding the appropriate language to use when a person may confide in a peer after an instance of sexual assault. Though 75.96 percent of the participants reported the first thing that Taneesha or Madeline should do is report Connor or Jamal to the police or university, only about 12.5 percent

of sexual assault cases are actually reported (Krebs et. al, 2016). Victims are most likely to turn to a trusted person (a peer or loved one), than the institution. With this being the case, teaching all university students about how to talk to a victim in a way that provides comfort, does not victim blame, and also assists in the accumulation of evidence for a proper police report, should be developed, following the structure of Bystander Programs (Coker et al., 2016).

Simultaneously, the university should increase training for police and other relevant professionals to counsel victims through the criminal process and any emotional healing.

The success of #MeToo and *Surviving R Kelly* demonstrate how continued exposure via social media campaigns can start a cultural shift. Colleges and universities can use social media as a way to connect students and encourage discourse. This suggestion may be controversial because social media engagement can be dangerous, but that does not outweigh the opportunity to gain international attention for sexual assault survivors.

The final suggestion is to use a public health approach for sexual assault intervention programs as outlined by Basile (2003). The steps include: increasing surveillance measure, identifying causes, develop and evaluate programs, dissemination and implementation of data. The first step includes the use of the SaVE Act to establish a National Surveillance System for Sexual Assault on College Campuses (NSSSCC) that will be comprised of formal and informal reports.

Title XI requires that all reports of sexual harassment and misconduct at universities must be reported nationally, but this new national surveillance system will also incorporate anonymous reports and testimonies because most victims do not report to the authority. The NSSSCC can be used to calculate the prevalence of sexual assault, unveil the risk factors, expose the underlying causes, and its social impacts in post-secondary institutions. Reports and data

from the NSSSCC can be the foundation for evaluations of how compliant universities are to Title XI policies, address victims of sexual assault, penalize perpetrators, and the development of new programs to prevent sexual violence. As a national resource, the NSSSCC can set national standards for how institutions can tackle the complexities of sexual assault reporting and prevention.

Title IX (1964) and the Cleary Act (1990) were passed to give victims more agency in the justice system in cases of sexual assault. The Cleary Act in particular, addresses sexual assault on college campuses, but data continue to show that sexual assault is a rampant issue in post-secondary institutions throughout the United States (Fisher et al., 2002). As more Black women enter college, dated assumptions that portray them as hypersexual beings limit their claim to the Cleary Act. A separate act, Title VII (1964), includes protection from work-place hostility and environments in the context of race (as well as gender, religion, etc.) (Civil Rights Act, 1964). However, currently, there are no policies that can address the intersectional indemnities of Black women and how they may be more vulnerable to specific actions, conditions, and obstacles (Scales-Trent, 1989).

Suggestions for future research of this nature include examining how other intersecting identities (racial, sexuality, skin tone) may affect the perception of victimhood. Research on the experiences of Latinx women, LGBTQ+, and other minority groups is limited. To gain better understanding on what culturally competent methods can be used to better understand other sub-populations can increase the effectiveness of existing intervention programs.

Currently, social institutions like universities, as well as local, state, and federal governments, should do more to prevent cases of assault and to enhance the methods used to address rape victims in medical, educational, and criminal just systems. Additionally, specific

attention must be paid to Black women by considering what they may face in light of their race *and* gender. As the United States social structure continues to evolve, acknowledgement of the plight of Black women is necessary. Without the historical context of the experiences of Black women in the United States, policies at all levels will continue to let Black women fall through unintended gaps.

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Appendix A

Sample Vignette (Sober Condition)

Note: For Questions 1-4, the participants can only select one choice response. Question 5 is an open-ended text box. The samples had two different questions and answer choices for Question 4, both variations are included on the next page.

Taneesha/Madeline is a commuter, enrolled in a small seminar evening class. Usually she takes the 45-minute bus ride back to her family's house after class, so she gets home at 11pm every night. In the second week of class, the professor assigned a semester-long group project and randomly paired up students. **Taneesha/Madeline** was paired up with **Jamal/Connor**. For their first few meetings, they met up in the library. One day, class was canceled for the evening and **Jamal/Connor** suggested working at their apartment because he had more space. **Taneesha/Madeline** agreed, seeing that she was familiar with **Jamal/Connor** and he agreed to take her home afterwards, so she would not have to take the bus. That evening, they worked a bit on the project and started having more personal conversation. After a couple hours, they kissed, soon, **Jamal/Connor** put himself on top of **Taneesha/Madeline**, even after she repeatedly said no. Eventually, **Jamal/Connor** forced **Taneesha/Madeline** to have sexual intercourse and dropped her off at home. There are still three more weeks before the project is due.

Appendix A (continued)

Question 1	What is the first thing [the victim] should do to deal with this situation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report it to the police • Report it to the university • Tell her loved ones • Ask the professor for a new project partner • Avoid being in the same space as [the perpetrator] 	
Question 2	How could this have been prevented? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [the victim] should have not gone to his apartment • [the perpetrator] should not have offered his apartment as a meeting space • Both students should have continued just meeting in the library • [the perpetrator] should have stopped when [the victim] asked him to stop 	
Question 3	How much responsibility does each person hold in this scenario? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [the victim] is mostly responsible compared to [the perpetrator] • [the victim] is somewhat responsible compared to [the perpetrator] • [the victim] is less responsible compared to [the perpetrator] • [the victim] is not at all responsible compared to [the perpetrator] 	
Question 4		
	Study 1 Variation	Study 2 Variation
	Should [the perpetrator] be arrested and charged? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No 	What is the most appropriate punishment for [the perpetrator]? He should be blocked from contacting [the victim]. He should be suspended for one semester He should be expelled He should be expelled, then arrested and charged
Question 5:	Describe [the victim] in three words.	

Appendix B

Social Consciousness Scales

Just World Belief Scale

1. I think basically the world is a just place.
2. I believe that by and large, people get what they deserve.
3. I am confident that justice always prevails over injustice.
4. I am convinced in the long run people will be compensated for injustices.
5. I firmly believe that injustices in all areas of life (e.g., professional, family, politics) are the exception rather than the rule.
6. I think people try to be fair when making important decisions. Each of these statements determine the participants' internalized and externalized views on the perception of justice outside of a legal context.

Attitudes Toward Women

1. Men and women should be paid the same for the same work regardless of whether or not they have a family to support.
2. It is all right for women to work, but men will always be the basic breadwinners.
3. Whether or not they realize it, most women are exploited by men.
4. Women should not be permitted to hold political offices that involve great responsibility.
5. Women have the right to compete with men in every sphere of activity.

Black Racial Bias Scale

1. Black people are mostly responsible for the outcomes of their life
2. Blacks are demanding too much from the rest of society
3. Blacks generally do not complain as much as they should about their position in society
4. Black people are mostly responsible for racial tension that exists in the United States today
5. Discrimination against racial Blacks is no longer a problem in the United States
6. Black people have trouble managing their tempers
7. Less Black people elect to go to college, that's why there are fewer Blacks in college, and
8. The incarceration rate is higher for Blacks because they commit more crime.

Black Feminist Belief Scale

1. The problems of racism, poverty and sexual discrimination are all linked together
2. Black women should share equally in the political leadership of the Black community
3. What generally happens to Black women will have something to do with your life
4. Black women have suffered from both sexism within the Black movement and racism within the women's movement
5. Black feminist groups help the Black community by advancing the position of Black women.

Appendix C

Selected Submissions from Question 5

Note: These responses were not used included in the count of Descriptors in Figures 4 and 5

About Taneesha:

- *Taneesha is a regular girl who got involved with a bad guy, bad in every sense of the word.*
- *Taneesha is gullible, naive, and should have been more aggressive towards Jamal.*
- *Carelessignorantgirl*
- *Just another statistic*
- *I can't really judge her as a person from this, she said no, he raped her. I have more words for Jamal than Taneesha.*

About Madeline:

- *she has a hard work ethic considering that she goes beyond herself to complete work*
- *she might understand that chemistry with group partner is important to overall work quality; however, when people are drunk, they can get irrational about relationship borders. "*
- *Me too" victim*
- *Not smart enough*
- *product of society*