Sexual Assault and Academic Achievement: Creating More Ideal College Campuses for Sexual Assault Survivors by Taking Into Account Intersectionality and Multiracial Feminism

Kelly Pinter
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss

Part of the Criminology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/1487

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 2015 Kelly Pinter
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT:
CREATING MORE IDEAL COLLEGE CAMPUSES FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT
SURVIVORS BY TAKING INTO ACCOUNT INTERSECTIONALITY
AND MULTIRACIAL FEMINISM

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY
KELLY PINTER
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
MAY 2015
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all of the people who have made this dissertation possible, starting with Dr. Judith Wittner. Judy not only read numerous drafts of this work, but her thoughtful suggestions, encouragement, and drive to push me, made me an even better scholar. I would also like to thank Dr. Lazarus-Black for being my mentor and true friend both before and during this process. She was the first person to plant the seed of graduate school in my mind, and as a first generation college student, there is no way that I would have gone half as far as I did in academia without her support. I also want to thank Dr. Lisa Frohmann and Dr. Jennifer Parks for selflessly serving on my committee. Their ample encouragement and dedication to me as their student was obvious. I am forever thankful to these four strong women, not only for making this work possible, but for helping mold me into the feminist scholar, educator, and activist that I am today.

In addition to the supportive committee that I had the pleasure of working with, I also want to thank my feminist comrades. These are the women and men that I have met in everyday life as well as those at colleges and universities including Loyola University, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of Chicago, the College of Lake County, and Harper College. These friends and colleagues reminded me that I can do anything that I put my mind to. They not only listened to me as I nervously practiced before conference presentations and told me to never give up on this work, but they sat and drank coffee with me in their free time, came to my babies' birthday parties, and gave
me the gift of friendship that will last our lifetimes. I love them more than words could ever express.

I also want to thank my remarkable family. My parents Dawn and Rick Pinter altered their entire lives for years in order to witness this day. They helped to nurture my children and even let my family live with them for a time, just to make sure that I was given a fighting chance at completing this dissertation as a mother with two children under the age of five. My loyal in-laws, Cindy and Mark Gira were also an enormous help with the kids, when I needed some uninterrupted time to write. Additionally, I want to thank my two lovely children, Hanalei and Dexter, for giving me a reason to keep on going no matter how arduous this process was at times. Their tiny faces reminded me that by getting this doctorate, they would also have the proof that they are capable of anything that they put your minds to. I thank them for being my world. Also, my companion, Adam Gira has been my rock. I know that this process has been difficult for him too, but I feel that it has brought us even closer together. Through this progression, we have learned to be an even sturdier team who supports one another through thick and thin. I want to thank Adam for being my cheerleader, best friend, and the love of my life. I look forward to many more years with him, as well as many more date nights, now that this dissertation is completed.

Upon concluding, I want to thank the courageous and inspirational sexual assault survivors who took the time to talk to me about the difficulty of dealing with this crime. Sometimes through tears, they shared their most agonizing recollections in order to support others who will or do walk in their shoes every day. I am eternally inspired by them. Without the survivors, this work would not be.
This work is dedicated to the 28 sexual assault survivors who made this work a reality. Thank you.
Sexual violence is more than just a crime against individuals. It threatens our families. It threatens our communities; ultimately, it threatens the entire country. It tears apart the fabric of our communities. And that’s why we’re here today – because we have the power to do something about it as a government, as a nation. We have the capacity to stop sexual assault, support those who have survived it, and bring perpetrators to justice.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii

LIST OF TABLES ix

CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT 1
  Introduction 4
  Definition of Terms 6
  The Prevalence, Consequences and Underreporting of Sexual Assault and the Anti-Rape Movement 6
  Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Gap in Knowledge 13
  Primary Research Questions 15
  Methodology and Procedures 15
  The Interviewees 22
  Limitations 24
  Location of the Study 25
  Review of Instrument and How It Was Validated 27
  Theoretical Framework 29
  Assumptions 32
  Limitations and Generalizability 32
  Summary 33

CHAPTER TWO: SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT 36
  In-group Survivors’ Views on Rape 40
  Out-group Views on Rape 50
  In-group Views on Reporting and In-group Offenders 57
  Out-group Views on Reporting 59
  Aftercare 61

CHAPTER THREE: HOW PERCEPTIONS OF RACE AND ETHNICITY INFLUENCE SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES 69
  How Race and Ethnicity Affect Survivors’ Sexual Assault Cases 72
  Racial Hostility Between Victim and Offender 82
  Campus Emails about Crime and Race 87
  Race and Punishment 92
  Violence and Culture 94
  Conclusion 107

CHAPTER FOUR: HOW PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER INFLUENCE SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES 112
  Liars 114
  Survivors as Objects 118
  Sluts 120
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survivor Blamed Herself Because of Her Attire</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependents</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivors with a Voice</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violators</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivors’ Suggestions on How to Deal with Sexual Assault on Campus</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting Survivors</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplifying Their Lives</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivors’ Perceptions about Healing after the Crime</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivors’ Perceptions about Whom Universities Should Hire to Work with Victims after a Sexual Assault Occurs</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Dissertation</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX A: DISSERTATION INTERVIEW GUIDE</strong></td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX B: SURVIVOR QUESTIONNAIRE</strong></td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFERENCE LIST</strong></td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VITA</strong></td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Respondent Identified In-group and Out-group Characteristics 37
Table 2. References to Race and/or Ethnicity by Interviewees in Relation to Sexual Assault Cases 73
Table 3. Subject of Reference for Survivors Who Talked About Race and/or Ethnicity (N=12) in Relation to Sexual Assault Cases 74
Table 4. Examples of Rape Culture 97
Countless college campuses are providing incompetent aid to college sexual assault survivors. According to Leslie Gomez, a sexual assault policy consultant, many campuses are failing in the same capacities, including absence of clarity, student mistreatment, bewildering procedures, and poor training among those commanding the processes on campus (Grinberg 2014). Currently, 94 colleges and universities in the United States are under investigation by the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights for the mishandling of sexual assault on their campuses (Ng 2015). According to Bonnie S. Fisher, professor of criminal justice at the University of Cincinnati,

> It just hasn’t been on most university administrator’s agendas; they don’t know how to approach it, and they just haven’t taken the time to be informed…It’s just another issue on their desks that they’re hoping doesn’t cause a loss of students or bad media attention. (Pérez-Peña and Taylor 2014)

The University of California at Berkeley was one example of inadequacy. Berkeley had been accused of failing to investigate sexual assault cases and instead allowing named offenders to graduate early (Grinberg 2014). In response, Dr. Dirks, chancellor of UC Berkeley, said that Berkeley was able to fix many of the issues that survivors were facing quite easily. For example, it was not too difficult to balance a student’s wish for privacy against his or her request that the university enforce physical estrangement between the victim and the offender (Pérez-Peña and Taylor 2014).

There are countless stories of survivors being re-traumatized by school officials.
One survivor was asked why she did not come forward with the assault complaint sooner. Administrators suggested that this woman was acting as a malicious ex-girlfriend and not as a truthful survivor (Grinberg 2014). Another noted that the campus investigator took shoddy notes about the crime and that she was warned not to discuss the case with others (Pérez-Peña and Taylor 2014). The University of Missouri also kept a rape case quiet by refraining from investigating or telling criminal justice professionals about the alleged rape. The victim in this case eventually committed suicide (Farrey and Noren 2014).

Even some survivors who do get as far as adjudication are unhappy with the process. One survivor noted that the adjudication procedures left her feeling unsafe and even more traumatized. She said, “I’ve never felt more shoved under the rug in my life” (Pérez-Peña and Taylor 2014). Merely educating students about sexual consent during a 50-minute presentation during the first year of college is not enough for a crime as serious and pervasive as sexual assault (Pérez-Peña and Taylor 2014).

The U.S. Department of Education enforces the Title IX law. This law encourages schools that know or reasonably should know of alleged sexual violence to take abrupt action to investigate the claim or to otherwise determine what transpired. The law applies even after an alleged victim is deceased (Farrey and Noren 2014). Title IX forbids discrimination on the basis of gender for all schools that collect federal funding (Anderson 2014). The Clery Act compels college and university officials with responsibility for campus activities to report all severe criminal events to law enforcement for investigation and possible addition to the college crime statistics (Farrey and Noren 2014). The failure to protect students from sexual harassment and assault has become such an issue on American college and university campuses that the Education
Department’s Office for Civil Rights sent a letter to colleges and universities in 2011, warning them that it saw numerous educational institutions mismanaging sexual assault cases and that it was going to become more strict on them when it came to Title IX complaints in the future (Pérez-Peña and Taylor 2014).

The shortfalls and failures of colleges and universities in the United States when handling sexual assault cases has resulted in many sexual violence investigations by the federal government. Every year since 2012, the numbers of sexual violence complaints to the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights has increased (Grinberg 2014). These institutions being investigated include not only small regional schools, but also large public schools, and even elite private universities (Anderson 2014). A few of the colleges and universities that have been or are currently under investigation include Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Florida State, Ohio State (Pérez-Peña and Taylor 2014), Dartmouth, Emory, the University of Southern California, Amherst, Swarthmore, Catholic University of America, the College of William and Mary (Anderson 2014), Vanderbilt University (Gonzalez 2013), and UC Berkeley (Felch 2014). Yale was also recently fined $155,000 for violating the rights of sexual assault survivors (Gonzalez 2013). These are only a fraction of the named violators.

In 2014, President Obama created the Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault to assist schools in protecting students from sexual violence. The main goals of the task force are to identify the extent of sexual assault on campus through campus climate surveys, preventing sexual assault by engaging men, and having schools effectively respond when a student is victimized. Specifically, the task force aims to help schools maintain confidentiality between advocates and counselors with survivors, create
specific definitions of consent, provide informed training programs for school officials, improve schools’ current disciplinary processes, and advance partnerships with the community. The government also created a website to encourage survivors to file a complaint if they felt their school acted in violation of their rights. They also released a detailed report about students’ rights and the schools’ obligations under Title IX (White House Task Force report 2014).

The data used in this dissertation was collected one year before Obama’s Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault was formed. It gives readers an idea about the situation of sexual assault on American college and university campuses during a time when our government was recognizing a disservice to survivors and a need for more action. It is an important addition to the sexual assault literature because it tackles an issue that was popular in the media during the time that it was conducted, but this work was strictly from the mouths’ of sexual assault survivors. This is important because of the discrepancy between how survivors see the sexual assault aftermath on campus when compared to how some college and university administrators and criminal justice professionals see the issue. Furthermore, both groups have different goals that they want to attain when these cases come to light. Because it is the goal of this dissertation to shed some light on what sexual assault survivors desire when it comes to prevention, aftercare, and polices when dealing with this crime, I interviewed sexual assault survivors. If we want the plight of survivors to change on campus, it is imperative that we listen to them through a qualitative approach.

Introduction

In this dissertation, the reader will learn about 28 sexual assault survivors’ perceptions
about educational and criminal justice responses to them after a sexual assault and how these sexual assault survivors perceived how race and ethnicity, income, and gender affect cases differently. Additionally, I explore sexual assault policies that survivors think are working, and those they feel need improvement. I also assess in depth recommendations concerning what education administrators, staff, and advocates can do to assist sexual assault survivors.

In order to gain accurate insight into these topics, I interviewed 28 sexual assault survivors. The interviews centered around three main questions. First, what are the educational and criminal justice responses to sexual assault survivors who seek help through these institutions? Specifically, how do survivors view the sexual assault reporting process and what are the survivors’ viewpoints on how confidants handled their cases? Second, how have survivors’ social locations through race, income, and gender influenced their experiences? Lastly, what are the essential components of sexual assault prevention and aftercare programs on campus through the eyes of sexual assault survivors?

This dissertation seeks to help people who work with high school and college sexual assault survivors to provide assistance in a beneficial and humane way. Furthermore, it provides information on how survivors view race, income, and gender and how they perceive the ways in which those intersections affect their lives after they are victimized. It advises higher education administrators, educators, and advocates about the most effective policies to enforce on high school and college campuses so that survivors are able to be most successful in their academic lives.
Definition of Terms

This dissertation focuses on sexual assault. I used Northwestern University’s definition of sexual assault in this dissertation because it draws a clear line around unacceptable behavior. It not only covers unwanted penetration, but also unwanted touching or fondling against the victim’s will. Northwestern University’s Student Handbook defines sexual assault as:

The intentional or knowing touching or fondling by the accused, either directly or through the clothing, of the victim's genitals, breasts, thighs, or buttocks without the victim's consent. Sexual assault includes touching or fondling of the accused by the victim when the victim is forced to do so against his or her will. Sexual assault also includes any nonconsensual acts involving penetration of the sex organs, anus, or mouth. (Northwestern University Student Handbook 2009-2010)

I also use the term, “rape” in the dissertation, as rape is a form of sexual assault. While sexual assault encompasses all of the above acts that are defined in Northwestern University’s Student Handbook, rape is “…the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without consent of the victim” (Beebe 2013:25). In other words, while rape is sexual assault, not all forms of sexual assault are rape.

When I write about culture, this is the definition I am using: Culture is “[a] set of beliefs and values, norms and customs, and rules and codes that socially defines a group of people, binds them to one another, and gives a sense of commonality” (Trenholm and Jensen 2000).

The Prevalence, Consequences and Underreporting of Sexual Assault and the Anti-Rape Movement

Sexual assault is an educational and societal concern. On a campus with 10,000 female
college students, about 350 of them will be victims of rape in a nine-month academic year. In other words, about one in five women will experience rape during the now average five-year college career (Gonzales, Schofield, and Schmitt 2005). In a 2007 U.S. Department of Justice study, Krebs et al. also found as many as 1 in 5 undergraduate women are the survivors of an attempted or completed sexual assault during their college experience. According to Fisher and colleagues (2000), about 20-25% of the entire female higher education population will experience a completed rape. In addition to that, the college years are the greatest period of risk for rape (Fisher, Daigle, and Cullen 2010). In fact, in the U.S. instances of rape and sexual assault are higher for female students ages 18-24 than for non-students in this age group, making the college years among the most vulnerable for women (Sampson 2002). "College campuses are social domains conducive to students' sexual victimization, including rape...[F]emale students' victimization is ingrained in the very fabric of normal college life" (Fisher et al. 2010).

Men are also survivors of sexual assault. Tewsbury and Mustaine (2001) found that 8.3% of college men are victims of this crime.

Sexual assault is the most common violent crime on campus (Paludi 2008). Despite it’s prevalence, many colleges and universities are not assisting sexual assault survivors. The greater rates of victimization found among college students highlights a number of persistent inequalities that continue in higher education including restrictions of movement (Fisher & Sloan 2003; Sheffield 2007; Warr 1985), the stigmatization of rape and sexual assault survivors (Ahrens et al. 2007; McMahon 2007; McMahon 2010), and the deficiency of institutional supports for survivors who seek justice (Anderson 2014; Kramer 1994; Pérez-Peña & Taylor 2014; Sanday 2007).
In addition to institutional issues, sexual assault affects survivors individually. The consequences of these crimes to survivors may be physical health problems including chronic headaches, sleep disturbances, and unwanted pregnancies, as well as lower academic achievement (Vladutiu, Martin, and Macy 2011:1). Sexual assault is also linked to drug use and missing class (Vladutiu et al. 2011; Paludi 2008). In addition, damaged peer relationships at school and impaired interactions within the family are further consequences of being the survivor of a sexual assault (Paludi 2008; Sivakumaran 2005). Survivors’ whole lives can be uprooted as there is also a link between sexual assault victimization and quitting one’s job and moving out of one’s home (Karmen 2007).

Sexual assault is considered the most underreported violent crime in America (Gonzales et al. 2005). Students are less likely to report if it was an acquaintance rape or if the parties were drinking (Fisher and Sloan 2003). Survivors are more likely to report when it is a stranger rape. With college woman, less than 5% reported attempted or completed rapes to law enforcement and about 1/3 told no one (Shaw and Lee 2009).

Special attention needs to be paid to intersections such as gender, race, and income when creating programs against sexual assault. Not all survivors face the same issues. Survivors of color face problems with the police due to historical problems with racism and the criminal justice system (Renzetti 2011). For example, the criminal justice system takes the rape of black women by black or white men less seriously than the rape of white women (Welsh 2006). Though rape is mainly an intra-racial crime (Shaw and Lee 2009), the order of highest sanctions for rape by race is as follows: white women raped by black men, white women raped by white men, black women raped by black
men, followed by black women raped by white men (LaFree 1989; Pokorak 2006). Welsh (2006) argues that immigrants may see less opportunities to report sexual crimes because they are not privileged within the legal system. Because of these issues, we need more work that focuses on race and the anti-rape movement (Corrigan 2013:56). Furthermore, heterosexist models that deal with violence neglect homophobia and biphobia (Girshick 2002). Male victims may question their sexuality, worry others will question their sexual orientation, experience an attack on their masculinity, be discouraged from talking about their feelings, and have few support systems available to them (Sivakumaran 2005).

Overall, male victims feel emasculated from rape (Sivakumaran 2005).

Society’s view of rape and sexual assault has changed over time. Psychological language integrated into the law through sexual psychopath statuses enacted in the first half of the 1900s let men walk free of the crime in a court of law. Rape was seen as the product of mental illness and when men did not appear to be mentally ill when tried for rape, they were mistakenly released into the free world (Corrigan 2013:35).

By the 1970s and 1980s, theorists and activists such as Connell and Wilson (1974), Davis (1983), and hooks (1980) looked at how different power inequalities, especially those based on race and class, were involved in sexual violence. During this time, the notion came about that rape was violence, not sex. There was increased interest in acquaintance rape, men and boys as survivors, women as offenders, and in cases without obvious physical force (Corrigan 2013:41).

Feminists at rape crisis centers with a victim concentration and state agencies such as law enforcement with a law and order focus were at odds with each other in the 1980s. State agencies limited Rape Crisis Center’s independence and authority. Funding
for rape was generally from conservative criminal justice agencies and anti-rape advocates knew that in order to continue to receive funding, they were forced to make compromises (Corrigan 2013:43-44). Furthermore, some feminists who were anti-pornography became affiliated with conservatives opposing not only pornography, but women’s rights. The conservatives affiliated with these feminists pushed for greater regulation of gender, sex, and sexuality. The association of the anti-rape movement with the anti-pornography movement alienated feminists who were in favor of sexual liberation and were anti-rape (Corrigan 2013:49).

There were improvements made in many communities. From the 1980s to 2000, we saw improved stalking laws, victim impact statements, and better-quality mental health services and funding for survivors (Burgess et al. 2006:211). Rape reforms since the middle 1990s included post-rape medical care, emergency contraception for rape survivors, and sex offender statutes (Corrigan 2013:51). Despite these advances, the rape reform movement did not solve the problem of rape. Activists viewed criminal justice actors as antagonistic rather than cooperative towards the activists’ goals (Corrigan 2013:30). Feminist anti-rape activists questioned the effectiveness of a social change strategy through the male dominated legal system.

Rates of non-rape sexual victimization have changed little since the 1950s with respect to the amount and types of victimizations committed against college women (Fisher, Daigle, and Cullen 2010). Secondary victimization occurs when service providers have victim-blaming attitudes and engage in actions that lead to additional trauma for victims (Campbell et al. 2001:1240). Modern day care advocates continue to exhibit bias, insensitivity, and little training when responding to sexual assault survivors
Sexual assault survivors still face overwhelming resistance from institutions that are supposed to help them. The goals of that anti-rape movement, which included care and justice for sexual assault survivors, still have not been realized (Corrigan 2013:4). Anti-rape reform has failed because of the failures of criminal justice and medical professionals to take rape seriously (Corrigan 2013:115).

Rape, the fear of which terrifies most women at some point in their lives, is dreadful enough. But then the legal bad dream begins. In great pain, the rape victim tells of her assault to police, prosecutors, judges, and jurors, but no one believes her. They suspect rather that she fabricated a rape from a consensual encounter or that she caused it by her own bad behavior. (Anderson 2004:946)

People with power over survivors reinforce cultural messages that blame them for the attack and minimize the seriousness of this crime (Corrigan 2013:95). Only 36% of rapes were reported to the police between 1992 and 2000 (National Institute of Justice), leaving the majority of survivors without criminal justice assistance. When prosecutors do take on rape cases, almost all drop out of the criminal justice system through plea-bargaining rather than through a trial (Corrigan 2013:75). If a survivor wants to press a civil lawsuit in a rape case, he or she faces extensive questioning by lawyers and judges and is depicted as a greedy complainer (Lininger 2008:1582). Lawyers and judges cannot always tell the difference between rape and sex (Corrigan 2013:31). When victims report sexual assault, some law enforcement officers avoid, minimize, and drop sexual assault cases (Corrigan 2013:65). Police often disregard sexual assault allegations and think the victim is lying (Corrigan 2013:83, 85) and some go as far as to polygraph sexual assault victims (Carmody 2006:198). Furthermore, rape survivors are judged on their class status, and if they deviate from traditional gender norms, they suffer from rape myths that shame and isolate them (Corrigan 2013:30). Jurors also impose rigid gender stereotypes
on victims. For example, they viewed complainants who followed stereotypical gender roles who were tearful or upset as more valid when compared to calm and controlled survivors who normally followed stereotypical gender roles. (Schuller et al. 2010:759).

Hospital staff often does not know how to respond to rape survivors after the crime either. They are uncomfortable handling these cases and often make the victim wait hours for an examination (Corrigan 2013:70; Carmody 2006:204). In the healthcare realm, taking care of sexual assault survivors is not a money-maker for the hospital (Corrigan 2013:127). Police, health care professionals, and attorneys work together to force survivors out of the criminal justice system. They do this by making reporting so terrible and difficult that survivors give up on the complaint (Corrigan 2013:65). (For further readings on criminal justice and healthcare professionals’ suspicious and dismissive attitudes towards rape allegations see Frohmann 1991, 1997, 1997, 1998; Levine 2006, 2006, and Martin and Powell 1994).

Despite the prevalence of rape and sexual assault and the serious consequences of it, contemporary feminist scholars have not focused much attention on it (Corrigan 2013:12). Academic feminists rarely theorize rape (Corrigan 2013:50). They are more likely to examine domestic violence (Corrigan 2013:13). (See Bumiller’s work for examples on the assumption that services for and systems responses to abused women are the same for rape survivors.) Additionally, rape crisis centers are no longer affiliated with academic communities. Because of this, they have little opportunity to improve rape reform failures and to help rape survivors. They are not able to capitalize on policy opportunities and change the laws against rape (Corrigan 2013:50). Trying to engage modern day concerns about sexual violence are not taken seriously (Corrigan 2013:13).
Rape occupies a strange space as it is both highly scrutinized, but also avoided and ignored. The topic alone creates uneasiness and discomfort (Corrigan 2013:14). After more than 30 years of rape law reform, rape is the least reported and least convicted non-property crime in the United States (Corrigan 2013:5). Ultimately, more academic attention is needed on this violent crime, with attention to intersections of the survivors.

**Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Gap in Knowledge**

Sexual assault and sexual assault survivors are prevalent on college campuses (see, for example, Vladutiu et al. 2011 and Fisher et al. 2000) and these assaults may be linked to lower academic achievement (see, for example, Vladutiu et al. 2011) and a lower quality of life (Fisher, Daigle, and Cullen 2010:109). Also, a large minority of survivors will be victimized again (Fisher et al. 2010:127) if nothing is done to stop these offenses.

This dissertation will add to the broader field of sexual assault studies by focusing on a multidisciplinary approach to the problem. My methods also bring a fresh look at a topic that is often covered by large, quantitative surveys that frequently omit the voices of sexual assault survivors. By using in-depth semi-structured interviews as my main method, I was able to learn about sexual assault directly from people who had been assaulted. This work can help to decrease sexual assaults on college campuses by focusing on the words, perceptions, and experiences of survivors and may eventually help to create college policies, prevention, and aftercare programs that are most beneficial to victims. This work will shed more light on how universities can retain more students who have been victimized deal with sexual victimization while also juggling the rigors of academia. This work goes beyond a focus on gender and sexual assault by taking into account the intersection of race and income and how these intersections influence
survivors’ lives. It can help a diverse range of survivors with the differing dilemmas that they encounter because of sexual assault and it may decrease dropout rates. This work is practical because it may improve the manner in which universities handle sexual assault cases. This dissertation may advance theoretical and practical understanding of men and women who have been sexually assaulted before or while attending college. It will help us understand the costs of being a sexual assault survivor while going to school and can help us to create better sources of support for survivors. It may also help college personnel build even better rapport with college sexual assault survivors. It may help college personnel better reintegrate survivors back into college life after such a traumatic event. It may help make parents and students feel safer about the campus. It may also be used to help sexual assault centers improve their services to their clients. Lastly, data may be presented at conferences and to educate the college community about sexual assault prevention and aftercare.

This research focuses on the words and perceptions of sexual assault survivors instead of people who work with them. Its attention on survivor diversity and intersections enhances insight on how survivors are affected by income and how their income brackets sway the choices they make when moving ahead (or not) with a sexual assault case. I also investigate how the perceived in-group or out-group status of the offender affects how sexual assault survivors pursue cases. In addition, this research provides a greater understanding of how race is perceived to be crucial to the sexual assault cases of women of color, but not of white women. It provides an innovative direction on race and violence, by examining how survivors form an aversion towards innocent men of the same race as their offender, even if the offender is the same race as
himself or herself. The data is also pertinent because it demonstrates how gender is imperative when women victims regain power in their lives after the crime by rejecting traditional gender roles and instead accepting nontraditional gender roles and even feminism. The point of view of the survivor is also a fresh way to examine policy and the wishes of this unique group in future sexual assault policy creation.

**Primary Research Questions**

Interviews covered three main questions. First, what are educational and criminal justice responses like towards sexual assault survivors who seek help through these institutions? Specifically, how do survivors view the sexual assault reporting process and what are the survivors’ viewpoints on how confidantes handled their cases? Second, how have survivors’ social locations through race, income, and gender influenced their experiences? Lastly, what are the essential components of sexual assault prevention and aftercare programs on campus through the eyes of sexual assault survivors?

**Methodology and Procedures**

For this dissertation, I conducted 28 semi structured in-depth qualitative interviews with sexual assault survivors eighteen years or older in order to address their subjective experiences of being threatened or forced to have sexual intercourse and other sexual experiences and the aftermath of these crimes (see Ullman and Filipas 2001:1032). Interviewees were informed about possible interview topics in order to help them decide if they wanted to participate in the project or not. Interviews lasted for about 90 minutes and every interviewee was compensated $20 for his or her time. I assured participants that becoming an interviewee would not influence the participant’s reputation at the high school, college, or university that he or she is attending, or did attend. All interviewees
were reminded that participation is voluntary, does not affect receiving services, and that all information is confidential. All potential interviewees were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the study.

Sexual assault survivors are a difficult group to identify. With verbal permission from business employees, I located survivors through flyers and announcements posted in coffee shops and bookstores near university campuses. Specifically, my posters said: Sexual Assault Survivors: Are you a survivor of a sexual assault that occurred between 1990 and the present day? Did the sexual assault occur while you were in high school or college? Did you attend a college or university either during or after the time of the assault? Are you 18 years of age or older? If so, you can help! I am a PhD candidate at Loyola University Chicago and I am interested in your lives and thoughts about how to prevent and handle sexual assaults on college campuses. I will be conducting 1-2 hour interviews to learn from you. All of the information is confidential and you will be paid $20 for your time. Your interview could improve the lives of sexual assault survivors and could aid with prevention. Thank you so much for your consideration!

When distributing these posters, I explained to business owners and employees that the choice to present the posters was voluntary and that they may be removed from the establishment at any time. I assured participants that becoming a participant would not influence their reputations with any university. All employees or owners were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study. After it was clear that the potential participants understood their rights and the scope of the study, I hung recruitment posters in their establishments.

I also went to sexual assault crisis centers and LGBT support agencies around
these universities and asked them to allow me to post recruitment posters in their facilities (For more on the usefulness of working with crisis centers when conducting research on sex crimes, please see Ullman and Filipas 2001:1032). Advocacy groups were especially helpful because sexual assault survivors are not identifiable by visible characteristics and they are often secretive about their sexual assault experiences. With this flyer approach, interviewees could contact me by e-mail or phone to indicate interest in the project without feeling any pressure to participate.

I also located survivors through the online social networking site Facebook. I created a public Facebook page. This page explained the research and provided my contact information and survivors could choose to contact me if they wished to participate in the project. All participants that saw the Facebook page had the opportunity to either ignore it, or contact me if they were interested in the study. I explained that the interview is voluntary, that becoming an interviewee does not influence the participant's reputation at the university that he or she attends or did attend, and all interviewees were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. With these approaches, interviewees could contact me by e-mail or phone to indicate interest in the project without feeling any pressure to participate. By posting information about the research on Facebook and providing information about the study and my contact number in local businesses in college towns, I was certain that the survivors who were contacting me wanted to be a part of the study and did not feel pressured to share their personal information.

I also attended a sexual assault awareness meeting for “Slutwalk” in order to understand how anti-violence advocates were approaching the topic of sexual assault in
2013. SlutWalk is a rally throughout cities to show disapproval for the comment that a Toronto police officer made about rape victims. The officer, Michael Sanguinetti, said that women, “should avoid dressing like sluts in order to not be victimized.” Furious over this thoughtless comment, young women formed Slutwalk, in which women (and some men) dress in provocative attire in order to protest victim blaming and rape culture (Gibson 2011). This meeting connected me with additional interviewees.

Once a potential interviewee contacted me, he or she was informed through e-mail about possible interview topics in order to help him or her decide if he or she would like to participate in the project or not. Interviewees who decided to move forward with the interview had the choice to be interviewed in person, over the phone, or through Skype. These options were ideal for interviewees who do not feel comfortable meeting with strangers. This gave them more control over the interview process as well as more privacy. In addition, pseudonyms were used for all participants, so identities were further masked.

Sexual assault is a crime and survivors may have a very difficult time talking about the crime that happened to them. The offenders may be family members, people they did or still do love, or even someone that has threatened them about never talking about the incident. A signed consent form could link the survivor to the project and create unneeded stress in the lives of participants. Because of this, documentation of consent was waived, meaning that participants were not required to sign a consent form in order to be interviewed. It was in the best interests of all survivors to verbally consent to be interviewed for their own safety and well-being. Verbal consent allowed people that have already been traumatized to regain some more power and control over their own lives by
being able to tell their stories without linking them to the project. I had a prepared consent form that I read aloud to potential in person interviewees and they verbally agreed to do the interview. A separate consent form dealing with audio recordings was e-mailed to potential interviewees before an interview occurred. This form explained that the choice to be audio recorded was voluntary and interviewees checked his or her preference for audio recording, before the interview occurred. All interviewees (in-person, telephone, and Skype) were offered a copy of both consent forms (to participate in the interview an to be audio recorded) for their records if they wanted them, either through e-mail or in person. All completed audio consent forms were stored in locked filing cabinets in my home or on files on a personal computer on a password protected and encrypted hard drive.

If the potential participant agreed to be interviewed, all interviews occurred at a time convenient to the interviewee. He or she was reminded that participation was voluntary, that becoming an interviewee would not influence the participant's reputation at the university that he or she attended or did attend, and that he or she could end the interview at any time with no penalty. Participants who met in person also chose the place of the interview and if they had no preference, the interviewer provided options for private locations. The 28 interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes each and were audio recorded with the permission and informed consent of each interviewee. All interviews were transcribed by me for later coding purposes. Recordings and transcriptions included interviewees’ names, the name of the university, and also the date of the interview. After the interviews and transcriptions were completed, I created a pseudonym for every interviewee and university. I then replaced the participant’s actual
names as well as the college or university name in the transcriptions with created pseudonyms. Pseudonyms were also assigned to any offenders’ names and any other identifying information.

Because interviewees were current or previous American college students, it was unlikely that they would not speak English, would be illiterate, or would have low reading comprehension. Even so, I took the extra precaution by reading the verbal consent forms aloud to participants before each interview. I also specifically asked if participants had inquiries and I answered all concerns verbally.

Though I used the interview questions as a guide, overall the interview transpired more like a guided conversation. This allowed me to actively listen to participants and provide follow up questions or new topics when appropriate. This approach also encouraged participants to talk about the issues that they found most important. While I did not ask every interview question to every participant or follow the order of the questions at all times, the conversational approach allowed me to build rapport and learn from my participants, while also focusing on my research topics. After the interview, I asked participants to give my contact information to other survivors that they knew. This was equivalent to a snowball sampling method. I met and interviewed five additional survivors this way.

Financially, the interview process may have cost the subjects a minimal amount of money. Missed work, transportation, and/or childcare costs may have accrued. I offset this cost by paying each interviewee $20 for his or her time. For in-person interviews, I handed the interviewee $20 in cash upon completion of the dissertation. For phone and Skype interviews, I mailed (first class) a personal check to the address of the
interviewee’s choice, either directly after the interview, or on the following business day.

I also built relationships with Porchlight Counseling Services of Evanston and Rape Victim Advocates of Chicago in case a survivor needed free therapeutic assistance after the interview transpired. In that instance, I was available to drive or accompany local survivors to any aftercare that they needed, though no survivors took advantage of this opportunity. I explained to RVA and Porchlight that their participation would not hurt their reputations with any universities. The directors were also given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and after I answered all questions and was sure that the directors understood the agreement and their rights, they wrote letters of cooperation. The directors and I both received a copy of these forms for our records.

When I interviewed the three out of state survivors, I provided contact numbers and health related information to sexual assault resources in their local areas. Because survivors may not have revealed the true extent of discomfort to me, I also provided numerous contact numbers for 24-hour rape crisis support, medical care, as well as my own contact information on a discrete business card. That information was distributed in person or through e-mail to each interviewee at the end of our meeting.

After all data collection was completed, my data was stored either on my personal computer or in a locked file cabinet in my home. Interviews and transcripts were stored in a text file that is hard drive protected by encryption and a password. All audio recordings of interviews were stored as password protected files on an encrypted hard drive on my personal computer on a password protected and encrypted hard drive. Hard copies of audio recordings were locked in a file cabinet in my home. Only my dissertation committee and I had access to these recordings. I also stored all hard copies of consent
forms, transcripts, and audio CDs in a locked file cabinet in my home. Aside from myself, only my dissertation committee had access to this data. After completion of the project, I will store data for future research and will continue to use the encryption, passwords, and locked files to protect it.

**The Interviewees**

The participants in this qualitative study were 27 women and one man, all ages 18 and older who were sexually assaulted while in high school or college (excluding online only schools). Though I set out to interview 25 men and women who were survivors of sexual assault while in high school and/or college, towards the end of data collection, additional survivors requested to be interviewed. I interviewed three more people, but eventually turned away three others because my data collection time frame was expiring through the university. All respondents must have attended a college or university during or in the years following the sexual assault. If an interested person was not a sexual assault survivor, he or she could not participate in the research.

My 28 participants were sexually assaulted between 1991 and 2013. Specifically, one was sexually assaulted 1991, 2001, 2008, and 2013. Two survivors were sexually assaulted in 2000, 2004, and 2005. Three were victimized in 2002 and 2007, while four women were sexually assaulted in 2010, 2011, and 2012.

Of the 28 survivors, 25 were attending school in the Midwest, one was attending college on the east coast, one was attending high school in the south, and one was in India when the crimes occurred.

Eight survivors in my study were last victimized in high school and 20 were in college. Of the college students, 12 were attending private school and eight were public
school students when the crime happened. All eight of the high school sexual assault survivors attended public schools.

After the crime, ten did not graduate from the school he or she was attending when the victimization occurred. Five were still enrolled in that school at the time of the interview and had not yet graduated. Thirteen had graduated from that high school, college or university.

Victimizations occurred during every possible year in high school or college. Specifically, one was victimized freshman year in high school, two sophomore year, three junior year, and two senior year. Of the survivors who were sexually assaulted in college, six were last victimized their freshman year of college, five sophomore year, four junior year, three senior year, and two were in graduate school.

I purposely interviewed a diverse group of survivors and I did this by over representing underrepresented groups. This helped me understand the crime from the point of view of people from various social locations. For example, people of color and lesbian and bisexual women were overrepresented when compared to their statistical representation in society. Specifically of the 28 survivors, 21 self identified as heterosexual, three as bisexual, two as questioning, one as a lesbian, and one as gay.

Out of the 28 survivors, 14 identified as white, four as African American, two as biracial (Hispanic and white), two as biracial (Native American and white), two as multiracial, two as Hispanic, and two as Asian (East Indian and South Asian American).

At the time of the most recent sexual assault, 14 survivors were 19 or younger, 12 were 20-29 years old, one was 30-39, and one was 40-49. At the time of the interview in 2013, only one survivor was 19 or younger, 19 were 20-29 years old, five were 30-39,
and three were 40-49 years old.

Survivors tended to have a higher than average household income. While three did not know their household incomes, four made between $0-$19,999, four made between $20,000-$39,999, five made between $40,000-$59,999, and one made between $60,000-$79,999. Three of the wealthiest survivors had household incomes between $80,000-$99,999 and eight made $100,000 and over every year.

Twelve of the survivors were Christian; twelve were unaffiliated with a religion (including atheists and agnostics), and there was one survivor each who was Hindu, Unitarian Universalist, Methodist, and Buddhist.

**Limitations**

The participants were women and men ages 18 and older who were sexually assaulted while in high school or college. People under 18 were excluded because of the subject matter and because I would not have received IRB approval to interview people under age 18 about these crimes. Sexual assault is a highly sensitive topic and I wanted to ensure that people who were interviewed would be consenting adults. All participants had to be sexual assault survivors as well because that is what the bulk of the research would be focusing on. They had to be in high school or college at the time of the attack/s because I wanted to see how high school and college sexual assaults affected college students’ lives. I wanted these survivors’ perspectives on policies that colleges and universities could implement in order to help sexual assault survivors attending higher educational institutions.

Respondents had to be previous or current college or university students, excluding online only students. I excluded people who were not current or recently
college students because I wanted the point of view of recent survivors who attended
colleges or universities in order to see their particular struggles when dealing with high
school or college sexual assaults. I wanted to understand their experiences in order to
help with new policy enactment on college and university campuses. I also excluded
college survivors who attended online only schools because they have little to no face to
face contact with college or university peers, professors, and staff, making their sexual
assault experiences very different than students who live on campus and are surrounded
by peers, professors, and staff who could also be potential victimizers.

The assault must have taken place between 1990 and 2013. People not assaulted
between 1990 and 2013 were excluded from the research because I wanted to keep the
participant pool relatively current. Furthermore, most sexual assault research was
completed in the decades before the 1990s and more recent sexual assault survivors could
be compared to the older cases in order to see what has changed for survivors over time.

**Location of the Study:**

Most of this research took place in the Midwestern United States in an urban area and in
the suburbs within an hour of a Midwestern city. Although one interviewee from the
South was interviewed over the phone, everyone else was interviewed while living in the
Midwest. Though the sexual assaults took place mainly while interviewees were enrolled
in high schools and colleges in the Midwest, some attended high schools and colleges
outside of the Midwest at the time of the crime. Specifically, Of the 28 survivors, 25 were
attending school in the Midwest and one was attending college on the east coast, one was
attending high school in the south, and one was in India when the crimes occurred.

Once I had permission to conduct interviews, I talked to numerous small business
owners and owners of other locations that college students frequent in urban and suburban Midwestern college communities in order to get their verbal permission to post recruitment flyers on community bulletin boards and in their windows. Specifically, these locations consisted of coffee shops, grocery stores, sports complexes, and advocacy group establishments. I also created a public Facebook page about the research. Advocacy groups and individuals shared this page and got the word out to survivors about the project.

Porchlight Counseling and Rape Victim Advocates of Chicago were also involved with the research. Both of these establishments are located in the Midwest and in urban or suburban areas that tend to be politically liberal. I contacted both advocacy groups before starting data collection in order to set up free therapeutic services to any of my interviewees in the case that someone may have needed the extra care as a result of the interview. Both groups were enthusiastic about helping, but I am unsure if any survivors ended up utilizing their free services. Because I handed interviewees discrete business cards with these establishments’ contact information as well as my own phone number and e-mail address, survivors could have contacted these advocacy groups without my knowledge. Though I was available to drive and accompany survivors to these services if they needed it, no one requested this.

Sexual assault is a very sensitive topic. Furthermore, some participants did not have easy access to transportation. Because of these issues, I decreased interviewee hardship by having them choose the interview location. For example, some interviews took place in private rooms in Midwestern universities or city libraries. Others took place in survivors’ own homes when they called me over the telephone at my home office for
phone interviews. I confirmed with interviewees that the locations were private and that it was a place where he or she felt comfortable sharing confidential information.

**Review of Instrument and How It Was Validated**

I used an interview schedule to gather data and decrease risk to participants. There was some risk to interviewees who might experience emotional discomfort and relive painful memories by disclosing their experiences with sexual assault.

Through semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews, I built rapport with interviewees. This method allowed interviewees control over how much or how little they wished to disclose to me. Furthermore, I reminded participants that they could voluntarily skip any interview questions that they did not wish to answer. They were also reminded that they could withdraw from the interview at any time with no consequences.

When creating the interview schedule, each interview question was carefully worded and I took into consideration the current literature on the issues. I was careful not to word questions in such a way that they pushed the interviewee towards a certain response. For example, when focusing on the schools and what they did or did not do for survivors, I asked, “What could have been done differently, if anything?” This did not guide the survivor to answer any one way or another about the school. Another example with neutrality is the question, “How, if at all, does the sexual assault impact your life today?” With the wording here, the survivor knew that I wanted his or her own account of the story. In other words, I was careful not to lead interviewees into any kind of answer. I paid close attention to question wording in order to get sexual assault survivors’ own experiences and thoughts. After extensive drafts with special attention to wording, the relevancy of topics, and the desired length of the interview, I had an approved and
completed interview schedule.

At the beginning of the interview, I went into some depth with a few open-ended demographic interview questions in order to transition from these more neutral questions to the more personal inquiries about the crime. For example, asking an interviewee about his or her childhood neighborhood to learn about income was a way to help me build rapport, instead of beginning the interview with more emotional questions about the sexual assault right away. When I was ready to transition from less invasive questions to the actual criminal incident, I gave interviewees a verbal warning. I said, “Now I am going to ask you a few questions about the assault. Are you ready?” This approach worked because it gave interviewees a warning about the more serious questions and also gave them an escape option if they did not want to start with those questions at that moment. Because I was interested in the depth of these stories, I probed interviewees by saying phrases like, “Please tell me about that,” “Then what happened?,” “Walk me through that,” “Please describe that,” “Give me an example,” or “How?” I only did this if interviewees appeared open to the interview and were not crying or using nonverbal behavior indicating discomfort. This ended up being useful because I collected rich data from survivors about a very personal crime. This appeared to work, because every interviewee ended up telling me his or her sexual assault story, many in great depth.

A closed-ended survey of demographic questions was added at the end of the interview, mainly due to time constraints. We were concerned that interviewees would be fatigued if open ended demographic questions went into too much depth. That could result in interviewees not answering as much for the interview questions related to sexual assault. Although some interviewees did talk extensively about demographic information
within the interview, the closed ended survey was helpful because not all interviewees felt comfortable talking face to face with an interviewer about personal information such as income and sexual orientation and others did not have the time to sit through more than 90 minutes of an interview.

The interview schedule was helpful because it touched on many of the same topics for each interviewee and their responses could be compared later. It was also useful because it allowed me to skip questions when specific interviewees appeared distraught. It also let me further explore areas that particular interviewees had more knowledge or interest in speaking about.

**Theoretical Framework**

In this dissertation, survivors talked about how their various social locations influenced their rape cases. Their subjective understandings of the crime were influenced by factors such as their socioeconomic status, gender, and race and ethnicity. This dissertation follows an intersectional framework that is informed by multiracial feminism.

Collins (2000) defines intersectionality as an analysis of systems such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and age, and how those form mutually constructing features of organization in society. These intersections shape women’s lives (Collins 2000:299). Women of color’s lives are affected by their locations in multiple hierarchies. Furthermore, the intersections of gender and race affect women and men in different ways. Multiracial feminism asserts that gender is constructed by a range of interlocking inequalities that Patricia Hill Collins calls the “matrix of domination” (Zinn and Dill 1996:326). When looking at the category of woman, we need to examine the cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of woman is constructed.
(Butler 1999:5-6). There are also structural inequalities of gender, class, and racism (Ptacek 1999:10).

Feminism’s previous reliance on white and middle class women obscured the activism of women of color (hooks 1984:xii). The feminist movement focused on white middle class women and there were limitations on sisterhood when the woman was not white or middle class (Dill 1983:131). Stacey and Thorne also showed that white, middle class, heterosexual, European women were the unacknowledged basis of the analysis of women (1985:311). For example, Kennelly gives the example of how Black women, but not white women, were stereotyped as single mothers, leading to discrimination in their jobs (1999:168). This is not an issue with white women, showing how women of different races encounter different oppressions. According to this literature, not only are white men oppressors, but white women are as well. If white women are oppressed in careers they oppress women of color at home, as Rollins shows in her work. Structures of power interact (Rollins 1985:7). When it comes to women of color, they are marginalized because of their socioeconomic status, gender, and race and ethnicity.

Race and gender also intersect with respect to violence. Black women experience racism in ways not always the same as those of men of color, and sexism in ways not always parallel to the experiences of white women. (Crenshaw 1991:1252). Settles noted the importance of the intersectional identity to black women as they found that intersected black-women’s identities were more important to them than the individual identities of woman and black person (2006:589). Gender roles, along with class and race, also influence the occurrence and types of crime in our society (Messerschmidt 1993:62). hooks stated that contemporary feminists must acknowledge the diversity of
women’s experiences to create a movement to end oppression (1984:xii).

By taking into account the diverse intersections in survivors’ lives’ I noticed how people who are differently situated experienced their sexual assault cases in dissimilar ways. They highlighted their different identities through their socioeconomic statuses, genders, and races and ethnicities to make sense of their experiences of sexual assault. They also used these identities to explain how they reacted to the offenses and why they did or did not seek help after the crime. They also used the term culture to explain why sexual assault occurred for some people more than others. These intersections influenced survivors’ perceptions of victimization, impacted how survivors interpreted the crime, and swayed the outcomes of their cases.

Multiracial feminism acknowledges that race is a system of power that interacts with other structural inequalities to influence gender (Baca Zinn and Thorton Dill 1996:324 cited in Burgess-Proctor 2006:35). Multiracial feminism does not center on gender as a system of power (Burgess-Proctor 2006:37). Instead, it focuses on the matrix of domination (For more on the “matrix of domination” please see Collins: 2000 and Burgess-Proctor 2006:36). Burgess-Proctor argues that an intersectional framework informed by multiracial feminism can advance criminological theory because it will advance our understanding of gender, crime, and justice by focusing on the correlations between inequality and crime (Burgess-Proctor 2006:28, 40). Overall, my work was inductive. As exploratory, open-ended research, I found patterns and reached conclusions through the data themselves (Preves 2008:159). I explored topics that arose during the interviews (ibid. 159) and theory analysis evolved along the way.
Assumptions

This dissertation was based on the assumption that interviewees were telling the truth about their victimizations and that they answered every question accurately and to the best of their abilities. I assumed that they were highly qualified to answer the interview questions because they were the actual victims of these crimes. Though most did not have any credentials that made them experts on sexual assault, they were the people living with the aftermath of these violent crimes on a day-to-day basis.

Limitations and Generalizability

A limitation of this study is that interviewees may not be representative of sexual assault survivors. This is due to four reasons. First, this research is comprised of 28 interviews. This is a small number of participants and is not representative of sexual assault survivors as a whole. Second, this sample is not representative because interviewees were mainly from the Midwest. Of the 28 survivors, 25 were attending school in the Midwest and one was attending college on the east coast, one was attending high school in the south, and one was in India when the crimes occurred. People from the Midwest may not have similar sexual assault experiences as people from other parts of the United States and across the globe. Third, the sample is not representative of male sexual assault survivors. Though my research was just as open to male survivors, men were more likely to cancel on me after we had an interview set up. Out of the three men who agreed to be interviewed, only one followed through. Only one woman out of 28 totally backed out of an interview. In addition, sexual assault survivors are very secretive about their attacks. It is likely that only the most outgoing survivors agreed to participate in the study. This group may be very different from survivors who are very private about the crimes that
Another limitation of the study is that it only tells us about the issues that high school and college sexual assault survivors are dealing with. It does not tell us about less educated sexual assault survivors and non-college age survivors.

Next, this study focuses on the words of sexual assault victims. I did not interview the defendants, the survivors’ parents or guardians, college administrators and staff, or criminal justice professionals. Doing so would likely give me an enhanced understanding of this violent crime.

I collected data from January through July of 2013. In 2014, the Obama administration focused on sexual assault on college campuses and pushed universities and colleges to hold more attackers accountable, encouraged the reporting process to become simpler, and urged places of education to reexamine their sexual assault policies. Because of this widespread interest in these crimes on American college and university campuses, survivors in 2013 may have faced a more hostile environment on campus when compared to assault survivors who were victimized after 2013.

Because of these limitations, this study may not be generalizable to other geographic locations, to other sexual assault survivors, or even to cases that happened after 2013.

**Summary**

In summary, chapter one focuses on the dissertation’s three main questions and how they will be answered in the project. Specifically, what are educational and criminal justice responses like towards sexual assault survivors who seek help through these institutions? Specifically, how do survivors view the sexual assault reporting process and what are the
survivors’ viewpoints on how confidantes handled their cases? Second, how have survivors’ social locations through race, income, and gender influenced their experiences? Lastly, what are the essential components of sexual assault prevention and aftercare programs on campus through the eyes of sexual assault survivors? Study significance, an extensive review of the literature, an exploration of methodology, an examination of the interviewee population, as well a limitations of the study are explored.

In chapter two, I investigate how in-group and out-group status affect sexual assault survivors’ cases. Specifically, in-group survivors were generally concerned with keeping a prestigious image. This appearance prevented them from reporting their victimizations to the police, in contrast to out-group survivors who also did not report, but in their cases, out of a distrust of the criminal justice system. I also explored how crime is perceived as well as how sexual assault survivors’ access to self-care after an attack is influenced by in-group or out-group statues. I also examined how the perceived in or out-group status of the attacker factored in to how survivors dealt with the aftermath of their cases.

In chapter three, I discuss race and ethnicity and how these play a role in sexual assault cases. Specifically, when survivors of color in my sample talked about race and/or ethnicity, they perceived race and ethnicity as central to their sexual assault cases while white survivors made references to race in rape cases in general or mentioned race in terms of how that affected people of color. I also explored how when survivors had a dislike of men of a specific racial or ethnic group, it was the same group that their victimizers came from. This was true for both white men and men of color, and even when the attacker was the same racial or ethnic group as the survivor. Third, I explore
how both interviewees of color and white women believed that campus email alerts disproportionately depicted men of color as sexual assault offenders. Women of color also perceived white men who were offenders as less implicated in these crimes than men of color in terms of the posted alerts. Next, I examined who was actually prosecuted in these 28 specific cases, with specific attention to the race of the offender. Lastly, I explored race, violence and culture and how this is articulated differently by the race and ethnicity of the interviewee. Specifically, I unpack how survivors of color linked violence to a racial or ethnic culture while survivors who identified as white linked violence to gender through a rape culture.

In chapter four, I explore gender and how survivors think independence, autonomy, and power are stolen from them through the actual crime, and when dealing with professionals, friends, and family who have not learned how to handle sexual assault cases. These victims feel like they are treated like they do not know what is best for them and their honesty is questioned. They are unhappy about feminine gender norms that disempower and anger them. Survivors feel like they are treated like weak people in need of assistance, but many of them identify with strength. In response to this disconnect, survivors try to take back control of their lives after the crime by rejecting traditional gender roles. They reject traditional gender roles by being verbally aggressive, standing up to authority, becoming active in advocacy, and through physical aggressiveness.

Chapter five is the conclusion. It summarizes main findings from each chapter and includes policy suggestions for high schools and colleges when handling sexual assaults at their institutions. It also includes a section on areas where future researchers can add to the literature through questions that remain unanswered.
CHAPTER TWO

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Socioeconomic status influences sexual assault survivors’ ideas about crime and their reactions to it. Socioeconomic status is the position that a person occupies in society. One’s SES is determined by his or her income, material possessions, and participation in the community. It can also include educational attainment, occupation, quality of housing, and the status of the dwelling area (White 1982:462). Survivors in this study mentioned all of these indicators as important factors in their sexual assault cases. Overwhelmingly, money mattered when it came to the aftermath of the assaults. Survivors also mentioned popularity and place as factors in how they dealt with the crime, although these were related to money as well. For example, if the attacker was a popular sports player, survivors were concerned about backlash if they reported these well-liked offenders. They noted how place was very important, defining safe versus unsafe spaces again, often linking safe places to wealthier areas. For the purposes of this chapter, the following graph explains the subjective concept of socioeconomic status from the points of view of the sexual assault survivors in the study. Notice how many of the non-income variables are directly related to financial status, though not all of them are.

I used the terms “in-group” and “out-group” to differentiate insider or outsider status. People in the in-group tended to benefit from that status after a sexual assault,
although not always. People in the “out-group” tended to have a more difficult time with the crime due to their out-group position. The situation of the offender in these two groups also influenced cases. Although every survivor is different and he or she can belong to a variety of both in-groups and out-groups, the 28 survivors in my study identified the following important and sometimes subjective variables when it came to the outcomes of their cases:

Table 1. Respondent Identified In-group and Out-group Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Money</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-group:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Out-group:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Home</td>
<td>Small Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops at expensive stores</td>
<td>Shops at inexpensive stores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealthy</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Income</td>
<td>Low Income (Broken family, family disruption, has a single mother, is estranged from family)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Income Families</td>
<td>One Income Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle to Upper Class</td>
<td>Lower Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owns expensive accessories such as a designer purse, car, computer</td>
<td>Does not own expensive accessories (Exception: Owns a big truck, works on cars)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has spending money</td>
<td>Does not have a lot of spending money or has financial problems, has to pay own bills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Popularity</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-group:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Out-group:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a fraternity or on a sports team (Ex. Plays basketball, jocks)</td>
<td>People overly interested in education (Nerds), also people who skip class often or those who fight a lot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older (Upperclassman)</td>
<td>Younger (Freshman)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Looking</td>
<td>Not Good Looking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survivors who belong to an in-group were generally concerned with keeping an honorable image that did not involve criminality and victimization, which could influence the course and outcomes of their own rape cases. Though little is known about treatment
seeking among crime survivors (New and Berliner 2000:694), I found that survivors who belong to in-groups had access to more financial resources that allowed them to seek the expert assistance that they needed after the crime. Furthermore, these survivors were more likely (62% of the time) than out-group survivors (40% of the time) to stereotype offenders as poor people.

Survivors who belonged to out-groups had their own rape cases affected by circumstances associated with their level of earnings. Specifically, instead of being focused on keeping an image, this group was preoccupied with finances and paying for daily necessities. Costs due to the crime could be crippling to this group and this prevented them from getting the expert help that they needed. They also have less family support because they did not want to burden working loved ones who were also overwhelmed with financial issues. With less expert assistance and family support, dealing with the crime became devastating in addition to school and keeping a job. Additionally, out-group survivors were less likely to stereotype offenders based on their socioeconomic status.

The perceived social status of the offender was also important to the outcome of the case. For example, if the offender was observed to be popular, specifically an athlete or fraternity member, survivors were hesitant to press charges against him. The same was true if the offender was alleged to be wealthy. (Survivors labeled offenders as wealthy or not based on where they lived, the occupations of their parents, as well as their extracurricular activities. Though their perceptions might have been inaccurate at times, their beliefs about the offenders are what influenced their cases.)

In this chapter, I will compare in-groups and out-groups on their viewpoints about
being sexual assault survivors and I will show how stereotypical assumptions about out-groups influenced the results of these criminal cases. I will also look at how the financial limitations of those out-groups could influence their access to resources used to deal with the issues associated with a sexual assault and how this changes the way the incident was handled.

**In-group Survivors’ Views on Rape**

Survivors who identified with an in-group had different views on rape when compared to people in out-groups. In neighborhoods where in-group people lived, there was the expectation that residents should associate with folks of their own socioeconomic status. The suburb is an exclusionary area where upper income occupants look for sameness, prestige, and safety in an ideal “new town” or “green oasis” (Low 2001:47).

Today, economic troubles and job loss are also a part of the suburban experience. Between 2000 and 2011, the rates of people existing below the poverty line in the suburbs grew by 64%, making the suburbs a place that has more poverty in America than urban areas (Von Hoffman 2013). Despite this trend, only two survivors from the suburbs, Kat and Anyah, mentioned how this downturn negatively influenced their lives, and neither of them was living below the poverty line. Despite the recent financial downturn in the suburbs, my interviewees continued to identify the suburb as an exclusive enclave, home to important people. In-group interviewees also mentioned rural areas and small cities as select spaces.

Kat, a white woman, illustrated suburban exclusivity. This survivor lived in a community where the median family income was over $100,000 a year. Though Kat’s family did not attain this income, making between $40,000-$59,999 a year, they still
lived a comfortable lifestyle that afforded some luxuries. Despite living in an in-group community, Kat told a story about how she and her family were not good enough for her friend’s wealthier mother, thus making her an outsider. According to Bettie, young women have friendships organized not only by race and ethnicity, but also by class (2003:190). Because Kat belonged to an out-group because of her shabby house and clothing, Kat’s friend’s mother discouraged the two children from spending time together. Kat ruminated:

[This one girl] and I used to be best friends in fifth grade. I used to always go to her house and one time I wanted her to come sleep at my house. She came over to my house and slept over and I remember going to school the next day and [she told me] that we weren’t allowed to hang out anymore. I asked her why. She’s like, “Well, I don’t know. My mom says that your house isn’t big enough and she doesn’t like where you shop.

In-group sexual assault survivors described their communities as privileged places where people are highly competitive with one another. According to Brian who grew up in an in-group, but later was placed in an out-group because he became poor and later came out as gay in an intolerant town:

…We grew up in an area that was a man-made resort town out in the middle of the country. People who lived in my specific town were sort of upper middle class so there were man-made lakes and it’s very bourgeois and what happens in the family stays in the family. Lot’s of trying to keep up with the Joneses….

Meghann lived in a small southern city. She is a white woman from a wealthier family who earned over $100,000 a year. Meghann described a high school community similar to Brian’s privileged town:

The students were really hateful. There were so many different social groups. You would not venture out of those. Where I live, it’s a really small town. There’s the upper class and there’s the lower class. There’s really not much in between and you stay with your group…there would either be the upper class people or the,
this is going to sound hateful, but [my attacker] was a redneck. It was either upper class people or the redneck Republicans…

In this example, the intersections of gender, race, and socioeconomic status, influenced Meghann’s social life and ultimately her sexual assault case. Even though Meghann was aware that money can place one in an in-group, she decided to date a poor man because dating afforded girls in her school more in-group status than if they remained single. (Meghann determined that her boyfriend was in an out-group based on the fact that he lived in a mobile home, because his mother was a prostitute, and because he came from a single mother, one income family.) The popular gatekeepers were more likely to accept Meghann if she had a boyfriend of any status as opposed to being single, though economically privileged boyfriends were more sought after.

Gatekeeping- defined here as efforts and ability to control access to valued social positions- is central to processes of social reproduction. Within educational and occupational settings, gatekeeping has obvious consequences in that gaining access to valuable positions generates material rewards. Yet because stratification is maintained through multiple, conceptually distinct hierarchies, gatekeeping also has important consequences in social settings, where the symbolic resources that flow through social networks, associations, and friendships play a unique role in structuring social inequality. (Stuber, Klugman, and Daniel 2011:431)

Meghann would gain access to more popular social networks if she had a boyfriend. She explained that her choice to date a young man outside of her financial in-group status was related to being bullied. She had previously been the victim of mistreatment by classmates and participating in a relationship afforded status to young women at Meghann’s school. By dating the young man, Meghann had hopes that popular gatekeepers would no longer bully her, but instead accept her as one of them.

According to Stuber and colleagues, high school students compete to become members of the coveted popular cliques at the top of the hierarchy in their schools
(Stuber et al. 2011:434). Meghann showed how not only money matters, but status and popularity among high school students, influence pupils’ lives. The prestige of high school popularity and the income expectations of their parents were sometimes conflicting for survivors. Even though Meghann described popularity as being romantically partnered, she also added being a jock, and participating in honors classes as markers of status. This was Meghann’s rationale for dating a young men from an out-group and this quote also explains how the intersections of age, gender, and socioeconomic status affect survivors’ lives:

I was pretty young, so I think I felt the need to be in a relationship. I just went along with it… I was bullied a lot in school. I wanted to fit in with everybody and have a friend as well…All of my friends had boyfriends. I felt like I was the outsider with a lot of other things too so I felt like that would make me fit in more. But their boyfriends were very different. They were the jocks, upper class families. This guy was very low class. He was a nobody…He skipped class. He was planning on going to a tech college, if anything…He wasn’t in any [honors] courses. He was in the lower classes. Not even honors…He was into cars and fighting…

After the assault, Meghann a tried to act superior to out-group people like her rapist. She said:

…I get really selfish and stuck up. I’m very hateful. Very hateful to people who drive big trucks and redneck people. I always say really awful things. I’ll tailgate behind them and do things that are not very safe… I flip them off sometimes, but it’s gotten better. Sometimes I just hold my purse like I am better than them and stick up my nose. I act like the kids did in my high school. Just very stuck up and that’s not who I am…

Like Meghann, Jenny was an example of a survivor who was sexually assaulted by a young man from an out-group. Jenny was a white woman from a home with a household income over $100,000 a year. Her offenders did not have extra money. Jenny described the area that the offender was from as, “not my cup of tea,” and “trashy.”
Though her mother lived in the same town as the offender, Jenny identified with the place her father lived, which was a wealthier neighboring suburb. She described the offender’s town as a place where people did a lot of drugs and people often had recreational sex. When asked about the place where the offender lived, Jenny said, “It’s not me.”

Not only did these survivors want to keep the crimes by out-group men a secret, but some also regained power in their own lives by building up their own status as a superior one when compared to their offenders. Specifically, Jenny constantly differentiated herself from the offender and his out-group lifestyle, placing herself in a higher status than him.

Like Meghann, others showed that in-group popularity and status factor in to these cases. For example, Yolonda also talked about popularity and gatekeeping at her school. Because Yolonda’s attacker was a basketball player, she was afraid to report the rape. She knew that doing so would result in backlash because the attacker was well liked at her school, while Yolonda was not as admired. Reporting the rape would lead to disbelief by her attacker’s doting followers. She said:

[His status] made it just that much harder about making my decision whether to say anything or not. Because, like I said, everyone was cool with him or wanted to be cool with him because he is a basketball player. Then you got the whole basketball team that probably consists of 10-15 guys. For the most part, I’m not an athlete, jock lover. I like nerds. I like the ones who are more about education and things like that. So that was a first for me. I was more so getting to know the guy and I got to know from people telling me about him. So since he’s a basketball player, everyone tries to get to know him…

Similar to Meghann and Yolonda, Eva was aware of the status hierarchy at her school. Because she was a freshman (part of an out-group), she felt privileged to spend time with older fraternity members (in-groups). She welcomed the invitation to
participate in underage drinking and become a part of the accepted crowd. Eva described her mindset right before the rape:

…it was Labor Day weekend and my roommate’s boyfriend had come to visit from Detroit. And we were trying to decide what to do and [my school] at that time, all of the frats (in-group) were wet so there were always parties everywhere. And we were like, well let’s just go and see what’s going on. We had gotten to know some of the guys there and so we decided to go there. When we walked in, it was a nice feeling because the guys knew me and being a freshman (part of an out-group) it was kind of a cool feeling.

Eva went into the situation that night with the hopes of becoming a part of the popular crowd. She had no idea that the fraternity member who she thought was a friend, would rape her. He used his popularity to dominate a younger girl who was lower than himself in the college status hierarchy. These survivors showed how not only the intersections of age and socioeconomic status, but also popularity factored in to these rape cases.

Four of the thirteen in-group survivors (Natasha, Jenny, Ashley, and Meghann) were raped by men whose income would put them into an out-group. Admittance of sexual contact with an out-group person was incompatible with the idea of who in-group family members were supposed to be associating with, especially sexually. This view presented complications for these survivors raped by out-group men, which is a new finding to add to the literature. Natasha, Jenny, Ashley, and Meghann all had family members react to the crime with dismissal or blame. For example, Natasha’s brother completely ignored that his sister was raped. Jenny’s sister was shocked that Jenny had any kind of a sexual encounter with a well-known partier. Ashley’s father acknowledged her rape admission in merely a few sentences and never spoke about it again. Meghann’s father called her “stupid” and her sister called her a “whore” for interacting with the offender. Both of her parents were very angry with her.
These survivors’ rape admissions are incompatible with who in-group people are “supposed” to be and who they are “supposed” to be socializing with. Their stories conflict with their relatives’ views of what is right for their sisters and daughters. Specifically, Elliott discussed how white higher income young people (both traits of in-groups) were seen as sexually innocent. In contrast, youths without this race, and income privilege were viewed as hypersexual miscreants who had the ability to corrupt harmless white income privileged girls. Innocent teens must be separated from corrupt age mates. Binaries justify social inequality and build up one group as “better” than the other. Ultimately this privileged group is constructed as more deserving of social rewards (Elliott 2010:195-196), again showing how different intersections can factor into these cases.

In-group survivors who were assaulted by out-group men were met with dismissal. Natasha placed herself in the household income bracket of $100,000 a year and over. Her adult attacker earned an annual household income around $20-$39,999 a year. (These incomes associate them with the respective in and out-groups.) Natasha wanted to explain her depression and anxiety to her brother so that he could understand her. After she e-mailed him about her attack, he did not respond to her. Her brother’s wife told Natasha that he had received the e-mail, yet did not acknowledge it. Natasha noted, “They don’t want to go there. It makes them really uncomfortable, I guess.”

Similarly, Ashley placed her annual income in the $500,000 and over category and guessed that her stranger attacker had an income more associated with out-groups. When Ashley tried to talk to her father about the sexual assault, he responded with a few sentences. Specifically he said, “I’m really sorry that happened to you. You sound like
you are okay. I’m surprised by that. I’m happy with how well you are doing with this.”

Ashley and her father never talked about the rape again.

Survivors who live outside of the city, and especially in the suburbs thought that crime happened outside of their communities, and mainly in urban areas. According to Low, when people dislike urban areas this is another way of expressing their fears of crime and violence. There is an assumption that the city is a dangerous crime-ridden place (Low 2001:45). When residents from non-urban areas are raped, there is a sense of disbelief.

Yolonda had an income associated with an out-group, but she attended a community college as well as lived in an upper income suburb, which are both traits of in-groups. Yolonda illustrated this point about disbelief that crime happens in privileged areas:

I really didn’t know that sexual assault and things like that happen at college campuses…Possibly you hear that on the news, but when you live in certain areas and you go to certain schools [you don’t worry about it]. It’s a community college…It’s safe. We all live in one big county. So it’s like, “No, it would never happen here.”

Erin’s view that crime is an urban phenomenon was similar to Yolonda’s view. Though Erin lived in an urban area during college, she grew up in a suburb (in-group area). After the assault, Erin became afraid of the neighborhood around her college, which was telling because the man who assaulted her was someone she had known since childhood and he was a college student. Even so, Erin continued to think that crime was associated with out-group traits such as urban areas, by strangers, even though the typical rape does not happen in an alley, but in a friend’s home or the victim’s residence by an acquaintance (Anderson 2010:646). Someone the victim knows is most often the person
carrying out these crimes. These acquaintances mainly assault without weapons, without any injuries, or without physical violence (Lonsway, Archambault, and Lisak 2009:4).

Erin said:

…After it happened, I lived in [a city neighborhood near my university], which is not the greatest neighborhood in the world. I would take the train into class, or I would walk to class. One of my classes got out at 9:00, 9:30 PM. There was one point shortly after it happened that I was terrified to leave the apartment. I missed a lot of class and my grades greatly suffered. I don’t know if part of it was just the neighborhood, knowing that [the city neighborhood I lived in] is not the best neighborhood. Every time, if someone would turn a corner at the same time, I would jump. [With] random shadows, I felt like a little kid. [I was] afraid of absolutely everything.

Similar to perceptions about neighborhood crime, survivors also had perceptions about where crime on college campuses is more likely to occur. Nina, an East Indian American with a yearly household income that put her in an in-group, viewed the urban public school that she attended as an area where crime occurred. She believed that because she attended a state institution instead of a private school, she received substandard care after she was raped. Nina stated:

School officials at [state university]…I know not to expect any type of decency. So when there is a base line average behavior, I get excited. I would say that they confirmed my suspicion that I already knew. I would have liked to believe that they had some type of competency, or care, but it was clear that my hypothesis was true that they’re completely uncearing and you know, pretty much a cliché state institution…I also knew coming in that these people are basically the bottom of the barrel. Good administrators that give a fuck about kids go to Harvard and Yale and maybe, Loyola, who knows. (Laughs). But, so [state], I pretty much knew that they were pieces of shit and that’s what I got. Sorry to say.

Molly, a South Asian American with a family income which was compatible with an in-group, arrived at the heart of the problem in-group viewpoints on rape create when she touched on the isolation that economically privileged survivors face. Because violent crimes are not supposed to happen in their communities, admitting that one is the victim
of a violent crime in a supposed safe space means that in-group survivors deal with being shamed or disbelieved. Instead of choosing that option, they remain silent about the attack so that they will not have to face the victim blaming that goes along with admitting victim status in an assumed “safe place.” Furthermore, they do not want to upset the perfection of their communities and their privileged reputations. Molly stated, “There is a stereotype that people from the middle class do not get sexually abused…It’s so weird, the kind of images of whom it can happen to…Sometimes it is more severe, because it is more kept inside the upper middle class white households.”

In Lisa Frohmann’s (1997) work on the attrition of sexual assault cases in court, she found that prosecutors disproportionately dropped cases coming from lower income communities of color. She argued that prosecutor stereotypes about these communities and the people who live in them created unequal access to justice for survivors from those neighborhoods. Though my work finds that survivors also stereotype lower income communities of color as places where sexual assault disproportionately occurs, my analysis further shows that being a survivor from a supposed safe space, such as the in-group suburbs, also contributes to case attrition.

Kat expressed her annoyance with idea that violent crime is absent in the suburbs. She forcefully articulated, “…Wake the fuck up… It can happen anywhere. It doesn’t matter who you are. Status quo and your social status or what you think you are. You’re a person. You’re a human being. It can happen to you anywhere…” According Kneebone and Raphael of the Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings (2011), “The narrowing of the gap between city and suburban crime rates underscores that crime is not solely an urban challenge, but a metropolitan wide issue.”
Because out-group urban areas are the assumed crime ridden spaces, survivors are both confused when they are raped in in-group areas, and they are disbelieved because of the location of that violent offense. In other words, both survivors sexually assaulted in lower income, urban, communities of color and survivors victimized in the “in-group” areas are disbelieved. They dropped their cases, or had them dropped because the place that the crime occurs at was incompatible with stereotypes about crime.

**Out-group Views on Rape**

In-group survivors were encouraged to fraternize with in-group people, and this influenced sexual assault survivors’ cases when out-group men victimized them. Their families reacted to news of the crimes with disbelief, disapproval, and dismissal. High school and college cliques also factored into rape cases and how survivors responded to the crimes. Specifically, young women wanted to be a part of the popular in-groups and young men used their admired status to victimize less accepted women. Also, in-group survivors continued to believe that criminal behavior was associated with out-group areas, even when in-group men sexually assaulted them.

In contrast to in-group survivors, out-group survivors were not preoccupied with the status of money, but were instead focused on survival. The rape was one of many stressors that these women and men were facing. Survivors who belonged to out-groups due to a lack of money dealt with the rape through religious institutions and fewer had family members present who they could confide in about the crime. Also in contrast to survivors with money who believed that crime was a lower income phenomenon, out-group survivors, due to financial status, were most likely to be neutral about who commits crime and where it occurs.
While in-group people viewed crime as an out-group issue, the same was not true for out-group people. Specifically, nine (32%) out of 28 survivors did not perceive crime as being attributed to any specific group or location. Five out of 28 (18%) mentioned crime as an in-group issue. The majority, 14 of 28 (50%), focused on crime as an out-group issue. Of these 14, eight (57%) were in-group and six (43%) were out-group. Even when victimized by in-group men, in-group survivors focused on out-group people as the law-breakers (62% of the time). Meanwhile, out-group survivors rarely focused on in-group people as the transgressors (only 13% of the time). In-group survivors were more biased against out-group people, while out-group survivors were more accepting of out-group people. Out-group survivors attributed crime more frequently to the out-groups (40% of the time) as opposed to in-groups (13% of the time), but they were the most likely to remain neutral about income and criminal offenders (47% of the time). This is telling because while in-group survivors were most likely to blame crime on out-group people, out-group survivors were most likely to remain neutral about where crime occurs and who commits wrongdoing. An important point is that all of the out-group people who believed that crime was an out-group issue were sexually assaulted by out-group men. Only 63% of the in-group survivors who thought crime was an out-group issue were victimized by out-group men. In other words, even when these in-group women were raped by in-group men, they still saw crime as an out-group problem.

Out-group survivors were not focused on an income image like in-group survivors. Instead, they were focused on survival. For example, Yolonda was tackling many stressors aside from the sexual assault. Because her mother was abusing her, Yolonda’s grades had dropped even before she was raped. She was on academic
probation. She was warned that if her grades continued to fall, she would get cut off from financial aid. Even though her father was in the military and was entitled to financial benefits that would help pay for Yolonda’s college, the school was not accepting those benefits. Yolonda talked about this time in her life: “...We were paying out of pocket when we weren’t supposed to. So that was a whole other stress situation. So I just had a lot going on.”

Less privileged sexual assault survivors had to worry about work and money during the trauma. For example, Bella had to work 2AM-8AM at one job and 9AM-1PM at another job while also going to school. Elise talked about having to rely on other people as roommates because she could not pay for rent alone. Anabel was also dealing with moving, school, her job, and car payments. Beth’s low income created more stress for her in addition to the crime. She had to keep working in order to pay her bills, despite her depression and anxiety.

Like Beth, Joelle also noted how her life was hectic around the time of the rape. She said that she had “a lot on [her] plate” with a job and school. After the assault, she noted that the crime: “…Affected my whole life. It affected employment…My whole focus was just, you know, I was in a survival mode…trying to keep my life together.”

Brian’s story illustrates how income affects rape victims who are trying to survive. Brian was the only survivor who identified as a gay male. Though he was born into an in-group home, he was dealing with abuse from family members, and once he came out as gay at 16 years old, he was kicked out of his house. His Catholic school expelled him because of his sexual orientation. He was left without a support network or economic means of survival. As a teenager, he had to rely on the benevolence of
strangers so that he could attend school while he strayed in and out of homelessness. He slept on friends’ couches and relocated from home to home until he entered college. At that point in his life, Brian had very few resources. Being underprivileged influenced Brian’s case in numerous ways, especially when he met a man he thought was his “prince charming.” Brian’s attacker had dominance over him in copious ways not only because he was older, but also because he had more money. Brian depended on his boyfriend (later attacker) not only for the love and fondness that was absent from his family, but he also relied on him for transportation and spending cash. Brian expressed what it was like being an out-group member:

I went to two [high schools]. I was actually homeless. I was kicked out for being gay. I came out at 16. My first high school asked me to leave. It was a private, Jesuit, Catholic, all boys’ high school. Then I went to a different school, which was an inner city public school. That was during my crisis mode. I was homeless. I was on the streets. I was in the shelter system and living with different families. Some were good. Some were bad. That was when the assault…happened…I was living through the generosity of some friends’ families, couch surfing…I was staying with different people’s families when I was 16, 17…The high school that I was at the time was an inner city public high school, and [the assault] happened that summer. It happened right around the time of Pride Fest…It was June, 2002….I was at my first Pride in [the city]. At that time…[I had just] really established shelter and safety. I was living with a friend and her family. I was really still healing from the cycles of violence that I grew up with. I was at Pride and he looked like this Ken doll. He was this shirtless, muscled, sweaty, White guy with blond hair and blue eyes. He was the most Aryan person I ever liked. He was actually attached to a muscle, fitness organization and had a booth there and was calling me over to come say hi. I guess he thought I was cute. I was shocked. I was like, “Why would this person like me?” I’m insecure, kind of overweight, feeling awkward about being gay. It was kind of surreal. It was kind of like Cinderella in a way… I was sort of mesmerized by the fact that he wanted to talk to me… [He did have some authority over me.] I didn’t have access to a car. I was depending on the generosity of people to live with them. Yeah! I didn’t have autonomy on my own in any way and then he would come and pick me up and take me on dates. I was dependent on him for transportation, for car, for money…

Brian differed from in-group survivors because he relied on his attacker for basic
necessities and attention. While in-group survivors were focused on keeping an in-group image, this in-group turned out-group survivor was concentrating on daily survival.

Unlike in-group survivors who told family about the assault but were met with dismissal, three (20%) of the out-group survivors relied on religious institutions for help. (This was true for only one, or 8% of the in-group survivors.) This makes sense, because their families were often the source of their conflicts (Specifically, 46% of out-group survivors noted that their families were a source of conflict, compared to 23% of in-group survivors). Furthermore, religious institutions offer free counseling and this was the only way some survivors could get mental help. Joelle relied on a church for support. She briefly told her brother about the attack because she was at the police station and wanted to let him know where she was. For more in depth help, she contacted her minister from church. Similarly, Yolonda did not talk to anybody about the crime for a week. When I asked her if she would some day tell her family she said, “I didn’t tell them. My dad was never really home because of his job so I never really talked to him. My mom, there was just no talking to her. At all….I never told my parents. I don’t think I ever will…” Like Joelle, Yolonda sought help from her church.

Bella, a Guatemalan American, also did not rely mainly on emotional support from her family after the crime took place. Though Bella did not tell her mother about the attack, her mother noticed that Bella was having intense anger problems, so Bella’s mother also sought help for her daughter at the local church by enrolling her in counseling sessions.

Brian’s childhood home was so abusive that he ran away. In his case, he could not confide in family about the crime because they were estranged. Elise was a multiracial
woman living in the U.S., whose family was in another country. Anabel, a Hispanic American, had a fractured relationship with her parents. Erica also had a tense relationship with her mother, who allowed her to be sexually abused by her stepfather. In all four of these out-group cases, the survivors were prevented from disclosing to family about the crime because their family members were not in close contact. In other words, these victims had little or no family to rely on.

Bella was close to her mother, but never told her about the rapes. Throughout her interview, Bella talked about being a protector of her mother, especially when her mom was criticized for being a single mother in a close knit community that valued intact nuclear families. The following example illustrates why out-group status is linked to why Bella did not tell her mother about the attacks:

…I was protecting her from her guilt, because I think she would feel that it was all her fault. Because she was such a hard working mom, she was never home. I was always at a cousin’s house, at my grandma’s house. And when I got older, I was allowed to be at my house by myself or with my brother. Supposedly, always with my brother…He was always hanging out with the kids in our building. We lived in a seven-story building and all of the kids, we were all friends. So the little sisters and the little brothers would always go to Bella and watch TV while the big ones were playing basketball in the back yard.

Bella did not want her mother to know about the rape because she did not want her mother to blame herself for what happened to her since she was working when the crime occurred. Bella recognized that her mother was a good woman who was doing the best that she could as a single mother (out-group) to support her family. It was not her hard working mother’s fault that she was left alone and ultimately sexually assaulted.

Beth, a white woman, was another out-group survivor who did not want to tell her single mother about the attack, but she was forced into doing so. Beth explained:
I told my mom probably a month after. I kept it a secret because I’m her baby. I knew she was going to freak out. I was scared. I didn’t want her to blame it on me. When she would call, I would either tell her I was sleeping or I was at work, or I’d make up an excuse not to talk to her. She found out something was wrong on Facebook because my friend Becky, who I had told at home, she had put something on Facebook and my mom assumed it was about me.…

Finally, in contrast to in-group survivors, out-group survivors were neutral (47% of survivors in the lower income group) about who commits crime and where it occurs. They were also more open to admitting that crime existed where they lived. Specifically, 23% of in-group people admitted that crime is an in-group issue, while 40% of out-group people admitted that crime is an out-group issue. For example, Brian, an out-group multiracial man associated crime with the lower income, inner city neighborhood where he lived. Erica, a Black woman, also discussed crime in her neighborhood. She described her part of the city as really crime ridden and dangerous. Specifically, she stated that, “Everything bad happens there, all the time. If you ever see stuff on the news, it’s always [the area of the city I was born in].”

Overall, while in-group survivors were concerned with keeping an in-group image, out-group survivors were concerned with everyday existence. While four in-group survivors told family members about the crimes by out-group men and all four were met with minimal acknowledgement or blame, out-group survivors were more likely to rely on religious institutions for support. Of the fifteen out-group survivors, three (20%) relied on religious institutions for support. Of the 13 in-group survivors, only one (8%) went to a religious institution for help. Out-group survivors also dealt with the crime alone because family was absent or they did not want to burden overworked loved ones. Bella and Beth protected their single mothers from finding out about the crimes, but Beth’s
mother inadvertently found out from an online post. Bella never disclosed the assault in order to protect her mother from self-blame. Lastly, 40% of out-group survivors admitted that crime can be an out-group problem, only 23% of in-group people noted that crime is an in-group issue.

**In-group Views on Reporting and In-group Offenders**

Some in-group survivors were hesitant to contact the police. They had self-images that they wanted to protect or they believed that no one in their privileged communities would understand them. They also assumed that if the offender was from an in-group due to money, that his wealth could help him in a court of law. These viewpoints kept in-group survivors isolated and silent.

Rose felt alone because she believed that people in her in-group community were shallow and concerned with their images. Furthermore, admitting to a violent crime in a nice community would only be seen as “shining a bad light” on an assumed safe place.

…That’s one thing. In my community, I know that there were a lot of people who were assaulted and didn’t come forward because it would look bad in the community…I lived in a middle class community…in one of the wealthiest areas of [the town]. There were people I knew that lived in my area that were assaulted and wouldn’t come forward because the people that were assaulting them were also people that lived in that area…They don’t want that bad light to shine on that area. [What they care about is how] much would your property get devalued if you live around a bunch of sexual predators…

After Meghann was raped, she did not want to press charges against her attacker because admitting victim status might have hurt her upper income father’s business.

Meghann stated:

The policeman didn’t really do anything about it. He said it was too late to press charges. I made up some dumb excuse about, “Even if I did press charges, it will ruin my dad’s company.” Like, just ridiculous excuses….When I told [the police officer] that I did not want to ruin my dad’s business, he offended me. He lowered
my father. He said, “Well if I was your father, I wouldn’t care about my business.” My father has never said anything about messing up his business. That is something that I said but the police officer lowered my dad…He lowered him, lowered him more than he really is…

Aside from protecting privileged income identities, survivors were also aware of the power of money in criminal cases. When the survivor was from a lower income household than the offender, these survivors were unsure about moving forward with the case. They knew their offenders may be able to buy themselves out of a punishment and this prevented reporting. Kat noted:

I think the problem with most people that have money that are either in the upper middle class or the lower upper class, they think that they can buy people off. That’s the issue I found out around here. People from [these wealthy communities] their kid gets arrested at the low income tower apartments over here buying crack or meth and they don’t ever get thrown in jail. Their parents pay the lawyers off before they ever even have to go to court. It’s like, shhh, shhh, shhh. My kid doesn’t have this drug problem. You know what I mean?...

Kat’s hypothesis is supported by research. Alexander (2010) notes that while Black lower class youth are less likely to engage in drug crimes when compared to wealthier white youth, lower class black youth are more likely to be formally punished for it. Eva also linked the power of money to getting out of a criminal charge. Because her attacker was wealthy, Eva did not press charges against him. She said:

What happened was horrible, but to go and tell them this guy’s name and stuff, they’re not going to throw him in jail. What’s it going to do? And they have them pay a fine. [The school I was assaulted at] is known for being a rich kid’s school. Its nicknamed J-Crew U. So he would have had that money in his back pocket…

Similarly, Lily did not press charges because the offender had more money than she did. She felt that he would win the case regardless of guilt. While she made an income placing her in an out-group, she was hesitant to move on with her case because her attacker lived in an extremely wealthy community (in-group) near her university and
she did not believe that she would see justice if she moved forward with the case.

Again, people in in-groups were concerned with their images. This trepidation prevented them from reporting their victimizations to the police. Furthermore, survivors raped by wealthier men were aware of the power of money and when wealthy men victimized them, they were hesitant to move forward with their cases.

**Out-group Views on Reporting**

In-group survivors in my study avoided reporting the crime in order to protect their images, they had some hopes that the police could help them after the offense. In contrast, out-group survivors were vocal about their lack of trust in the police. Weitzer argues that because crime rates are normally higher in poor white and black communities (out-groups) when compared to upper income areas (in-groups), people in less privileged neighborhoods (out-groups) have more interactions with the police. More interactions may lead to more chances for an interaction to go poorly and result in conflict (2000:130).

Bella and Erica both said they would not contact the police in a rape case. Though Bella did not elaborate, Erica was vehemently opposed to the idea of seeking assistance through the police. This viewpoint started at a young age for Erica. She described being let down by the justice system consistently throughout her young life. She articulated:

I can’t [trust the cops]. I’ve been in too many situations in which I needed them and they didn’t show up. …In high school, I was jumped by about five girls. They beat me up really bad. I called the police and they didn’t come. The high school I graduated from, that’s on the south side, in the heart of [the city], [it’s] one of the most dangerous schools in [the city], every day after school, we would have to stay behind for about 30 minutes so [gangs] could finish shooting at each other. [There were] gang turf wars and everything (out-groups). The police never showed up. The police would be sitting in front of our school, while they’re shooting, and nothing. Just sitting there… [When I was a kid,] we were at my
grandma’s house. She lives in [my neighborhood] too…There was a guy that got his brains blown out on the street, right in front of us. We called 911…We saw it happen and they didn’t show up for about an hour. [At that point, the guy was dead.] (She laughs.) …[Police have to] stop being crooked, number one…Because if you get stopped by the police, and let’s say you’re out and you’re buying some marijuana and you see the police, they take your marijuana and smoke it, in front of you, and then walk away. [With] the drug dealers, they take their drugs and sell it back to them. I mean, yeah! It happens all the time…I never call them. *Ever.* Anymore…

Lily also thought that the criminal justice system was unfair. When her stepfather raped her as a teen, Lily went to court to try to get him incarcerated. She did not feel that she received justice. She noted that even though her stepfather admitted to the crime, his only punishment was a year of mandatory counseling. Though Lily had an order of protection against her stepfather, her brother and mother were excluded from it, so the offender could still visit her loved ones. Because she was a minor, she could not renew the order of protection on her own. The offender had to pay a fine to the state of Illinois, not to Lily’s family who were financially unstable because her stepfather (now sex offender) had contributed to half of the family income and was no longer in the household. This bad experience with the criminal justice system discouraged Lily from using it after her second victimization years later.

Joelle was more positive about the police than Lily, but she still had mixed feelings about them. When she was being raped, she screamed, “Help, someone call the police. Help, someone call the police.” She was fortunate in that the police did interrupt her victimization. Even so, Joelle was unhappy that an officer refused to let her talk for more than a few minutes on the phone to her pastor after the crime occurred. The officer said to Joelle, “Look. We are not going to let you take any more time to contact this person….He took the phone out of [her] hand and hung [up] the phone.” In Joelle’s eyes,
the pastor was her lifeline and the officer was being callous. After that, the officer then released Joelle’s attacker for three months. During those days, Joelle lived in constant fear. Ultimately though, Joelle’s assailant was incarcerated. She said that, “…[The system] does prevail in the end….and it is there for people’s benefit.”

Overall, while in-group survivors’ images prevented them from reporting the crimes to the authorities, out-group survivors did not trust the justice system. They were ultimately concerned with integrity and they did not think the justice system worked in their favor. Survivors raped by wealthier men (intersections of gender and socioeconomic status) were aware of the power of money and when wealthier men victimized them, they were hesitant to move forward with a case. Furthermore, previous interactions with criminal justice actors prevented out-group survivors from trusting criminal justice professionals in later cases. Joelle may have been more positive about the system in particular because she was a statistically rare case in that her offender was incarcerated for his offense. According to RAINN, if there are 100 rape cases, 40 will be reported to the police and 10 of the 40 offenders reported to police will be arrested. Eight of those ten will be prosecuted and four of those prosecutions will lead to a felony conviction. Only three of the original 100 offenders will spend a single day in prison.

Aftercare

Although an in-group status can isolate a survivor in his or her own community, access to financial resources can help these survivors. Unlike less privileged students, financially stable survivors have the ability to quit jobs when work becomes unbearable. Specifically, of the out-group survivors in my sample, 67% had to focus on finances over their own recovery. This was true for only 15% of the in-group survivors. In other words,
85% of in-group survivors put their own healing above their finances while only 33% of out-group survivors were able to do that. Even so, in-group survivors were pushed into leaving jobs that they enjoyed previously and benefitted from. Jessica, an African American woman, said her annual household income was high, putting her well into the in-group. She explained the demise of her job due to the rape:

I had this job at this diner and because I was in the hospital [due to the sexual assault], I couldn’t go to work. My dad called out for me and was like, “You need to be home.” I was like, “Okay.” My boss called my dad and I thought [it was] just to check on me. I thought he was just being nice…[My boss asked], “What happened?” [My father answered], “She got hurt but she is all right.” I was like, “Oh. That was nice that he called.” As soon as I came in to work, [my boss] ambushed me and was like, “What happened!?” I was like, “I don’t want to talk about it.” [He said,] “Your dad sounded like he was about to cry over the phone.” [I responded,] “Yeah. I’m okay. I really don’t want to talk about it.” He kept harassing me and was like, “What happened? What happened?” I was like, “I really don’t want to talk about it.” [Finally he said,] “I’m not letting you leave until you tell me what happened.” [Again I responded,] “I don’t want to talk about it.” My mom came in to pick me up. I made milkshakes behind this little bar. My mom was at the bar, and there was this customer after her…My boss was like, “So! Your daughter and your husband won’t tell me what happened. So what happened?”…My mom was so mad that she just walked out. She was like, “Why would he ask me that in front of customers? You guys have already told him that you don’t want to talk about it.” I was like, “It’s okay mom. He’s just being really insensitive.” Then I came in another day and he apparently had my co-workers check my Facebook to [snoop]. It was, really, really invasive. Another day I came in and my co-workers who hadn’t seen me yet, who knew I was in the hospital were like, “Are you okay?” And I was like, “Yeah. Everything is fine.” They were like, “You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to.” I was like, “It’s okay.” I guess my boss had figured out through context what had happened and was like, “She got raped.” I was like, “Uhhhhhhhh…..” [My co-workers] were like, “Is that true?” I’m like, “Uhhhh…. And I did not respond. I was so shocked. So they figured it out. They started asking me all of these questions. I was like, “I just want to work. I just want to serve burgers. Stop asking me questions.” I stopped working there after that.

Eva, a white woman, described her yearly household income as in line with an in-group individual. She was very traumatized from the attack. Unlike out-group survivors, Eva was able to take care of herself after the rape and focus on her healing. Like Jessica,
she did not have to juggle a job at the same time. Eva said:

Employment-wise, I wasn’t able to hold a job because I was just crying and I didn’t want to leave my room. I lived in my room for about two years.”…[The sexual assault] led to the eating disorder and because of the eating disorder, I slept all day. I took a lot of time off of school. A lot of time. Like I said, I went to [the community college]. I was down to one class. After that, I went to [a private university]. I only lasted one quarter because I went to school and I lost 13 pounds. Thirteen was the number. I had to leave after a quarter, had to drop all classes but one, again. Then I did [the community college] again after about a year and a then I went to [a state school].

Also similar to Eva and Jessica, Natasha took time off from responsibilities after the crime. Natasha’s income afforded her the opportunity to focus on her treatment. Natasha was institutionalized after the attack and her depression and anorexia became unbearable. She was also suicidal. This was extremely problematic because Natasha was a single mother with a small child. Natasha’s in-group family status helped her in this situation, paying for hospital bills and raising her little boy for months as her health improved. Natasha talked about her family:

…They’re always been really supportive and tried to help me even when I had no clue what was going on. Taking care of my son, for one thing…They knew that I had been dealing with some depression for years because of different things, but they never knew why! So, they were troopers.

Socioeconomic status influences survivor’s lives in several ways. After the violence, victims with the financial means to leave their jobs and take care of themselves do so, but not all survivors have that opportunity. Some have to keep working in order to pay their rent, afford daily necessities, and have enough money for college. This becomes demanding with the debilitating side effects from the crime.

According to Paludi (2008), sexual assault survivors miss more classes because of the crime and face broken peer relationships at school. Sexual assault is also linked to

According to Karmen (2007), some survivors even relocate because of the crime. These worries do not vanish when a survivor has to work to survive; so out-group survivors have to navigate a difficult post trauma life at work, in order to pay for school. In addition to these issues, sexual assault survivors may endure added expense because of the rape. For example, Beth encountered expensive medical costs due to being raped. This added to the stress of achieving academically while also trying to make enough money to stay enrolled in classes and pay for medical costs and rape kits. Erica grew up in a very poor neighborhood as a child. When assaulted, she did not trust the police to help her with aftercare. Instead she mainly dealt with the crime alone. Yolonda, Lily, Polly, Erica, and Brian were dependent for money on abusers or family who supported the abusers. Also, schools in poorer neighborhoods offered access to fewer resources in times of trouble. For example, impoverished schools lacked adequate counseling resources. Financially unstable students also had to rely on their friends or the intermittent computer access available on campus in order to use the Internet for classwork. This left some survivors in the dark about crime on campus, or made them more vulnerable to predators who used their computers as tools to lure dependent students into their homes for sexual gratification.

To illustrate the delicate balance of dealing with trauma after a sexual assault when the survivor is from an out-group household, I will focus on Beth’s story. Beth had no financial assistance from her family. She knew she had bills to pay, so on the morning after she was attacked, Beth still attempted to attend her shift at work.
[When I] got to work, I was already two or three hours late. [They stated writing me up because I was late and never called in.]...I was crying and I told my boss what had happened. She had told me that I could go home for the day and calm down and get checked out. I didn’t have to work if I didn’t want to. I could take a leave of absence and stay home for a couple of months if I had to...My boss said that if I [took a leave of absence], I would have to reapply and put in another application. I was only working weekends at the time [so I figured] I have a whole week plus this weekend off. I think that I can come back next weekend and work. [My boss said] “If you can, let me know.” And I did go back that next weekend and it was hard, but I have bills to pay. My parents don’t pay for anything. I pay for my car, my cell phone bill, my rent, my food, everything. So it’s not like I can really take a leave of absence or miss two or three weeks of work because I have bills to pay.

Beth was determined to stay in school, but she knew that in order to do that, she had to keep working. This became extremely difficult when her anxiety and depression became worse after the rape.

Even now, there are times I cry about [the sexual assault]. I had bad depression and anxiety before this, but since then it’s gotten worse. The doctors upped my anxiety and depression medication to 20 mg. I’m also on Xanax as a back up because I have panic attacks when I’m by myself. There’s one time at work where I was completely fine. I was making pizza at the school and all of a sudden I started freaking out. I was crying. My heart was racing. I got super scared and I told my boss I had to go out to my car and get medicine to calm myself down. I had an anxiety spell there before, the previous year, so she is like, “I’ll have Callie walk you out to your car.” I had taken the meds and within ten minutes, I was okay...

Beth was fortunate that she had an understanding boss who did not chastise her when she broke down. Despite this kindness, Beth’s financial problems were constant added stressors in her life.

Unfortunately, the crime itself can add further expenses to the already stressful situations that less well-off rape survivors have to face. For example, in North Carolina rape kits cost $1,600 and although there was a fund to help survivors pay for these expensive tests, the compensation endowment was underfunded and survivors in that
state still had to pay $600 for the exam (Andrews 2008:1). Beth owed $928 for an emergency room visit and rape kit procedure that she received after she was attacked.

This was an immense debt for a college student who worked at a pizza parlor and did not have health insurance. Beth stated:

> When I left the hospital, they gave me [a letter about] if I ever needed help paying the [emergency room] bill, [to] contact this [certain] number. And then they gave me information about [a sexual assault counseling center in my area]. I probably contacted them about a month later, I would say. Right now I owe close to $1000 [for the hospital visit]. The exact amount is $928. I don’t have health insurance and if they would have found him guilty in court, he would have had to pay my bill, but it never [went] to court because the prosecutor never thought we had evidence…There’s a $400 bill just for going in to the emergency room.

Beth was also interested in empowerment activities after the crime. She wanted to join a self-defense class at the school. She also was interested in a play held by the university that focused on sexual assault and liberation. Though she had the desire to join these activities, work prevented her from doing so. She had to make money rather than take care of herself after the assault if she wanted to stay in school.

After Brian was raped, he did not seek any kind of assistance from the high school he was attending. The school was immersed in conflict and was having trouble with retention. Brian knew that they didn’t have counseling services and that even if he did seek assistance; the school was not prepared to sensitively handle a gay male rape case.

> …[There was never anything about sexual assault or rape in the high school.] This was a school where you walked through metal detectors every day. What they were talking about was gun policies and gang fights. [There was nothing like “Take Back the Night,” or the “Vagina Monologues.”] Not at all. Those are white people activities.

Brian’s case illustrates how the intersections of gender, sexual orientation, and financial instability negatively influences survivor’s lives. Because he was poor and abandoned,
Brian was searching for love and thought he found it in his boyfriend. Unfortunately this older, wealthier man took advantage of Brian’s destitute status. Brian’s underprivileged school also worked against him. He knew that he could not get help there because the school was having difficulty with everything from retention to violence. This left Brian alone to deal with his problems.

Finances also affected survivors in other ways. Though Yolanda lived in an in-group area, her family was struggling financially. She noted how her lack of access to a computer was a problem because her college sent out e-mails about crimes and attacks, but her lack of access to a computer kept her less informed than fellow classmates. Elise also did not have the financial means to afford her own personal computer, so she borrowed laptops from her friends. One man who she thought was a friend offered to lend her his laptop, but when she went to his home borrow it, he tried to get her to have sex with him. Both these women were at a safety disadvantage due to their lack of access to computers, which was ultimately due to their lack of money.

Overall, out-group survivors had less of a chance to focus on healing after the crime. If they wanted to stay in school, they had to keep working at their jobs, which often meant enduring panic attacks and anxiety in order to stay enrolled in school. Less money was also a huge stressor for out-group survivors when they endured added costs due to the crime. In contrast, in-group survivors were able to quit jobs, even for years at a time in order to concentrate on their health and education. Though they also encountered added expenses because of the crime, these expenses were not crippling.

In conclusion, in-group survivors were generally concerned with keeping an in-group, prestigious image. This appearance prevented them from reporting their
victimizations to the police, in contrast to out-group survivors who did not report out of a distrust of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, 40% of out-group survivors admitted that crime could be an out-group problem, while only 23% of in-group people noted that crime is an in-group issue. These in-group survivors were able to quit jobs, even for years at a time in order to concentrate on their health and education, in contrast to out-group survivors who had to work through the depression and anxiety spells.

In contrast to in-group survivors, out-group survivors were worried about everyday existence. They did not trust the justice system and did not think it worked in their favor. Previous interactions with criminal justice actors prevented out-group survivors from trusting the system. In addition, survivors raped by wealthier men were aware of the power of money and when wealthier men victimized them, they were hesitant to move forward with a case. When compared to in-group survivors, out-group survivors were more likely to rely on religious institutions for support (20% of out-group versus only 8% of in-group survivors). They also dealt with the crime alone because family was absent or they did not want to burden overworked loved ones. Out-group survivors also had less of a chance to focus on healing after the crime. If they wanted to stay in school, they had to keep working at their jobs, which often meant enduring panic attacks and anxiety in order to stay enrolled in school. Extra expenses because of the attack were crippling for out-group survivors who could barely afford to get by, let alone pay for expensive rape kits, medical care, and mental health assistance.
CHAPTER THREE
HOW PERCEPTIONS OF RACE AND ETHNICITY
INFLUENCE SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES

Not all sexual assault survivors are the same, nor are their experiences with this crime. This chapter explores the diversity of survivors through an intersectional framework, and examines how survivors’ differences influence their cases in various ways. Though several intersections affect cases at the same time, this chapter specifically focuses on survivors’ perceptions of race and ethnicity and how those relate to their lives after the attack/s.

Existing literature discusses that black female survivors are treated more harshly than whites in sexual violence cases and that white survivors tend to be viewed as “legitimate” victims (see Young 1986 and Dorr 2004). I unpack how race and ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation complicate the outcomes of these cases and I explain why survivors of various intersections respond to cases in the different ways that they do. When Collins (2000) defined intersectionality, she said that it is an analysis of systems such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and age, and how those form mutually constructing features of organization in society. These intersections shape women’s lives (Collins 2000:299). For example, Crenshaw (2004:2) articulates to an interviewer from The American Bar Association:

What happened was like an accident, a collision. Interesectionality simply came from the idea that if you’re standing in the path of multiple forms of exclusion,
you are likely to get hit by both. These women are injured, but when the race ambulance and the gender ambulance arrive at the scene, they see these women of color lying in the intersection and they say, “Well, we can’t figure out if this was just race or just sex discrimination. And unless they can show us which one it is, we can’t help them.

As Crenshaw eloquently explained, people have very different experiences based on their unique intersections. This is true in all aspects of life, including the distinctive experiences of sexual assault survivors.

What is the role of race and ethnicity in sexual assault cases? For survivors of color in my sample, race and ethnicity were fundamental to their situations. White survivors were more likely to make references to race in more general discussions about rape. For example, while Jessica (black) was worried about ruining her reputation in the small black community on campus after a popular black student assaulted her, McKenzie (white) discussed the importance of understanding race in connection to sexuality and homosexuality with women of color. She did not talk about how being white had any significance to her specific case. While race directly affected Jessica’s rape case, race influenced women of color in McKenzie’s example.

Second, when survivors had an aversion towards men of a particular racial or ethnic group, it was often the same racial or ethnic group of their victimizer. Intersectionality factored in here when it came to the offenders. While survivors’ lives were influenced by their identities as women who had been raped by men, their race and gender of men in their lives after the assault mattered. They viewed men as potential rapists, but especially men of the same race as the particular offender who had victimized them. Specifically, racial hostility between survivors and offenders occurred in 6 of the 28 cases (21% of all interviewees). For example, a white man raped Meghann (also
white), and after the crime, she had an aversion to white men. She said, “I feel no attraction to white guys…There is no attraction there to white people. I mean, I am sometimes attracted to Black guys.” In general, in my sample, sexual assault led to increased intolerance of racial groups by the survivor, especially for the racial group of their attacker. In one case, this racial and/or ethnic intolerance led to a survivor who was a bank teller to refuse to serve people of the same ethnic group as the attacker or to allow anyone of the attacker’s ethnic group into her home.

Third, four interviewees (14%) noticed that campus email alerts frequently depicted sexual assault offenders as men of color. Women of color also perceived white men who were offenders as getting off easier than men of color within the alerts. Katheryn Russell-Brown created the term “criminalblackman” to refer to the stereotype that minority men are seen as offenders. It refers to the fear that whites have of African American men (Greene and Gabbidon 2009). “The stereotyping of Blacks as criminals is so pervasive throughout society that “criminal predator” is used as a euphemism for young, Black male” (Welch 2007:276). These disparities are problematic because they focus on black men as offenders and neglect white men, ultimately leaving survivors less protected. They also unfairly label law-abiding men of color as troublemakers. Young black men, due to both their race and gender are affected by these intersections in ways very different from white men. Overall, interviewees who mentioned race and/or ethnicity in relation to campus alerts were in agreement that these warnings about campus criminality were not beneficial to themselves, other students, or to men of color.

Fourth, there was some uniformity in these 28 specific cases in terms of who the sexual assault offenders were depicted as in campus emails and alerts, to who was
essentially prosecuted. Some schools tended to report rapes in campus e-mail alerts when the offender was Black and ignore when white men were perpetrators. In my study, black men were also more likely to be convicted than white men (50% when compared to 0% of white defendants). The harsh way that black men were treated is consistent with existing literature (Welch 2007, Dorr 2004). This may be because during court proceedings, some prosecutors take advantage of the stereotype that Black men are violent, in order to secure higher conviction rates of these defendants (Higginbotham 2002). What is a new finding is that when the men were black and were outsiders on campus, sexual assault survivors in my study viewed them as especially vulnerable to being labeled as delinquent.

Finally, 43% (12 of 28) of interviewees discussed violence and culture. Specifically, when white women linked rape and culture, they did so by referring to an American rape culture, while women of color linked race and culture to rape. Both white women and women of color noted that violence was a part of their cultures, but white women focused on gender and culture, while women of color focused on race and culture. Of the 12, 11 (92%) agreed that in some way, cultural values factored into their sexual assault cases. Only one of the 12 (8%) did not think culture should be linked to rape.

**How Race and Ethnicity Affect Survivors’ Sexual Assault Cases**

Out of the 28 total interviewees, 12 (43%) mentioned how race or ethnicity influenced either their sexual assault cases or these incidents in general. Sixteen out of 28 (57%) did not mention how race or ethnicity affected cases. Of the 12 who did discuss race and/or ethnicity, eight (67%) were survivors of color (Jessica, Lily, Nina, Bella, Rose, Brian,
Molly, Kat) and four (33%) were white (McKenzie, Becky, Kim, Meghann). Of those who did not talk about race and/or ethnicity, 6 out of 16 (38%) were people of color and 10 out of 16 (62%) were white. “…Within the current context of color-blind racial discourse, researchers must confront the reality that some whites claim not to experience their whiteness at all” (Lewis, 2004:623). Lewis (2004:623) finds that when whites think about race, they think of minority groups, and blacks in particular. This may explain why white survivors were less likely to see if or how race and ethnicity influenced their cases. In other words, the intersections of race and gender influence sexual assault survivors’ lives in different ways, and merely exploring sexual assault as a gender problem is unhelpful to women of color who recognize their race and ethnicity as important dimensions in the aftermath of their cases.

Survivors of color differed from whites in that they were more likely to talk about race and ethnicity in relation to sexual assault cases (29% versus 14%). They also differed in how they talked about race and ethnicity. Specifically, of the 12 survivors who discussed race or ethnicity, six of them (50%, specifically Jessica, Nina, Bella, Brian, Kat, and Becky), of which 83% (all except Becky) were interviewees of color, talked about how it influenced their own personal cases. The other six (50%, specifically Lily, Rose, Molly, McKenzie, Kim, and Meghann), of which 50% were people of color (Lily, Rose, and Molly), discussed race and rape more generally.

Table 2. References to Race and/or Ethnicity by Interviewees in Relation to Sexual Assault Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did the Interviewee reference race and/or ethnicity in relation to sexual assault cases?</th>
<th>Interviewee Was a Person of Color</th>
<th>Interviewee was White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>29% (8 interviewees)</td>
<td>14% (4 interviewees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>21% (6 interviewees)</td>
<td>36% (10 interviewees)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Subject of Reference for Survivors Who Talked About Race and/or Ethnicity (N=12) in Relation to Sexual Assault Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race and/or Ethnicity mentioned was in relation to their own case</th>
<th>Race of Survivor</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person of Color</td>
<td>5 (83%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and/or Ethnicity mentioned was in general</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person of Color</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People of color in my sample noted how race and ethnicity directly impacted their sexual assault cases. Scholars have discovered that the campus climate adds to educational inequalities and that students of color come face to face with an unwelcoming campus environment. Campuses are not open and tolerant places, but instead, provide an unequal environment where students of color frequently encounter racial jokes, seclusion, and suffering (Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996). Students of color deal with racism, prejudice, and discrimination in higher education (Morrison 2010:989). College students experience very different realities on college campuses based on the intersections of race and ethnicity in their lives. These intersections also affect sexual assault cases and the way survivors perceive their lives after the attack/s.

Jessica, an African American woman, discussed how when a Black woman is raped by a Black man on a predominantly white campus, the survivor is ultimately silenced because of her race and also her gender. Not only is she silenced through the rape as a woman, but also her race makes her an outsider because she is not a part of the white campus community. Furthermore, she fears the disruption to the small black campus community that she is part of, which is a concern that white sexual assault survivors do not encounter due to their racial privilege. Again, the intersections in survivors’ lives influence their cases in very important ways. Jessica stated:
….There’s a lot more like, I feel like, victim blaming in the Black community. Because I feel like, especially in like an academic situation, like college, Black women are very aware of their cultural reputation of being sexually promiscuous and in the world of the hip hop imagery is happening. So they very much uphold, “Hi. I am educated Black woman and I don’t want to be hypersexualized so.” So there’s a lot of keeping your sexual activity very secret. Even if you date. Keeping a relationship secret, period. If you sleep with one person, and it gets out, you’re a whore. I can’t imagine that could be a positive, the way people view sexual assault. And also, it’s so small. The black community is so small. If you get sexually assaulted by someone in the community, you can’t tell people, because they know who it is. And they might be friends with that person, so…

Racially, white students are accepted by the larger campus community more than students of color (Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996 and Morrison 2010:989). White survivors, because of their racial privilege, do not face the situation that black survivors face when they are assaulted. When a black woman on a predominantly white campus is victimized, she is not only an outsider in the larger predominantly white campus community, but she may also become an outsider in the supportive, cohesive black student community if the alleged attacker is a popular black man in that clique. Ultimately, being a rape survivor could mean the end to that survivor’s social life and support system on campus.

Race also directly affected Nina’s rape case. Nina’s family was from India and they expected Nina to only date Indian men. Because her attacker was a Black man, Nina knew that she could never tell her family about the crime because they would blame her. When asked if her parents would have judged her because the offender was a Black man, Nina stated:

For sure, yes. I mean, number one, they would have judged me for the assault. Like, “Why were you there? Why were you hanging out?” Number two, of course the fact that he’s Black. That’s even worse. I mean, if he was a white guy, or an Indian guy, then um. I mean, it would have been weird because they’d be like, “Well, we don’t really believe you, but at least you were hanging out with not riff
raff. Or you know, not an “N” word kind of issue…I mean, that’s the worst of the evils. So if you’re hanging out with any guy, you know, there’s always that hierarchy of like, whether you’re dating or whether you’re raped, or whoever, you’re always portrayed in a best light if you’re dating an Indian guy. And then, second best light if you’re dating a white guy. And so the fact that he’s Black makes it worse for me.

Nina’s race mattered in her case because her family expected her to date other Indians, and the fact that Nina not only socialized with a Black man, but also had been forced to have sexual intercourse with a Black man, would bring shame to Nina and her family in the Indian community. Nina knew that her parents would blame her for the attack, and that they would be unhappy with her, even if she were a victim. Nina was ultimately being silenced by, and not given help through her family due to both her gender and her race.

Bella was a Guatemalan American as was her assailant. Even though Bella defied traditional gender roles, her abuser and others in her church and family encouraged her to be submissive and ladylike. Bella came from a country where nearly two women are viciously murdered every day, often because of gender based hatred. Their bodies are found mutilated, dismembered, and sexually assaulted (Gotfredsen 2008:1). Many young women who were the victims of femicide in Guatemala were those who did not follow traditional gender roles. In 2008, Guatemala had no domestic violence laws, unless the survivor’s bruises lasted ten or more days and a rapist could be acquitted if he promised to marry the survivor if she was 12 or older (Gotfredson 2008:11). Machismo and marianismo also add to inequality. Machismo is a social expectation for men in Latin American cultures which is characterized by exaggerated aggressiveness and sexual violence in male to female relationships while marianismo is a social expectation for
women revolving around the submission to men and being the family caretakers

(Gotfredson 2008:10-11)

Ethnicity directly affected Bella’s case, as did gender and religion. When a Guatemalan church leader with traditional gender beliefs assaulted Bella (an American woman of Guatemalan descent), he degraded not only Bella’s ethnicity, but also her gender. She shared the interaction:

“If you tell anybody [about the sexual assault], they’re just going to think you’re a liar, because little girls like you are just liars. You’re going to end up, probably pregnant in a couple of years, so that’s what your type is.” I’m like, “We’re the same nationality. How is my type different than yours?” He’s like, “Well now you know what type of women we have in our country.” And I was like. It kind of hurt me and made me think. I was like, “Man, maybe this is what Guatemalan women are.” And it started. It hurt me because I look back at my mother, my aunts. They are all single moms. None of them have husbands. Granted, my mom, my dad died but, my mom was, that was my mom’s second husband. So I’m like, maybe he is right. Maybe this is all that we are good for.

Bella’s ethnicity affected Bella’s case because her attacker was able to make her question her self worth and womanhood. He did this through degrading her ancestry and degrading her status as a Guatemalan woman. He damaged Bella’s womanhood by defining her as a “slut.” His comment affected Bella throughout her life because she believed what he said. Being Guatemalan affected Bella’s case differently than it would a white sexual assault survivor, because Bella was not white, and the degradation of her ethnicity by a man also in her ethnic group reminded Bella that she was not only less powerful because of her ethnicity, but also due to being a woman. She was an outsider even within her own oppressed ethnic group because of both her ethnicity and her gender. Though rape and sexual assault are horrendous traumas to deal with regardless of the survivor’s intersections, these crimes affect all people differently and a survivor’s race or ethnicity
does matter in these cases.

When gay males are raped, there is still a lot of misunderstanding. For example, Mitchell and colleagues (1999) found that college students blamed gay male rape victims more than heterosexual male survivors. Specifically, they placed more responsibility, more pleasure, and less suffering to gay men when compared to heterosexual survivors who were men. Brian, a gay male sexual assault survivor, also noted how race and ethnicity directly affected his case, as did his gender and his sexual orientation. Because he was a gay, multiracial, man, as well as non-Black at a predominantly refugee and African American school, he felt that his sexual assault case would not be handled well if he sought assistance for the aftermath of the crime. Brian said:

I think that I was 17 and this happened. This was scary and I had just come out of living in shelters. I had just come out of being bounced around to a bunch of different places. I had actually been in a potentially violent situation earlier that year, living with two gay men. So basically, I didn’t realize it, but I was in trauma mode still. I was like, processing all of this craziness that had happened in my life. Where um, I think to go to my school, where, it’s inner city. Half of the student body is international students, refugee students. The other half are inner city, lower economic Black kids from Black families. They’re just struggling to make it through to graduate. That school is just struggling with retention. That school is just struggling with basic crime rates and violence in school. They don’t have adequate counseling services. They certainly don’t have college preparatory programs. So the last thing I am going to do is be like, “Oh. I was sexually assaulted. I need you to help me.” They’re going to suck at that, you know? It’s not even necessarily because they want to. They don’t. Maybe if I was in sort of an all White county school and there was more experience with LGBT inclusion (inaudible), I could expect a little bit more but I knew where I was at. I knew how they were going to look at me.

In Brian’s case, the intersections of sexual orientation, gender, and ethnicity silenced this survivor. Because Brian was an outsider at his school, he knew that coming forward to get help at his predominantly Black school would only make the situation worse.

Race also directly affected Kat’s case. Kat was part Native American and her
rapist was a white member of the Ku Klux Klan. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (2014), KKK members have not only lynched and tarred and feathered people who challenged white supremacy, but they have also raped those who do not agree with them. Kat discusses how her attacker came to her home in a suburban community with an average household income of over $100,000 a year, in order to threaten her after the crime:

…I started to get threatened by him and his family; his family is a big part of the Ku Klux Klan apparently. And they buy out judges all of the time. The reason why he didn’t get such a hard punishment the first time he went in to jail, when he had a case against him, with seven young girls, they gave him like two and a half, three years, and he got out early on good behavior. I’m sure that’s how he got out. They were Ku Klux Klan and they were threatening to burn us and burn our house and burn crosses in our yard. I thought they were full of shit and that night, he showed up at my window with a gun…They didn’t get in the room. They busted in the window well. I sat up out of bed as they kicked the window in. All I see is him and this dude standing there, screaming at me, and guns…

Because Kat was part Native American, she may have been targeted for the crime that happened. The Ku Klux Klan members who raped her did not attack her Caucasian friend, even though they had the opportunity to assault her as well. Furthermore, the connections that the offenders had with Klan sympathizers in the justice system worked to their advantage and to the detriment of Kat, who, as a Native American, was loathed by that racist group. Had Kat been white, she may have never been raped to begin with and her attackers would not have held the power over the Klan sympathizers in the justice system. Here, the intersections of gender and race affected Kat’s case differently than if she had been a white survivor for example.

Only one white survivor talked about how ethnicity was directly related to her case and this was due to a mistake at the hospital. In Becky’s case, an advocacy group
sent a Spanish speaking volunteer to be her advocate but Becky only spoke English.

Becky thought that because her last name sounded Hispanic, that was why the organization sent a Spanish speaker. Because of this mishap, Becky was more isolated and less supported than she should have been. Ultimately this attempt at inclusion for all ethnicities backfired, leaving Becky to deal with isolation. Becky talked about this incident:

> [At the hospital, they made] me feel *so welcome.* (Sarcasm.) And they said that they had called someone who was going to come over because they didn’t *know* what to do...A woman had come in from an [advocacy] group, but it’s a Latina group and I think that they assumed because my last name is (Italian) that my name was (Hispanic), so she came in speaking Spanish. I was like, “I have *no idea* what you are saying.” So she was just giving me pamphlets and *left the room*...So I had *no idea* what was going on. I guess they had sent the Latina group. [The pamphlets were] *all* in Spanish. Then when she realized that I didn’t speak Spanish, she was like, “Okay. I’ll be back.” She left the room and I was there with *my mom.*

This attempt at inclusion of Hispanic women ultimately made Becky, a white English-only speaker’s encounter a more frustrating time with her case on the day of the incident. Even so, this pain was short lived because Becky ended up having a very positive experience with that advocacy group after they assigned an English-speaking advocate to her case.

While more survivors of color in my sample discussed how race was central to their specific cases, white women typically mentioned race in terms of how it affected people of color. In other words, being white did not make their rape cases more difficult for them, but they did note how it influenced people of color when they were victimized. For example, McKenzie talked about the importance of understanding the intersection of race and sexuality when determining which survivors report these crimes. McKenzie
said:

…I think racism has a lot to do with how we understand sexuality and homosexuality of women of color. Um, and depending on who the perpetrator is, who the victim is, that can have a huge impact on if the survivor feels comfortable about coming forward about what happened.

While Jessica, Nina, Bella, Brian, and Kat (all people of color) talked about how race directly affected their rape cases, McKenzie (white) only mentioned how race affected people of color’s cases. She was rare in that as a white person she did mention race (for examples on the invisibility of whiteness see McIntosh 1988), but she did not talk about how race directly affected her case.

Aside from McKenzie and Becky, Kim and Meghann (both white) also briefly discussed race and/or ethnicity, but did so in reference to after the attacks. They both mentioned how they disliked men belonging to the racial or ethnic group of their attackers after being assaulted. Rose (Hispanic) also noted how she disliked Arab men after her Arab attacker victimized her. Lily (Biracial – Hispanic and White) and Molly (South Asian American) also briefly mentioned race in their interviews, but not in direct relation to their cases. Both noted how men of color are at a disadvantage if blamed for a sexual assault when compared to white men.

Overall, when survivors of color talked about race and/or ethnicity, they talked about how race and ethnicity were central to their sexual assault cases. White survivors made references to race in rape cases in general or talked about their dislike for men of the race of their attacker after the assault occurred. Of the white survivors, only Becky’s case was directly affected by her being a white Italian. This was due to the assumption by an advocacy group that Becky was Hispanic, due to her last name. Unfortunately, this
attempt at being more inclusive to Hispanics excluded an Italian white woman. Even though this was traumatic for Becky, it was an unusual occurrence in my sample.

Racial Hostility Between Victim and Offender

Racial hostility between survivors and offenders occurred in 6 of the 28 cases (21% of all interviewees). Specifically, Jessica, Nina, Bella, Rose, Kim and Meghann all mentioned this issue. Of these six cases, four of these six (67%) survivors were women of color and two of the six (33%) were white. Of these six survivors, five (83%) were leery of men of color, while one (17%) was uncomfortable around white men. This is telling because the one woman who was biased against white men was a white woman and of the survivors who were biased against non-whites, four of the five (80%) were women of color.

According to Wilson (1973), racist practices and beliefs uphold racial domination. Discrimination by subordinate group members against dominant group members is not racist because it does not uphold the dominant group’s position in society (Quillian 2006:301). Ultimately, survivors were uncomfortable around men of the racial or ethnic group of their offender, even if this offender was the same race as the survivor (as was true in three of these six cases.) This was a finding I did not discover in the existing literature.

In my sample, when men of color victimized women of color of the same race, these women questioned their own racial group. This was true for both Jessica and Bella. For example, Jessica (an African American woman) did not feel comfortable around Black men and even had panic attacks in the presence of African American men who reminded her of her attacker. She talked about her fear of a Black police officer and a rapper who reminded her of her victimizer:
And then [hospital staff] called the cops and the cop came. He was kind of; he seemed like he didn’t know what was happening. Like, “Oh yeah. We wanted to send you a female cop but we didn’t have any. So here is this big, scary Black man.” (She laughs.) I was like, “That’s not the best circumstance because I just got raped by a big, scary Black man.”

Jessica also gave this example:

…I went to this concert and there was this rapper. His name is Danny Brown. And he is already very scary looking, but he came on. I had that overwhelming urge to run away or vomit and I didn’t know why. Then I looked at him and realized that he looked exactly like [my attacker]! If [my attacker] was missing two front teeth and had a scary perm. And so he was like [the attacker] on crack. I was like, “Ahhhhhhhh!” And I was like, freaking out. We were like front row center at this concert and I was like, I couldn’t get out. I wanted to be front row center for the main act, because it was my favorite artist. I was like, “I have been waiting for this. NO! I AM GOING TO SUFFER THROUGH THIS TRIGGER!”

Bella deeply questioned her ethnic group after a Guatemalan man told her that the only value Guatemalan women had was to be used as objects for sexual pleasure. This comment stuck with Bella throughout her life and she questioned her self-worth and ethnicity because at different times in her life she believed the attacker’s hurtful words.

Bella discussed what this pain was like:

It made me depreciate myself as a woman…I’m like, “Wow! Okay. Maybe this is how I should be.”…I was like, “This is how I should be seen.” Even though I tried to change my appearance, when I actually started dating, it was just like, “Well, no. They only want me for the time being because that is the only thing I’m good for.”…I think it did affect me that way and it did make me doubt myself…That I wasn’t good enough. That I was never be good enough because this happened to me because I’m stained or I’m dirty this way…I didn’t feel appreciated and when I graduated high school none of my family went. It was just my mom and my grandma. So I’m like, okay. This is supposed to be a big milestone for me. When I graduated high school, I was the fourth one of my generation…Nobody was there for me. And then when my younger cousin then graduated from the same high school, almost four years later, three years later too, everybody was there and I’m like. [What’s the deal!?] Because it’s me? Because of what happened and I haven’t told anybody. So, it always made me blame myself that I wasn’t ever good enough. Because this is why this happens to you. These things happen to you because you’re not good enough. You’re never going to be good enough, and you’re this type of person.
According to Crenshaw (1991:1243-1244),

…The experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and…these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism. Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both.

In Bella’s case, both her ethnicity and gender influenced her sexual assault. The fact that the offender used Bella’s status as a Guatemalan woman to both normalize her mistreatment and to degrade her, made her case different than a survivor who was not both a woman and also a woman of color.

While Jessica was scared of men of her own racial group because of the attack, Bella was forced to deal with the psychological pain of questioning the worth of her own ethnic group due to the comment of a violent man who shared her ethnicity. Both were oppressed not only because of their racial or ethnic groups, but also because they were women. This was not the case for white women, who were not concerned with their whiteness overall.

Nina, Rose, and Kim stereotyped and/or discriminated against men of color after the crime, but these survivors were not of the same racial or ethnic group as the attackers. As mentioned previously, Nina (an East Indian American) did not want to tell her parents about the rape because the attacker was a Black man and her parents did not approve of a Black man for their daughter. Kim is white and did not trust her attacker from the start because he was Muslim and she associated him with the September eleventh attacks on The World Trade Center. Rose (a Hispanic woman) began to discriminate against Arab men after the attack because her rapist was Arab. Of all of the survivors, she developed
the most overtly hostile behavior.

Overt racism is uncommon today when compared to in the civil rights era because according to Willett (2007:211), people today are vigilant against old-fashioned forms of racism, such as rape or lynching. Instead, today’s racism is more covert. “While big-footed forms of conscious oppression still exist, in the early twenty-first century white domination tends to prefer silent tiptoeing to loud stomping” Willett (2007:211). Here are some examples of Rose’s overt racism:

[My attacker] was of Arabic background…I just remember hating, hating Arabics. The biggest impact was when we went to war. So many people were against the war, everything that we were doing out there. I remember telling my dad that we should really just eliminate having any issues with Arabs and just make a whole other fucking sea…Just fucking nuke the shit out of them. That was my whole perception. It had nothing to do with the politics.

Rose’s sexual assault by an Arab man ultimately led to overt discrimination towards innocent people who were Arab. Specifically, Rose yelled racial slurs at her Arab neighbor, she also refused to wait on Arab people at her job as a bank teller, and she would not allow Arab people into her home. Rose discussed her hatred towards her neighbor because he was the same ethnicity as her attacker:

…I hated Arabics. I hated them so much. Every time I would see an Arabic person, whether it be a man or a woman, they disgusted me. I would let them know. Even years after, I moved back to Chicago after I was married, my parents later got a neighbor. He was Egyptian. Mind you, I was married to someone who was in the military. I was always very patriotic, but I became even more patriotic. My niece was walking our dogs. We had two little dogs. She was walking our dogs and he came out and started yelling at her that he didn’t want the dogs pissing on his grass, or whatever. So I went over there and, cause I could hear him yelling at her, and I went over there and I said, “What the fuck is your problem?” I never really talked to people just like that but he’s a fucking Arab. I don’t give a fuck. I was like, “What the fuck is your problem talking to my niece that way?” And he’s like, “Oh, it’s because the dogs are pissing on my grass.” His grass was like, super high. I was like, “Look. I don’t know if you want to keep imagining that you are in Vietnam, because you come from a fucking sandbox, but your fucking
grass is out of order anyway. I can get you a ticket for that. The city will give you a ticket for that. That’s one, two. They’re walking on this side of the fucking sidewalk and you don’t own that. [The city] owns that.” He’s like, “Oh, you don’t talk to me that way. I’ll talk to your dad.” I’m like, “You don’t need to talk to my dad. I don’t live in your fucking country. Just because I don’t have a fucking dick hanging in between my fucking legs doesn’t mean you can’t talk to me.” And he’s like, “Oh! Blah, blah, blah.” And I had a Marine Corps sweater on. And I said, “Do you see what this means? I don’t fucking like you. Go back to where the fuck you came from. You fucking sand nigger.”

In Rose’s case, the rape led to overt hostility towards men of color who reminded her of her attacker. She verbally attacked an innocent Arab person who had never harmed her. Though it is possible that Rose held these hateful feelings before the crime occurred, she said, “Before all of this had happened, I never had a problem with Arabic people. I thought everyone should love each other and get along. After this (the rape) had happened, I just remember hating, hating Arabics.”

Meghann (a white woman) also had an aversion to men who were the same race as her offender (white.) Meghann differed from all of the other survivors because she was the only interviewee who openly disliked white men. Although she was romantically interested in white men before the rape, she no longer dated them after the attack because she did not feel safe around them. She specifically sought out men of color as romantic partners. Here, Meghann discussed dating a man of color for the first time:

That has been really wonderful…It’s been really great. I feel safe…He moved here when he was 14 from Brazil. It’s really great to embrace a different culture than normal North Carolina stuff. I’m kind of proud of myself for branching out and embracing other cultures just because before that…I just wanted to stick to what I am used to in my life. When I went to Brazil with my boyfriend, there is a lot of rape that happens. I felt safer actually there than I did at that time in my hometown…I feel no attraction to White guys…There is no attraction there. Yeah! To White people. I mean, I am sometimes attracted to Black guys. There is a super hot one at school, but yeah. I do feel safer. My boyfriend’s stepfather is White and kind of redneck and I don’t like him at all because even though he is a fairly good person, I don’t like him because of that.
Like Rose, Meghann developed an aversion towards any men of the same race or ethnic group as the attacker. Both of these survivors said that this hatred did not exist before the crime occurred.

Overall in my sample, when survivors show a dislike towards men of a specific racial or ethnic group, that racial or ethnic group is the same group that their victimizers came from. In Jessica’s and Bella’s cases, they became outsiders within their own racial or ethnic groups because the victimizers were the same races as themselves. Nina, Rose, and Kim had troubles with men of color because men of color assaulted them. This hatred became so bad for Rose that she overtly discriminated against all men of the same ethnic background as her attacker. Meghann (a white woman) was the lone survivor who developed a dislike towards white men because her attacker was a white man. Similar to Jessica, Meghann was uncomfortable around men of her own racial group because a man of her own racial group was her attacker. Ultimately in my sample, sexual assault led to more intolerance of racial groups, especially for the racial group of the survivor’s attacker.

**Campus Emails about Crime and Race**

Out of my 28 interviewees, seven (25%) talked about campus email alerts from their schools warning people about sexual assaults on or near the campus. Of these interviewees, four (Lily, McKenzie, Meghann, and Molly) mentioned how the race of the offender was declared in the emails. All four of these women said that offenders were mainly portrayed as men of color. These women were 50% women of color and 50% white women. These interviewees were aware that white men were rapists, but that their schools were not focusing on white perpetrators. According to Patton and Snyder-Yuly
…the use of Blacks as convenient scapegoats for White crimes is not new; unfortunately, this historical trend is woven into current culture”. Three interviewees mentioned campus emails with warnings about sexual assault, but did not talk about the race of the offenders in the emails. Instead, they were critical of campus attempts at notification of these crimes. Specifically, they said that people do not receive the emails, they delete them without opening them, or, the advice in the email is unhelpful. These three interviewees were two white women and one Black woman (Malia, Becky, and Yolonda). In comparison to the interviewees who mentioned race in the emails, people who did not mention race of perpetrator in the emails were more likely to be white (67%).

The following are examples of women who noticed that sexual assault perpetrators were mainly portrayed as men of color in campus emails or noticed that when the perpetrators were white men, there was more silencing around those cases in order to protect the university. The intersection of race influenced men’s lives differently when pertaining to the threat of sexual assault. Lily (biracial) said:

…The perpetrator was described as an African American male, medium height, medium build, medium skin color, wearing dark clothes…I had friends in the Women’s Center who were like, “Well, here’s another email. Let’s see who this was.” (sarcasm) It was like, “Oh no! It’s John! The only Black guy on campus!” (sarcasm). So, it was, I felt like the crimes were very, it was a cookie cutter description of a perpetrator for any crime, and robbery, any sexual assault was the same person…Honestly, I know a ton of frat guys who are, who have fingers pointed at them. That’s not being reported…I have no idea of why it’s not happening. Because I know people who were assaulted in a fraternity and went to the Student Center, or like, to the Counseling Center. There is no [law or guidelines] for that response. It’s handled within the fraternity. It’s handled within the Greek system…I don’t know. They’re not discussed outside of [the fraternity] as far as I know. Which is really frustrating. So if it happened to me on a train, from a white guy from a fraternity, it probably would be known. If it happened to me in a frat guy’s bedroom, no one would know about it. That would not be
something that people are alerted against. I don’t know how they grapple with reporting through the Clery Act, but there’s a learning curve. [The offender] is always a campus outsider. Like, “An [city] resident was, gunshots were heard, an African American [city] resident was seen fleeing the scene.” And he must have been the one to fire it, because he’s just the one doing all the crimes. (Sarcasm.)

Molly (South Asian American) also brought up a recent rape case on her campus. She was very angry because of the way her school handled this incident involving a wealthy white offender. She believed that if the perpetrator had been a man of color, he would have been treated more harshly. Here, the intersections of race, class, and gender influenced Molly’s view about how her university reported the alleged attack. This is what Molly had to say about that case:

It was really hush hush. The way most of the students came to know was through the news. I remember my husband. He was away from home and he heard it on the news. This was like two days after it had happened. (Inaudible.) When a person gets her purse snatched, or a cell phone, there are emails going, right? What about somebody who was raped?...It was a white offender and it happened to two women. So it was really annoying. I remember, I was so angry about it. I was like, “I am not going to be at this university. This is like, really crazy. Who does that?” It was so hush hush...I don’t think my school is so much about the race aspect when they talk about the offender. Because that is usually how we discuss, right? But this one was kind of worse because yes. We came to know it was a white guy. Nothing about the perpetrator was ever talked about. And towards the end, the only message that my school gave was, “This is a personal matter.” So they are dealing with it. No. This is not a personal matter. Rape is never a personal matter. So that was kind of the only thing. And then the pictures came and there is this white guy…I’m sure that if it was a Black or brown guy, he would be absolutely, he would be deported by now. So obviously, I’m absolutely, absolutely sure that because it was a white guy from a wealthy family, maybe a Catholic, he got away with it.

Meghann (white) also discussed how Black men were depicted as the criminals on her campus. When asked who the offenders were typically portrayed as, this is how she answered: “…Most of the time a Black male, an outsider.”

Depicting the offenders as outsiders is important because the school can manage
the emotions of students and their parents by creating the feeling that students are safe at
the college or university and that the miscreants are not students who attend the school.
This puts everyone’s mind at ease and does not hurt student enrollment rates. According
to Sack (2012), colleges are worried about bad press and lawsuits linked to rape
complaints. They are concerned about donor discontent, and possible enrollment issues
(Tarrant 2010). Similarly, McKenzie (white) noticed that her campus also portrayed the
offenders as men of color in campus alerts about crime. She said:

…For the most part, if the person was an attacker of color, that was the only
defining trait that was given about them. Two, I feel like they worked really hard
to make people feel better. So they would send out this message saying that an
alleged assault or attack happened. And then a lot of times it would be followed
up with a message like,…“Everyone’s fine. There wasn’t an assault.” Or
“Everyone’s okay. Don’t worry about it.” It made me feel like the survivor had
been strong-armed into receding her statement.

Three interviewees also mentioned campus emails and alerts about crime, but did not
mention the race of the offender. Though these interviewees were more likely to be white
women (67%), there was also one African American (33%). They were all in agreement
that these emails or alerts were either useless or were even political attempts at feigning a
concern about these crimes. They felt that, in actuality, their schools mainly covered up
these offenses. According to USA Today, there is a “culture of secrecy” on university
campuses in America when concerning sexual assault cases. Campus judiciary systems
are difficult to navigate and some rape survivors are threatened with disciplinary action if
they talk about the crime (Thomas 2009). Yolonda stated:

I think [my school] feels like [rape is] a bad thing, but. I feel like they kind of try
to hide it. I’ve gotten some emails, or, like, I don’t know what they send, um,
letting people know about, like, sexual assault or things like that, or, some girl got
sexually assaulted in the parking lot and things like that and I’m just like, “Not
everyone checks their email and like, where’s the?” It’s like, “Yeah! You’re
telling me, but not everyone checks their email.” For the most part, I use it when I’m at school.

When asked about the campus alert emails, Becky said:

It was different [offenders] and it wasn’t only about offenders. It was like there was a robbery. “Oh! Watch out.” Someone fell on the train, or something like that. [Their advice was] to always walk with a friend. Or, yeah. Which isn’t as easy as it sounds though.

Malia also did not mention the depiction of the offender as a problem with campus alerts, but she still does not find them useful. She said:

…Students will get an email if there was reported sexual assault or a misdemeanor of some type but I don’t know how they handle it…[Emails] will say something like “This is an email from [campus] police. There was a reported forced fondling at one in the morning on Saturday. If you have any information, contact us. We’re just letting you know this happened.” People will make fun of it for it’s wording or they’re just delete it without even opening it.

Ultimately, both interviewees of color and white women noticed that campus email alerts disproportionately depicted men of color as the offenders. While white men were depicted as offenders in some campus alerts, survivors thought that they did not get the same attention in these alerts as men of color. For example, while Lily knew of cases on her campus where white fraternity members were under investigation for rape, those cases did not make it to the campus e-mail alert system. Students were not notified about these cases, but they were notified when the attacker was a man of color who was not a student. This is problematic when white men are the rapists. Although rape is a problem no matter what the race of the offender, it is a concern that to the women in my sample, men of color were depicted as violent criminals while white men were not. This may make potential victims racially profile men of color on campus, which can leave potential victims unprotected around white offenders, and it can lead to harassment of law-abiding
men of color. Women of color also noted how within campus crime alerts, white men who were offenders got off easier for the crime than men of color. This may make women who are raped by white men feel like there is no point in reporting the crime because the offender may be more protected by the school. Also, interviewees were in agreement that campus emails and alerts about campus crime were not useful. Because students do not take these notifications seriously, colleges and universities need to brainstorm more effective ways to discuss this dangerous and pervasive crime with students.

**Race and Punishment**

There was some consistency when comparing who the sexual assault offenders were in campus emails and alerts to who was actually prosecuted in these 28 specific cases. Schools tended to portray attackers as black men and black men were also more likely to be convicted in these cases. Historically, there has been a stereotype of the violent, brutal, African American rapist who stole the innocence of white women. This stereotype was used to justify the lynching of black men (Wingfield 2007:198). According to Brook (2008:5-16), today people of color make up almost ¾ of the prison population but only ¼ of the American population. The average sentence for black Americans is about ¼ longer than for white miscreants. This is not due to racially unbiased practices of controlling crime. New sentencing guidelines, including mandatory minimum sentences, have contributed to racial inequality in sentencing. Specifically, out of all of the interviewees, 19 of the 28 (68%) contacted the police. Seven of the 19 (37%) did so on their own accord. Only four out of 19 (21%) saw the offender punished in some way. Three of these punished offenders were Black and one was Middle Eastern. None were White. The four
cases consisted of the following racial combinations of offender and victim: two were
Black offender: Black victim, one was Black offender: White victim, and one was Middle
Eastern offender: White victim. These data are not surprising given the history of
incarceration of men of color compared with white men in America. It is again
problematic because within my sample, white men are disproportionately getting away
with rape and survivors are not seeing justice. Potential victims are also not being
protected. These numbers not only teach men and boys that women are disposable, but
these numbers teach white men that they are invincible when it comes to violating
women’s bodies and lives.

The four offenders in my sample were punished in a few different ways. One
African American offender received 18 years in prison. Lonsway and colleagues (2012)
note that only 0.35% of rapes committed against women will be reported, prosecuted, and
result in an incarceration. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 1992, the
average prisoner who was incarcerated for rape was sentenced to 117 months in prison,
but only served 65 months of that sentence. For sexual assault, the average sentence was
72 months, with 35 months served (Greenfeld 1995:1). The offender who received 18
years in my sample was a repeat offender and was caught in the act of his offense by
police, which is why he was given an unusually long sentence. A second African
American offender was also convicted and received three years of probation. A third
African American offender was tried by the university justice system for raping a white
woman. He was expelled from school. Lastly, a Middle Eastern offender who raped a
white woman had a case that ended in a settlement. Both the victim and offender are not
legally allowed to talk about the case when including each other’s names. He paid no fine
and served no time in jail or prison. Overall, in my sample, white offenders had a 100% chance of receiving no sanction for sexual assault, while black offenders had a 50% chance of receiving no sanction. Hispanic offenders also had a 100% chance of walking away free. Asians had a 75% chance of receiving no punishment. Statistics like these show survivors that the system may not work in his or her favor and that if the offender is not a person of color, the chances are that the defendant will not be punished for the crime.

Violence and Culture

Twelve (43%) interviewees discussed violence and culture. The majority of these interviewees were white (33%, specifically McKenzie, Ashley, Treasure, and Juliet), followed by black (17%, specifically Jessica and Erica), then Asian (17%, specifically Nina and Molly), then Hispanic (17%, specifically Bella and Rose), and finally multiracial (17%, specifically Brian and Elise). Out of all of these interviewees, everyone supported the idea that violence was linked to culture aside from Molly. She vehemently opposed the idea that rape was anyone’s culture. These discussions about culture and violence came from white women more than any other racial group. The way in which white women discussed culture and violence was not related to their racial group, but to a violent rape culture that exists in America. When women of color talked about culture and violence, they referred to a racial or ethnic group. This may be because of white privilege and the fact that whites live in a society in which they do not have to identify as people with a race. According to Frankenberg (1993), individuals often fail to perceive “white” as a race.

Some of the white survivors discussed the issues of culture but it was in terms of
gender rather than race. Their words emphasize the different ways culture is viewed in regard to rape. McKenzie said:

The previous director of our student program who runs orientation week was really awesome and commissioned two artists to work with students to create a really cool play. Just talking about rape culture on campus and you know, flipping the conversation so that it is about personal accountability rather than protecting victims, or whatever.

For this section on rape culture, I include the voices of feminists and anti-violence activists from popular culture sources along with academic literature. I did this because these sources closely mimicked the language and viewpoints of the feminist activist survivors who I interviewed and they also extensively covered some of the activist work that the survivors in my study were participating in.

According to feminist, anti-violence activist, and writer Shannon Ridgway (2014), we understand culture to mean ways of life that people engage in together as a society. We have a difficult time linking rape to culture. After all, America does not outwardly encourage rape. We do not all come together to engage in sexual violence as a society (Ridgway 2014). To better understand the term, we need to comprehend that a group or society does not need to outwardly promote rape in order for there to be a rape culture, although that can be the case (Ridgway 2014). Rape culture is all about cultural practices that we often take part in as a society, which justify or allow sexual violence (Ridgway 2014). It is the way we all think about rape (Ridgway 2014). It is ignoring, trivializing, normalizing, or even joking about sexual violence (Ridgway 2014). Examples of rape culture pervade our society not only individually, but also structurally and through our everyday institutions (Ridgway 2014).

According to Ritzer and colleagues (2011:493), rape culture links rape with
gender roles in society. From generation to generation, we pass down beliefs about what it means to be male and female. Rape is both the problem of a victim and a culturally and socially created issue. It comes about not only because of behaviors and attitudes, but also because of the institutions that support these actions and beliefs. It thrives on a social structure based on gender inequality and allows men to have the power to abuse women both intentionally and unintentionally. Women are taught to limit themselves in order to control violent men.

Rape culture occurs within a place in which sexual violence is normal. People are taught not to be raped, but they are not taught to not rape (Broderick, Testa, and Nigatu 2014). While men are trained to be aggressive in order to get what they desire, women are trained to be passive and agreeable (Pearson 2000). A study of the rape culture done by the UC Davis found: “The high incidence of rape in this country is a result of the power imbalance between men and women. Women are expected to assume a subordinate relationship to men. Consequently rape can be seen as a logical extension of the typical interactions between men and women” (Pearson 2000). Furthermore, our culture praises men’s violence through war and sports and it presents objectified female bodies to men through pornography, Hollywood movies, and strip clubs (Jensen, 2014). In a rape culture, there is an attitude that men are entitled to women’s bodies and when a woman is the survivor of a man’s violence, she probably deserved it (Lopatto 2014). A rape culture is one in which victims are blamed for being assaulted (Maxwell 2014). Even though most men are not rapists, in our rape culture, there are men who do not rape but who would be willing to do so if guaranteed no punishment. Male bystanders do not intervene when another man rapes. In a rape culture, men who are not rapists find the
idea of forced sex sexually arousing (Jensen 2014). Only in a rape culture could one in six women be stalked, one in four experience violence from an intimate, and one in five be raped in her lifetime (Lopatto 2014). According to Pearson, “Rape is endemic because it pervades every aspect of our complex social structure. In order to vaccinate against it, we would have to change many parts of society that people are fully comfortable with and accepting of.”

The following are a few examples of the rape culture:

Table 4. Examples of Rape Culture

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A judge sentenced a 50-year-old man to 30 days in jail for raping a 14-year-old girl (who later committed suicide) and defended his decision based on his view that the girl was “older than her chronological age” (Ridgway 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Supporting athletes who rape by calling their victims “career-destroyers” (Ridgway 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rapists can legally sue victims in 31 states for child custody if the attack ends in a pregnancy (Maxwell 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Colleges are more worried about getting sued by alleged attackers than in supporting victims (Maxwell 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>According to Broderick, Testa, and Nigatu (2014): Rape culture is telling girls and women to be careful about what you wear, how you wear it, how you carry yourself, where you walk, when you walk there, with whom you walk, whom you trust, what you do, where you do it, with whom you do it, what you drink, how much you drink, whether you make eye contact, if you’re alone, if you’re with a stranger, if you’re in a group, if you’re in a group of strangers, if it’s dark, if the area is unfamiliar, if you’re carrying something, how you carry it, what kind of shoes you’re wearing in case you have to run, what kind of purse you carry, what jewelry you wear, what time it is, what street it is, what environment it is, how many people you sleep with, what kind of people you sleep with, who your friends are, to whom you give your number, who’s around when the delivery guy comes, to get an apartment where you can see who’s at the door before they can see you, to check before you open the door to the delivery guy, to own a dog or a dog-sound-making machine, to get a roommate, to take self-defense, to always be alert always pay attention always watch your back always be aware of your surroundings and never let your guard down for a moment lest you be sexually assaulted and if you are and didn’t follow all the rules it’s your fault.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ashley (also white) discussed rape culture:
...There should be no shame involved in being attacked. No matter what you’re wearing, or how drunk, or on drugs you were that night, there’s no, there’s nothing that should have been. It shouldn’t be like that. That shouldn’t be the warnings that they give out. I don’t think that they should focus on those kinds of things. I think that they should focus more on the rape culture that we have created by making it such a joke and also making women such objects. It’s like, once they dress a certain way, they are nothing. Men look at them and they are just not women anymore. They’re just something they want to have…

Treasure (white) was raped right after a SlutWalk protest. SlutWalk is a march throughout cities to protest the comment that a Toronto police officer made about rape victims. The officer, Michael Sanguinetti, said that women, “should avoid dressing like sluts in order to not be victimized.” Outraged over this insensitive remark, young women created Slutwalk, in which women (and some men) dress in provocative clothing in order to protest victim blaming and rape culture (Gibson 2011). This was Treasure’s view on SlutWalk and the rape culture after she was sexually assaulted:

Yeah. And I think for a while there, I partially blamed, not blamed SlutWalk at all, but I was wearing a short dress because I was like, “My body is mine!” And then, that happened, that night I was wearing it. I think partially, I was like, “You know what? I know that Slutwalk’s philosophy is real and that’s true, but I don’t think, I don’t trust society enough to have caught up with it. It doesn’t matter…It still puts us in danger. I think for a while, I just kind of gave up on that.

Juliet (white) also discussed rape culture without specifically naming it. She argued that there is a problem of masculinity in American culture and that we need to educate men about nonviolence.

These four white interviewees discussed a rape culture that does not necessarily focus on their race or ethnicity, but on gender and masculinity in American culture. They all noted how women are victims of men’s power and how that is the issue that needs to be tackled. While white women see gender as the problem in rape cases, women of color focus more on race and ethnicity.
Jessica and Erica are black and both noted how culture influenced how they responded to being sexually assaulted. Jessica talked about how she met her attacker:

I went to a party. The Black community tends to throw a lot of parties the week the freshmen come because they want to get to know you. Show you, you know, the Black culture on campus. I went to this party and uh, I saw him there and he uh, I talked to him at the activities fair and I thought that he was cute. And I was like, “I need to get to know this guy better.”

“Like their white peers, black students are generally more likely to associate with coethnics than with classmates from other racial or ethnic backgrounds” (Espenshade and Radford 2009:184). Because Jessica was a racial minority at a mainly non-black university, people in her racial group tended to spend time together. Because of this racial isolation, Jessica had a difficult time telling other African Americans about her assault because there was such a small African American community on her campus. Jessica said:

And also, it’s so small. The black community is so small. If you get sexually assaulted by someone in the community, you can’t tell people, because they know who it is. And they might be friends with that person, so.

According to Brunson and Miller (2006:531), policing strategies in poor black communities can harm African American residents by subjecting them to disproportionate surveillance and stops, discourteous treatment, brutality, and less protection. Erica talked about her neighborhood culture and how the intersections of race and class affect her life. In her impoverished African American community, the norm was to never call the police. People who did so were scorned. Crenshaw (1991:1257) notes that women of color are tentative about calling police for help in violent situations because people of color tend to be unwilling to subject their private lives to examination by a justice system that has been antagonistic towards them. Erica said:
I never called the police because where I come from, it’s discouraged…So there is this, I guess you want to call it, a limerick. “Snitches are bitches.” So you don’t snitch. Ever. You take care of whatever you have to and plus, when you call the police in my neighborhood, they never come. They don’t come until it’s too late, so what’s the point of calling?

Jessica and Erica differ in their discussion of culture when compared to white survivors. For example, because of racial isolation on Jessica’s campus, when a Black man assaulted her, she felt silenced after the attack. She feared losing her good reputation in the small black campus community. Some controlling images of black women include the asexual mammy, the castrating matriarch, and the unfit mother, all of which depict black women as falling short of appropriate womanhood (Collins cited in Wingfield 2007:198). They are not only isolated because their race is in the minority on campus compared whites, but they could also face rejection by peers in their racial group who are friends with the African American rapist. Erica’s case was also affected because of her neighborhood culture. Because it was the norm to never ask the authorities for help, Erica was alone when it came to dealing with her victimization.

The literature on religion and sexual assault is focused on sexual abuse within the church, and there is not extensive information on how religion helps sexual assault survivors. There is a gap in the existing literature on sexual assault survivors and religious coping (Ahrens et al. 2010:1242). The few published studies that exist acknowledge that religion does help survivors. According to Chang, Skinner, and Boehmmer (2001), frequent religious service attendance helps to decrease the mental health and depression problems that female veterans experienced after victimization (Chang et al. 2001:77). Ahrens and colleagues also note that using religion to cope is correlated with better mental health and less depression in sexual assault survivors (Ahrens et al.
When Hispanic women in my sample talked about culture, they mentioned the intersections of gender and religion. There is a relationship between violence and religion and this can take the form of privilege, such as the privilege men have over women, religious leaders have over their followers, and the powerful have over the subjected (Diez De Velasco 2005:87). For example, Bella emphasized that religious elders and church leaders were to always be given respect. This became problematic when an older religious leader became Bella’s abuser. Bella talked about how the intersections of age, religion, ethnicity, and gender influenced her life:

…They were my superiors. I gave them the respect of my elders. Since the family knew them and they knew me since a little girl, I didn’t think anything of it…How I was brought up. Respect your, anybody older than you, plus ten. (She laughs.) Is your superior. (She laughs.)…Well, the church leaders, you have to respect them because, at the end of the day, they can report you to the pastor and you would have to be put on discipline and you would have to do whatever the action would be for your punishment…[Women were supposed] to be submissive. You know? I think, maybe that’s why some of that happened. Maybe? I don’t know.

Because Bella was a young girl, she was in an unequal power relationship with her older, male, religious leader abusers. In her culture, she was to be submissive to these more powerful people and this cultural viewpoint gave Bella little control over her victimization.

Rose also discussed how Hispanic women are treated worse than men in her culture. She said:

He comes from a culture where men are very much in control. I come from a culture like that myself. I think that’s why he did it. I think that he did it and felt no remorse for such a long time because in his culture, that is how they are raised. But I do think, I know white people that get assaulted by other white people, so I don’t know if, you know, I can say like, “It’s because I was Mexican.” I don’t
think that at all. It has nothing to do with the victim and everything to do with the predator…It has everything to do with gender. This goes hand in hand. I guess I shouldn’t say race doesn’t matter because it does matter. When you come from a culture where being masculine is very important, then everything you do must be masculine. Having that masculine control. So what do you do? You go and rape a woman… More than anything, I just think that, it’s just the person, the individual, the culture that they are being raised in. Like I said. That does have a huge impact…You go to Mexico and a woman claims rape, she is almost immediately laughed at. Like, “That didn’t happen.” Woman are not heard at all. At all. So there, gender definitely makes a difference.

In my sample, Hispanic women differed from white women when talking about sexual assault and culture because white women tend to talk about rape culture overall. They did not mention race or ethnicity in relation to rape, but instead focus more on problems with American masculinity. In comparison, the Black women in my sample, talk about racial culture and how that affects their sexual assault cases. Hispanic women in my sample also differed from white and African American women because they focused on gender, ethnicity and religion in relation to their cases.

Brian and Elise were multiracial. Brian was Mexican and Lebanese and Elise was Turkish, Romanian, and Greek. According to Love (1998), institutions such as schools and the Catholic Church have treated LGB people as invisible, or even as sinners or persons with disorders. Brian talked about how the intersections of gender, religion, and sexual orientation influenced his sexual assault case:

...Sexuality and Catholicism isn’t even talked about. If you look at just the trajectory and the history of how Catholic schools and Catholicism has dealt with sexual violence, it’s terrible. So, in an all guy school, to come back and be like, “I was assaulted,” I think at most they would be like, “Keep it hush hush,” and treat me as a troubled child. That’s kind of what they treated me like already because I was coming to school, towards the end, with black eyes and bruises. I was missing like, five days at a time because my mom was calling me out and they didn’t want to deal with it. What they were concerned about was collecting the money, because my mom had stopped paying tuition…
As a gay man, Brian’s church and Catholic school did not accept him, which in turn made dealing with his case even more difficult.

Elise was an immigrant from Greece. She had come to the United States to teach at a prestigious Midwestern university. When she was raped at that school, her immigrant status affected her. She was affected by and experienced culture shock from new American norms. Elise said:

Before 2003, I was living in China and I was going to school there. I don’t know man. It was just a little bit different. Like, I would never think that it would end up like that, in other words. In China, I would invite my classmates. I don’t have to idealize that because it wasn’t ideal there either. It wasn’t like here that my classmates would come to my dorm and they would invite me out to eat. We would be friends or share the cafeteria. Stuff like that, you know. Maybe we would watch a movie in the dorm but it wasn’t like really ending up in that sexual activity.

Cultural expectations influenced both Brian and Elise’s cases. Brian knew he could not seek help from the Catholic Church after his victimization, because he knew his Catholic school would not accept his sexual orientation. Elsie was influenced by American culture because she did not understand the norms of her new home. She noted that America was more sexualized and her innocent actions of spending time with men were mistaken as invitations for sexual advances.

Last, Nina and Molly discussed culture and sexual assault. Nina was an East Indian American. She noted how within her culture, her parents did not approve of her fraternizing with men. When a male friend raped her, she could not tell her parents about what happened. According to Manohar (2008:571), for first generation Indians, even dating is viewed as bad behavior, or as an acceptance of American culture over the ethnic one. Second generation Indians are discouraged from dating. Nina said:
Within my culture, the way that I’ve been raised and I perceive it, I feel like usually any type of assault or any difficulty that a woman endures as a result of her being a female, sexually wise, is usually her fault. Um, and I, at all costs did not want my parents to know what happened because they would have blamed me for putting myself in that position… If my, if a guy is staring at me and I’m wearing a fully covered Indian outfit that is very long and not showy, [my mother will] ask me to pull my coat tighter or cover up even my face or something crazy. The blame is always directed at the victim…I knew that, as far as, it was a totally different situation that when a girl knows that something that is happening is wrong and she has recourse. She can talk about it to her family and friends and people believe her. I definitely knew, and it was weird, I didn’t know where, until I’m talking about it now, I didn’t know where that apprehension of discussion came from. But I just remember, “You don’t talk about that. You don’t say anything. You shouldn’t have dot, dot dot.” Fill in the blank. Whatever you can think of.

Because of Nina’s culture, she was further silenced after the attack. She did not have her family to turn to because she would have been blamed for her victimization. Because of the silencing around any kind of sexual encounter with a man, consensual or forced, Nina knew that she would not have emotional support from family after she was raped. Ultimately, according to Nina, her parent’s cultural beliefs about women and sexuality left her very alone when she could have used the support.

The culture of violence theory by Ferracuti and Wolfgang (1967) argues that in diverse societies, subgroups develop their own norms in opposition to the mainstream society. These norms justify physical force and violence. If a person’s status is challenged, he or she is to resort to violence because backing down in the face of a challenge is perceived as weak. According to Ferracuti and Wolfgang (1967), violent subcultures are most prevalent in isolated, lower-income, masculine communities.

Scholars debate whether there is a culture of violence that is passed down from generation or whether violence is structural and specifically linked to inequality and poverty (Lee et al. 2007:254). For example, when looking at southern violence in the
U.S., Hackney (1969) and Gastil (1971) argue that long before the Civil War, there were high rates of murder in the south because of cultural values that encouraged using violence to solve disputes. People used violence to respond to threats of honor or family. These values were passed down from generation to generation and remained high even after the economy of the south became stronger. The opposing side, such as Loftin and Hill (1974) said that there were structural explanations for the high violence rates in the south. They argued that structural factors, especially impoverishment and inequality led to higher homicide rates (Lee et al. 2007:253-254.)

In contrast to Nina’s view, Molly (a South Asian American) did not use the idea of culture to explain her sexual assault. Molly was under the assumption, like Loftin and Hill, that violence was not passed down from generation to generation, but was instead due to an unequal social structure. This is what Molly had to say about how being a woman of color mattered in her case:

I think it would matter because they would try to make it a cultural thing. Like, this is a cultural thing. I mean, a lot of times, as a woman of color myself, I have gotten really annoyed with people who use the word, “Culture.” It’s like an excuse. It’s not, things like rape; it’s not anybody’s culture. So don’t try to say that, or this happened let them do it. They don’t know how to deal with it in their culture, or things like that. I think, um, intersections do matter. How women, like, depending on the race of the person, victim. It’s like with the gender thing. I’m sure that if it were a gay guy or something, they would have totally hushed that up. They would absolutely not talk about it.

In Molly’s (South Asian American) view, nobody wants to live in a violent world. Violence is not cultural. Though she did assert that gay men, due to the intersections of sexual orientation and gender, may be silenced if they are victimized, this is because of the stigma that gay men face on a daily basis. Gay male rape survivors’ silence is due to the structures in society that keep gay men unequal. Molly differs from Nina who focused
on the acceptance of violence as a cultural issue. Nina (Asian, East Indian) argued that being Indian would have made her rape case more difficult because culturally, her parents would have blamed her for the attack. Nina knew that Indian women who were attacked get blamed for the rape. These two cases are telling because both Nina and Molly were Asian women, yet both had opposing views on culture and rape. While Nina used culture as a reason why she was silenced after her attack, Molly dismissed culture as a reason and instead focused on inequality as a structural issue as to why some survivors face extra barriers after an assault.

After completing this research, I am in agreement with Molly that culture should not be used to justify violence in communities of color. What is happening is that survivors of color acknowledge their race and ethnicity, while I have shown how whites rarely do so. Both groups discussed culture and how it is related to violence, but because of the invisibility of whiteness in the lives of the privileged, white survivors talked about a rape culture that is focused on gender, while race is central to the lives of survivors of color. Therefore, race is more noticeable in their conversations about sexual assault and culture. Overall though, sexual violence is prevalent in America, across racial and ethnic groups. This is not to say that race and ethnicity do not matter in the cases of these survivors, but rather, Ferracuti and Wolfgang’s (1967) culture of violence theory needs to take into account the invisibility of whiteness and the high rape rates across racial groups to realize that America is a very violent across all racial and ethnic groups. A culture of violence approach to crime causation only silences survivors of color and ignores that white crime victims also mention culture as a factor in their victimizations. In other words, the culture of violence theory is not helpful when it essentially blames and
normalizes violence in communities of color without acknowledging that white survivors also recognize cultural issues in their sexual assault cases. According to Sokoloff (2008:158), “…culture becomes a framework used by white society that pre-empts both racism and sexism thereby preventing women of color and immigrants from talking about specificities of cultural experiences without risking a denial of the realities of violence, racism and sexism in [their] lives”. Survivors of color should be allowed to mention how their culture influences their victimization cases differently than whites, without having their entire racial or ethnic group criticized for being violent.

Conclusion
In this chapter, I discussed race and ethnicity as well as other intersections to see how these play a role in sexual assault cases. Specifically, when survivors of color in my sample talked about race and/or ethnicity, they talked about how race and ethnicity were central to their sexual assault cases while white survivors made references to race in rape cases in general or mentioned race in terms of how it affected people of color. In other words, being white did not make their rape cases more difficult for them. For example, being Black was central to Jessica’s case because reporting her attack by a black student would have isolated her not only in the predominantly white campus community, but also within the smaller black community. The same was not true for McKenzie who was white. Advocates and therapists who work one-on-one with survivors must understand a diverse array of cultures, races, and ethnicities and other intersections in order to assist a variety of survivors who are facing different obstacles after the crime. Survivors want to be understood and that starts with supporters treating every case as differently as the survivor who comes before them. It is only then that survivors can get the help that they
need and create a situation where staff and advocates can decrease the violence that many survivors carry out after they are assaulted.

Next, when survivors had a dislike towards men of a specific racial or ethnic group, it was the same group that their victimizers came from. This was true for white men and men of color, and even when the attacker was the same racial or ethnic group as the survivor. In that latter scenario, the survivor started to dislike her own race or ethnicity and even herself. Sexual assault also led to more discrimination of racial groups, especially for the racial group of the survivor’s attacker. Though I do not have a before and after sample to measure the different levels of intolerance towards the offenders’ racial or ethnic group, survivors (Rose and Meghann specifically) mentioned how animosity towards the offenders’ group was directly related to the crime. For example, Rose went as far as refusing to wait on customers of the same ethnic background as her attacker when at work. She also used racial epithets and spewed hateful words towards an innocent neighbor, merely because he was the same sex and ethnicity as her attacker.

While rape may lead to more discrimination in society, it may also have the opposite outcome. For example, when Meghann was raped by a white man, she became more open minded about dating men of color. Before the attack, she only dated white men. After she was raped, she discriminated against white men, refusing to date them because they made her feel unsafe and they reminded her of her white attacker. These findings are important because understanding rape and not only dealing with the after effects, but preventing rape altogether, may lead to less discrimination and violence towards innocent people.

Third, in my sample, both interviewees of color and white women noticed that campus email alerts disproportionately depicted men of color as sexual assault offenders.
Women of color also noted how white men who were offenders were less implicated for these crimes than men of color in terms of the posted alerts. A focus on men of color neglects white offenders and keeps victims less safe. This system unfairly labels black men as violent, when this is not the case. Furthermore, survivors were in agreement that these emails or alerts were either useless or were even political attempts at feigning a concern about these crimes. While many schools use campus alerts and emails as their prime source of warning students about potential danger, students merely delete these warnings or do not take them seriously. This being the case, administrators need to develop more useful ways to talk to students about these violent crimes.

Next, when looking at campus emails and alerts about who the sexual assault offenders were portrayed as in comparison to who was actually prosecuted in these 28 specific cases, there was some consistency. While schools in my sample tended to warn students about rapes by Black men more often than rapes by white men, black men were also more likely to be convicted. Specifically, only four out of 19 cases that were reported (21%) saw the offender punished in some way. Three of these punished offenders were Black and one was Middle Eastern. None were White. It is again problematic because white men are disproportionately getting away with rape and survivors are not seeing justice. Potential victims are also not being protected. These numbers not only teach men and boys that women are disposable, but these numbers specifically teach white men that they are invincible when it comes to violating women’s bodies and lives. It also teaches survivors that there is no use in reporting a sexual assault, especially if the offender is a white male.

Last, 43% (12 of 28) of interviewees discussed violence and culture. Of the
interviewees who linked rape to culture in some way, the majority were white (33%, specifically McKenzie, Ashley, Treasure, and Juliet), followed by black (17%, specifically Jessica and Erica), then Asian (17%, specifically Nina and Molly), then Hispanic (17%, specifically Bella and Rose), and finally multiracial (17%, specifically Brian and Elise). The way in which white women discussed culture and violence was not related to their racial or ethnic group, but to a violent rape culture and masculinity that exists in America. When women of color talked about culture and violence, they referred to a racial, ethnic group, or religion as a barrier to getting help. This may be because of white privilege and the fact that whites live in a society in which they do not have to identify as people with a race. According to Frankenberg (1993), individuals often fail to perceive “white” as a race. Out of these twelve interviewees, everyone supported the idea that violence was linked to culture (92%) aside from Molly (8%). These findings are important because again, advocates and therapists need to understand how different cultures affect different survivors, but they need to do so without labeling communities of color as the problem while ignoring sexual assault among whites. Acknowledging differences is important. For example, Nina could not tell her family about being raped by a black man because her family was prejudiced against African American men. This was not the same as Brian’s isolation at his predominantly Black school because Brian was multiracial and gay and did not feel like his crime-ridden school would make possible understanding either his ethnicity or his sexuality. Survivors’ specific intersections affect their cases very differently.

Above all, sexual assault survivors are not all the same and the advocates, therapists, and social workers who assist them must understand their varying intersections
and concerns for healing after an attack. In order for change to begin, survivors, just like all people, must be understood, and their differences accepted and embraced. As Susan B. Anthony said: “We ask justice, we ask equality, we ask that all the civil and political rights that belong to citizens of the United States, be guaranteed to us and our daughters forever” (Dismore 2012). Furthermore, we need justice not only for our daughters, but for our sons, both in acknowledging that they can be victims, and also discouraging violent masculinity. We need to pay exceptional attention to intersections such as race and ethnicity as well, in order to understand the varying concerns that survivors are confronted with after an assault.
CHAPTER FOUR

HOW PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER INFLUENCE SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES

This chapter rejects biological essentialism and instead examines gender as something that is produced in interactions. According to West and Zimmerman (1987:130-131), every day we do gender and this is created through interaction. Doing gender means creating differences between men and women and these differences are not natural or biological (West and Zimmerman 1987:137). “Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro political activities that can cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine “natures”” (West and Zimmerman 1987:126). When we “do gender” we may not live up to the feminine or masculine expectations that is normative to our society (West and Zimmerman 1987:136).

Of course, gender is a significant issue in sexual assault cases and sexual assault survivors are disproportionately women. Common stereotypes about women being emotional, weak, uncertain, and in need of protection help to emphasize women’s greater vulnerability. Moreover, even today, chaste women were more respected than women who engage in sexual activity. According to Cotter and colleagues, there was a trend in the 1970s and 1980s towards less traditional gender roles, but there have only been small changes since the middle 1990s. Specifically, in 1994, there was an egalitarian peak, but then gender egalitarianism fell until around 2000. These changing attitudes on gender
roles likely had to do with antifeminist backlash in popular culture. It is also the result of “egalitarian essentialism.” This is a cultural frame that blends the ideas of feminist equality with motherhood roles that are traditional (Cotter, Hermsen, and Vannman 2011). Furthermore, a review of thirty published studies since 1980 found that sexual double standards still exist for women and men (Crawford 2003:13). In other words, despite the idea of growing equality for women that survivors identify with, they are still fighting “old fashioned” gender stereotypes that affect their cases and their lives.

This chapter is important because it focuses on the words of sexual assault survivors and examines what they want. Instead of studying sexual assault through specialists who work with them (Payne 2007, Maier 2013), this dissertation assesses the thoughts and experiences of people most affected by these crimes.

Of the 28 interviewees in this study, only three (Rose, Brian, and Molly) were primarily happy with how confidants responded when told about the sexual assault. The other 25 had more disappointing experiences. Fourteen survivors (Joelle, Jessica, Natasha, Nina, Anabel, McKenzie, Erin, Beth, Eva, Becky, Treasure, Elise, Kat, Anyah) had equally positive and negative outcomes when confiding in others and eleven (Yolonda, Lily, Jenny, Polly, Ashley, Bella, Erica, Kim, Meghann, Malia, Juliet) had primarily negative reactions from people they trusted with their stories. Specifically, women discuss how they were forced into roles that they did not identify with. They were deemed liars who are sexually promiscuous. They were angry about being objectified. They were seen as weak people in need of care even when they identified with strength and did not want assistance. In other words, popular understandings about sexual assault stripped survivors of agency. Through this process of rejecting traditional gender roles,
survivors reclaimed the power and agency that they lost during the attack. Ultimately, acts of rejecting traditional gender roles through verbal assertiveness and advocating for change helped women to grow from victims into survivors while their use of violence as a rejection of traditional gender roles complicated their lives.

**Liars**

‘For as she is a liar by nature, so in her speech she stings while she delights us. Wherefore her voice is like the song of the Sirens, who with their sweet melody entice the passers-by and kill them’ (Kramer and Sprenger, 1486, translated by Summers, 1971:46, cited in Jordan 2004:31).

In my study I found that after men raped women, the victims’ honesty was scrutinized. Joelle, Yolonda, Jessica, Lily, Nina, Anabel, Erin, Beth, Jenny, Ashley, Becky, Bella, Rose, Kim, Meghann, Elise, Kat, Anyah, Malia, and Juliet all struggled with being labeled as dishonest due to the crime. This constitutes 20 out of 28 survivors in my sample, or 71% of them. In this study, survivors were labeled not only by peers, but also school deans, police, their families, and church leaders. These people, often their superiors, made survivors question themselves. The following are some examples of survivors being labeled as dishonest.

Jenny said:

… I was like, “I want to leave.” We were walking out. By the door, him, and some of the guys upstairs, they were laughing. He was making fun of [the attack]. Yeah, he obviously had to know me because he was like, “She’s the girl. She claims that I raped her.” They were all like, “What?! Ha ha bro! That’s ridiculous.” And I just left…

It was also common for peers to say that the survivor made the story up in order to get attention. Jessica said:
People [were] already started taking sides when I was sitting in the room crying. Some guy was like; “She is just doing this for attention.” I was like, “Really!? No.” So it was like, I don’t want to have to deal with that, and everyone calling me a liar. And my brain was crazy at the time…

Sanday (2007) found that young men in fraternities were loyal to their brothers after an accusation of rape and they made the victim out to be a liar. Lily said:

…A lot of people took my side or could understand my side, but there was also a lot from the fraternity, that I heard, any guys that knew of the story or knew him were like, “Oh. Well she’s just making it up. It’s a load of shit. I don’t know why she would say that. She’s crazy or whatever. She wants attention.” So, I heard that a lot. Not directly to my face but I heard it through people who were in fraternities.

Recall from chapter one the distrust between school officials and sexual assault survivors and the useless aid that many survivors are receiving. Despite the implementation of Title IX and the Clery Act, one of the college administrators who was responsible for responding to the incident involving one of the survivors in my sample did not handle this sexual assault case well. This dean, with power over the survivor, made her life after the sexual assault even more difficult. Joelle said:

…She did hear me out because she did say to me, the dean, originally, “I’m sorry to hear that,” but then the response to it. I mean it was almost like she heard me, but she didn’t necessarily believe me to the extent that there was also then action being taken…I think she heard me, but I don’t think she believed me.

While peers made survivors’ lives difficult by openly blaming them for the attacks, this school administrator tried to dismiss the problem. In both cases, survivors were left unsupported and alone.

Police officers also were critical of sexual assault survivors. They followed the approach that 1. If she is deceptive about one thing, she is deceptive about everything. 2. She did not act like your typical rape victim; therefore, she is a liar.
The following are examples where the victim did not act like the police believed rape victims should act. In Lily’s case, she was an advocate for rape survivors and here she discussed how a police officer talked about a survivor who was underage drinking:

… I’ve had some that are just like, “She’s wearing a 21 year old bracelet, she’s 19. We’re not going to investigate because she was underage drinking.” … They’re like, “We don’t get it. We don’t know why she’s lying. She might be lying about everything so we’re not going to move forward because we can’t trust her. She’s not honest.” Even though she’s got marks on her body and, a friend brought her in. It’s really frustrating… You try really hard to not let it be evident on your face. But it is sometimes very difficult…

In Becky’s case, the offender used a fake name and repeated a fake address throughout the night in order to confuse Becky after the crime. When police were interviewing her after the assault, she continued to call the offender his fake name out of habit. The police found her to be deceptive because of this. Becky said:

… They were saying I lied was because his name wasn’t right. The address that I gave them and when they went there they were like, “There’s no building here.” I was like, “That’s the address that he gave me.” The hospital did not test me for the date rape drug. There was a point in the hospital that they asked to look at my phone. I didn’t have it, but they wound up finding it in my stuff. They were like, “You lied about your phone.” I was like, “Well, I had a million other things on my mind. I wasn’t thinking about my phone.”

Aside from criminal justice professionals dismissing cases because they believed the survivor to be a liar about the rape if she was deceptive about anything else, they also dismissed survivors who they did not think fit the typical victim status. In the following cases, the survivors were deemed liars because they did not look or act like rape victims. According to Beth:

… The officers that were at the hospital seemed nice, but when I had gotten my police report, giving it to the school, they switched all my words around. They made me look like I was lying. This wasn’t the exact wording, but even when I had a meeting with the student conduct officer the other day, he said it was, excuse my language, but “bullshit.” In the police report, the officer had said that,
“I looked completely fine for a rape victim and there was nothing wrong with me.”

Police did not believe Ashley because she did not act like they believed rape survivors should act.

…She basically was saying that she didn’t believe me because I didn’t fight back and I didn’t run into oncoming traffic. She actually said that. She was like, “We have victims that have run into oncoming traffic to avoid the situation.” I was like, “I didn’t know what to do. I was just trying not to die. I don’t know what your usual thing is, but, I’m also sure that there are women who come in who don’t say anything. I don’t really know what you want from me at this point.”

Officers could not fathom that a man raped Becky, because she was a lesbian. The intersections of both gender and sexual orientation influenced Becky’s case differently than if she had been a woman who identified as heterosexual. She said:

…I don’t really remember much of the conversation that I had with [the police] but I remember going back to talk more about it. They called me a liar…It was a gay case. It was because I was making it up to try and get my girlfriend back.

Police also accused Kim, a woman with Asperger Syndrome or a form of autism, of lying about the rape. According to the Mayo Clinic (retrieved 6/30/14), Asperger’s syndrome is a developmental disorder that impedes a person’s ability to socialize. Young people with this syndrome are usually socially awkward and have trouble with everyday communication. Kim said, “And then after I reported it, two weeks later, [the officer] calls me in, tells me there’s too many holes in my report. Nothing matches up.” In this case, police accused Kim of filing a false police report and then took legal action against her. Kim then hired an attorney who brought it to the attention of authorities that Kim had this disability.

Not even families were exempt from labeling survivors as dishonest. Nina talked about being molested as a child and how her family handled the situation:
So there was an incident with a cousin of mine, paternity related, when we were kids. He touched me in ways that I wasn’t comfortable with. And I told my mom. I was like, “Mom. You know. You need to know that this is happening. I just don’t want to be, if you tell me to go anywhere in the same room with him and no one else is there, I’m not gonna go.” My mom told my dad and my mom’s like, “You need to do something.” And my dad was like, “She’s probably lying. Or she’s probably mistaken. I mean, she’s ten years old. How would she know?”…

Church leaders were not exempt from having suspicion either. In Bella’s case, the church leader was the offender and he reminded her that people do not trust little girls. He threatened that if she were to reveal the abuse, people would assume that she was lying, not him.

In these cases, survivors were called liars or were treated as such. They were not only assaulted, but then they were disbelieved. This treatment enraged many of the women. Added to this, many were also objectified and labeled as sexually immoral.

**Survivors as Objects**

Nine out of 28 (32%) survivors in this study (Yolonda, Jessica, Lily, Eva, Ashley, Rose, Kat, Malia, and Juliet) noted the gender based issue of a culture that objectifies women. They understood that not only college campuses, but also the larger society, see young women as sexual objects. These survivors linked this objectification to sexual assault in their own lives. According to Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeny (2006:489), fraternity parties consist of themes that require women to wear sexy clothing and for women to be subordinate to men. For example, some of the fraternity party themes from their research consisted of the “Pimps and Hos,” “Victoria’s Secret,” and “The Playboy Mansion” celebrations. Jessica talked about objectification and the fraternities on her campus:

…In order to get in to the parties, you have to know somebody or be dressed really slutty. They won’t even let you in if I wore this (jeans and a t-shirt). Or they’d be like, “Do you know somebody in this frat?” I’d be like, “No.” They’d
be like, “Well, you can’t come in.” And some girl in a short skirt, they’d be like, “Yeah. You can come in. You don’t have to know someone.” And they won’t let your guy friends come in. The girls can come in, but the guys can’t. That’s never a good thing…

Rose discussed objectification in society:

You know what? I have such an issue with strip clubs and things like that because it’s like, if they allowed any legalized prostitution, okay, but if they educated people on it, and said, “You know what? People are willing to pay for these services, or whatever. But the thing is, we don’t educate people.” We have these strip clubs open. And what does that do? What do strip clubs do? Oh my God…They insinuate that treating women like garbage is okay. Because look at her. She has a g-string on and she is working a pole. She must not have a soul. That’s what people think. So men go to these fucking strip clubs and they watch porno. Porno. Oh my God. The way that it is portrayed there. I don’t watch pornos for many fucking reasons and obviously my incident was one of the biggest reasons why. But when I have watched a porno, I cannot get through watching three fucking minutes. I just get angry. The woman is just treated like garbage. So of course these men go out there and rape women and think it’s okay.

Ashley also pointed out how the objectification of women is a problem in sexual assault cases. She advised society to focus on the problem of a rape culture and to stop blaming women for being victimized.

Sexual assault survivors are well aware that they might be labeled as liars if they come forward with a case. They are further rendered powerless because not only were they attacked, but now peers, deans, police, families, and church leaders who they trusted, also question their honesty. In addition to being labeled as liars, they are further re-victimized when they are blamed for being promiscuous, and their victimization accounts are questioned. They are also conscious of the objectification of women in society and how that is linked to their cases. These women have a difficult time escaping blame. Both being labeled liars and the objectification of women makes survivors very angry. Despite that being the case, some survivors continued to “slut shame,” or to
unfairly criticize women for their loose sexual morals (Khazan 2014) in order to draw a line between themselves as survivors and the more sexually promiscuous women who are raped. Others blamed themselves for the way they were dressed. According to Poole (2013:222), women are denied the freedom of sexual expression when compared to men. Females are shamed for desiring sex and society judges women for these actions in ways that are not applied to men. The following are examples where survivors drew distinctions between themselves and promiscuous women or blamed themselves in some way for the attack/s.

**Sluts**

Yolonda said:

I felt like [I had] really low self-esteem because it’s like, “Okay. I know I have a nice body. That’s great. But, I’m not the type of girl to like, *flaunt* that…

Jenny talked about the town she was raped in:

… I was kind of in denial myself. Because everyone, in that town. Everyone just like has sex with each other. It’s *disgusting*. It’s just like, totally normal to be, so promiscuous. And like, everyone would go to parties and have sex with each other…

**Survivor Blamed Herself Because of Her Attire**

Yolonda and Jenny appeared to be trying to convince me that they were real sexual assault survivors and that I should not question their stories because they were modest women. In comparison, Bella partially blamed herself for the rape because she believed that she dressed too provocatively at the time of the crime. According to Bella:

I kind of started looking at the third incident like, maybe it’s the way I’m dressing. Maybe it’s something about how *I look*. Maybe it’s my appearance. What can I change about myself? But I’m like, “I wear baggy clothes. I don’t really wear fitted clothes.” I mean, I do now, as an adult, but. I kind of thought to myself, maybe I’m in college now. Maybe that’s why, because I’m going to
school or maybe he has seen me in a short skirt or something in church. Maybe I should change that. I kept on looking at my appearance, like, what’s wrong with me?

While some survivors blamed themselves for the victimization, other survivors had contradictory views on their own victimizations. For example, Lily was well aware that survivors should never be blamed for the crime that a rapist carried out, yet she went back and forth between blaming herself for the crime and the idea that survivors were never at fault. The following is an example of her ambivalence:

I did. I felt horrible because I couldn’t defend myself. There were two of them. You know, I couldn’t defend myself in name or honor in any way because I was the one that left my keys out. I was the one that was drunk; I was the one that was coming home at three o’clock in the morning. If I had my keys, if I wasn’t drinking, if I decided to stay at the sorority house, this wouldn’t have happened.

While Lily appeared to blame herself partially for the victimization, she defended sexual assault survivors and described how they were never to blame when they were victimized. She went into depth about how sexual assault is never justified.

…You know, I could have walked in there, no tights on, no underwear on, a tiny little skirt, and been like, “Let me up to my floor.” And like, it wouldn’t have mattered if I was completely wasted, or if I was wearing jeans with a buckle. It wouldn’t have mattered and it shouldn’t matter what I was wearing or what I was doing. But the fact that I was drinking and the fact that I was dressed a little bit sluttier than I would have been on like a normal day, or even to class, um, is acceptable. I’m allowed to have fun and I’m allowed to go out and all that stuff, so.

Eva was also ambivalent about her case. She was unsure of the proper terminology to use for what happened to her. Even though she described a rape to me, she did not label the occurrence as such.

**Researcher:** …You said that in the beginning you didn’t call it rape but you eventually named it as that.
**Eva:** This [offense]. It’s wasn’t. No.
**Researcher:** Okay. Well it depends on what state you are in, I guess. He put his
penis in your mouth against your will, right?

Eva: Yes.

Researcher: Okay. I’m not saying what it’s named. It depends on what state you are in what they would call it.

Eva: Okay.

Researcher: When did you actually name it as something?

Eva: I called it sexual abuse.

Researcher: Sexual abuse. When did you actually name it that?

Eva: Um, to myself probably when I came home for fall break so the middle of October.

Researcher: Okay. And then what made you name it that?

Eva: I think that this is a big problem. There are so many different terms. There’s sexual abuse, sexual coercion, sexual assault, rape. They are used interchangeably. When you hear sexual assault, you think of violent, somebody throwing you against the wall and stuff and sexual abuse was what I felt like it as because something happened that was horrible but it wasn’t like extreme like that stuff that is on the news and whatnot.

Remember that rape is “…the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without consent of the victim” (Beebe 2013:25). In Eva’s case, even though she was orally penetrated against her will, an act that legally is rape, she did not think that what happened to her was violent enough to be called rape. After all, in Eva’s view, rape was violent, such as when people are thrown against the wall and forced into intercourse. Rape was what ended up on the news. Because Eva’s own experience was very different from the media’s depiction of rape, she did not name it as such, even though it legally was a rape. Her ambivalence about the attack made her label the occurrence the lesser offense of sexual abuse.

Some survivors were very confused about legal terminology. Right after the attack, they were in shock about what had happened to them; oftentimes by people they trusted the most. Even vocal feminist activists fighting against the oppression of women and specifically bringing attention to the problem of sexual violence were confused about
their own sexual assaults, why it had happened to them, and what to do about it. Treasure, an anti-sexual assault activist, talked about the time right after she was attacked the first time in her life:

Um, I felt, kind of confused. I felt like there was something that I had done wrong and I didn’t know what it was, or what I could have done so I was just confused.

Though confusion was typical of sexual assault survivors directly after an unexpected victimization, 54% of the interviewees in my study were sexually assaulted more than one time. When this was the case, they tended to become more vocal and sometimes even violent towards offenders with each subsequent attack. For example, in Bella’s cases, during the first attack she was in complete shock and said and did nothing during and after the crime. During the second offense, she verbally chastised the offender for what he was doing to her. During the last sexual assault with a different offender, she threatened to “beat a bat into his skull, and indeed, did pick up a baseball bat and began beating him with it. Over time, survivors who were victimized multiple times became less surprised and confused by being attacked, and instead became less trusting of men and expected potential violence even from nonviolent men in their lives, including their lovers, husbands, and even their fathers. Additionally, almost half of the interviewees in my sample were unfairly labeled as promiscuous women, further complicating their cases.

Out of the 28 interviewees, 13 (46%) were slut shamed. These interviewees included Yolonda, Lily, Nina, Anabel, Jenny, Ashley, Bella, Meghann, Elise, Kat, Anyah, Malia, and Juliet. Unfortunately, some women began to internalize this and blamed not only other survivors, but also themselves when a sexual assault did occur. By
doing this, they contributed to a rape culture. Furthermore, both young men and women in the survivors’ peer groups “slut shamed” sexual assault survivors, thus further minimizing the harm of rape. In the following examples, survivors discussed the strong male bond that forms when a woman accuses a man of sexual assault. Lily specifically examined how college men minimized the seriousness of this crime when she tried to teach them about it in her advocacy work:

Maybe on your own you’d be more sensitive to like, if it was like another guy talking to you and was like, “Yeah. She said I raped her.” He’d be like, “Did you?” You’d be like, “Well, it doesn’t really matter. She’s still a slut”, or something like that. And he’d be like, “Oh yeah. Whatever.” But one on one, if you talk to one of them, they are people. They get it. If you say like, “It’s your girlfriend that you are dating, how do you react? Would you want to rip his throat out?” So, it’s just very interesting. But like, you get them in a room together, and they’re all just like, glazed over. Not listening.

Jenny also discussed the “slut shaming” that occurred after she was raped. Young men at her school would make jingles about Jenny being a “slut.”

This was when they thought I just had sex with the kid. So they would make songs about me being a slut or something…When things were said in class, I ran out crying…Everyone thought that I was just a whore that had sex with him, so I just like let them all believe it. I mean, even some of my closest friends. I was like, “Yeah. What an idiot. I shouldn’t have done that.”…I don’t know. I would have just rather people thought that I was like, maybe a whore then like played that card like, “He raped me.” Because, I don’t know why. I was just ashamed…It’s like, there needs to be [some sort of a program where they say], “It’s okay to talk about [sexual assault]. Like if you’re at a party and drunk, it doesn’t matter. You clothes, it doesn’t matter. There’s absolutely no. You cannot justify rape. It’s not justifiable, in any way. These guys seem to think that it is.

Not only young men, but also women in the survivors’ lives “slut shamed” them (Ringrose et al. 2013:314). In Kat’s case, one of her best friends questioned her intentions with the rapist:

…Randy’s (a woman) first response was, “Oh. Are you sure you didn’t just want to just get some?” And Sandra’s like, “Randy. You know how she is.” She’s like,
“She’s a virgin.” Blah, blah, blah. And Sandra’s like, “No. I was there. I saw this happen. They tricked me. I bet you I was next.” [Sandra] was always constantly sticking up for me. Randy was, as much as she was a friend, and wanted to believe me, she was always looking for the gossip end of stuff.

Anyah was also “slut shamed” by friends. She was accused of wanting the sexual encounter. These peers told Anyah that she was a whore who concocted the rape story.

Malia was treated similarly by peers. Malia said:

I texted one of my friends from high school, who is at a different school, about it and I was kind of cavalier about it. She was like, “No. This is a problem.” Then I didn’t really talk about it. My roommate (a woman) actually chalked it up to me just being slutty.

Not only did male and female peers blame the survivors for their so-called loose morals, but families did as well. In Nina’s example, the intersections of race and gender influenced her case. Nina said:

If a guy is staring at me and I’m wearing a fully covered Indian outfit that is very long and not showy, [my mom will] ask me to pull my coat tighter or cover up even my face or something crazy. The blame is always directed at the victim.

Meghann’s family was also harsh. She said:

They acted like they were mad at me at the time because my therapist called them and told them. My mom screamed at me and was really, really, kind of cold to me for a while and my dad called me stupid. My sister called me a whore… They were really cold to me. Just wouldn’t really speak. I can’t remember how long it took, but we’re a lot closer now, especially my mom and I. We’re just, and she’s the one who screamed at me. We’re closer. And my sister called me a whore, slut, on Mother’s Day, actually. We’re a lot closer as well.

Juliet’s mother’s main concern after the rape was that her daughter was no longer a virgin:

She got all caught up in me having been raped but it wasn’t because I had been assaulted, it was because, to her mind, not knowing anything about any of my previous behavior. In her mind, I had been a virgin at the time and she was very upset that I was no longer a virgin…That was her main concern. My mother is
very much like, “You don’t have sex before marriage. That’s wrong. You have to be a nice girl.”

Aside from peers and family, the criminal justice system is not exempt from “slut shaming” either. The following are some examples of how the criminal justice system blames survivors. In Nina’s case, she was studying to be an attorney and she pointed out the flaws with the courts and sexual assault cases. Nina said:

…One of the goals that I had to memorize for evidence was that you can’t talk about the victim’s past sexual behavior, unless, like in the Kobe Bryant case, because there was other semen inside her, that was the only reason that they could bring that up. I mean, to be honest, all of the evidentiary rules are only as good as the attorney that objects to them, so if the prosecutor doesn’t really give a fuck and he’s just there because it’s part of his day, and [the university] wants to make a big showing of “Hey look. We’re tying to be very authoritative about any allegations of sexual battery. We’re going to prosecute it even though we don’t care anyway.” To be honest, the prosecutor was very much like, “Yeah, so, I mean…what happened.” He was really like he didn’t give a fuck at all.

The police officer in Ashley’s case was also unhelpful, according to Ashley:

[My family member] ended up having to call his brother who is a Chicago police sergeant to have [the officer] stop calling my friend and my roommates and stuff because she wasn’t asking any questions about the rape and stuff, she was just asking questions about my friends and what they do and my character and if I drink a lot, if I had a lot of boyfriends, and if I cheated on my boyfriend. All this stupid stuff.

In Elise’s case, the school blamed her for how her male students were behaving towards her. Instead of taking sexual assault complaints seriously by their female instructor, they acted like she was the problem and ultimately terminated her:

I think they were blaming it all on me and making me like the pervert. Not to the benefit of their male students. I don’t know how they were thinking…Basically, there was this lady, and after I talked with her, the summer of 2004, I think in 2005 she was hired by the university. She wasn’t hired then. She tried to make me feel worse by talking to her because she tried to imply… You know how someone can talk to you and imply as if I was doing something with these guys, as if I want it?...I got the feeling that I was endangering their studies or like, a pervert.
Dependents

Sexual assault survivors struggle with being called and treated like liars by the people closest to them and they are aware of their objectification by society. They also internalize the blame directed towards them. In the next section, I will discuss how sexual assault survivors are also viewed as irrational beings who cannot take care of themselves. Specifically in my sample, 12 out of 28 survivors, or 43% (Joelle, Lily, Natasha, Nina, Beth, Jenny, Ashley, Becky, Kim, Elise, Anyah, Malia) were treated this way. Though reporting a crime may seem like the quickest solution to apprehending an offender and charging him or her, in actuality, survivors in my study were revictimized when they trusted others with their stories. Revictimization is blaming and stigmatizing responses to survivors after they have been victimized. Specifically, it is composed of stress, hostility, and blame directed at the victim (Madigan and Gamble 1991, cited in Maier 2008:787). For example, survivors are not seen as “real victims,” if no weapon was used during the crime, if the crime was not reported quickly, and if an acquaintance raped the survivor (Estrich 1987; LaFree 1989; Madigan and Gamble 1991, cited in Maier 2008:788).

Friends, family, justice professionals, and university administrators tell survivors the path to take after an assault, even if it is not the path that the survivors want to take. According to Maier (2008), police have the job of investigating crime and this focus can make them insensitive and cold to rape victims. Survivors encounter officers who, in an effort to solve the crime, will have the survivors tell their story over and over again while they determine where the case is headed (Maier 2008:793). In other situations the opposite scenario occurs, when a survivor may want to proceed with a case and police want to drop it. This “helpless” stereotype coupled with the disempowering nature of police
investigations adds to the already defenseless state that many sexual assault survivors face after the crime.

In Jessica’s case, she did not want to report the crime to police, but she was led to believe that she had no other choice:

… I was freaking out because at this point. I wasn’t really considering pursuing charges. I just wanted to get the rape kit, make sure everything was okay. I learned, because I was [an advocate] that I had options. I could get the rape kit and the evidence collected, I could get a police report, and decide later if I wanted to press charges. That’s kind of what I wanted to do but they were making it seem like I did not have that option. I’m like, “What’s happening!? No. I don’t want to do this.” My mom was freaking out. She was like, “NO! YOU HAVE TO! YOU HAVE TO!” And I was crying…

Malia’s family also pushed her to press charges against the offender, even though she did not want to. Here she discussed telling her family about the attack:

Um, it was really awkward. My parents told my siblings without asking me. I didn’t want them to know. They called the police and set up an interview with me when I didn’t want them to. They made me do the disciplinary process when I didn’t want to. They sent me to a therapist for two weeks over winter break. It just didn’t work out. She was a very awkward woman and I felt like they were making me do all of these things. They said they wanted to empower me and make me feel better and I just felt like they weren’t listening to me. I was like, “I’m not. I don’t want to do these things yet. When I do I will tell you. You are making me do all of these things so you guys feel like you’re being adequate parents, when really I just want you to listen to me and what I want.”…

In addition to family, university officials disempowered survivors. College administrators began calling Lily only hours after the crime occurred. She was not happy with the phone calls, and described their harassing nature:

…I tried to lay down and I just did not want to be in my skin. And then the phone started ringing and it was the Director of Student Affairs. It was the Director of the Women’s Center. It was one of the people from the Health Center. My phone kept ringing for at least two hours. And it was person after person after person. And I was like, “How the hell do you know my name? How do you know my phone number? How do you know what happened to me three hours ago? I don’t
want to talk to anyone right now. I don’t want anyone to know. I don’t even know what happened.”

Later, university officials also tried to push Lily to do a rape kit:

They wanted me to be escorted by someone from the campus to go do a rape kit. I was like, “I don’t want to do that.” They were like, “Well, you know, it will only make this stronger.” I was like, “Well, the point is, I’m not gonna have a case. That’s my point. I don’t want to do that. I want to have independent healing. Independent of a legal justice system that probably won’t work out in my favor. It’s my word against his and he has a friend.

After Lily was called at her dorm in relation to the crime, the Dean of Students at her university also tried to push Lily into pursuing a court case:

…The biggest thing that I wanted was that I didn’t want him anywhere near me. And so, I had a meeting with the dean of students and she treated me like I was like some wounded puppy. She’s like, “I’m so sorry this happened to you.” And I was like, “Okay.” And she’s like, “How are you feeling?” I was like, “I’m okay.” She’s like, “No, you’re not okay. This is not okay.” And I was like, “Okay.” She’s like a grandmother person to me and I did not want to have that. And so I was like, “What I really want to know is what can I do. I really don’t want to go ahead with the court case. I don’t want to go ahead with the police report and all that. I don’t think it’s going to lead anywhere. It’s my word against his word. He has a friend who can lie for him. There’s no cameras in the hallway. I just want this to be over. I don’t want to deal with this in that way.” And she’s like, “Well, we have a system on campus that you can have a mediation with him where you guys sit in a room and have an immediate discussion about what happened.” And I was like, “I don’t want to see his face.” When he was arrested they told me he was pretty drunk. I was like, “It’s very possible that he doesn’t remember what I look like exactly. It’s very possible that he doesn’t know. He probably just knows my name.” …I was like, “But I want to know how I can get him out of my dorm.” She was like, “You would have to go through mediation. You have to go through a court case and have him found guilty, and then we can, and whatever punishments he gets there, we can include our own university punishments.”

In Lily’s case, the Dean of Students would not listen to her wishes for her own case. Lily described the Dean of Students as a “condescending grandma:”

…I was already irritated with the Dean of Students at the time for being this constant grandma. …She was just horrible and she was just pushing for this system, that apparently, I find out later, that she had developed, so I was like,
“Okay. I get it. It doesn’t work. But like, nice job trying.” It only works if you want to do it and no one does, so…She’s a condescending grandma. She sat next to me on the couch in her office and she rubbed my arm and said, “It’s gonna be okay. We’re gonna figure this out.” I was like, “I don’t need you to figure this out. You are not involved. I’m sorry that I’m a student underneath your umbrella of rain, but it’s not gonna effect you, how this turns out for me so stop trying to push your agenda because you’re not dealing with the consequences day to day.”

A police officer also pestered Lily to go to court with her case:

…I called, I don’t know, like four or five times to get in contact with my police officer. And he was never there. Apparently, he works at the overnight, and like, I would just never think to call him at 11:00 at night. So, um, finally I got a hold of him two days before the court date. I was like, “I’m not going to show up. I’m not going to be a part of this. And so I want this dropped. I don’t want this to be a thing anymore.” And so, he was like, “Well, it’s already scheduled so it’s already gonna happen. Either you choose to go or you choose not to go. I have to go regardless if you are going to be there or not. And it would be helpful if you were there to say you didn’t want to go instead of waiving your right to report this.” I was like, “I don’t care. I don’t even care if it’s on a record. I just don’t want to go to see him and his parents, in court. And like, my mom is not going to be able to go to it. I have to go by myself. There is no way that I am going to go.” Then he called me the next day and was like, “It’s tomorrow. Have you changed your mind?” I was like, “No, but you can call me tomorrow and I’m not [going to change my mind then either].” That was the last I heard of it…

In Lily’s instance, college administrators, staff, and the police would not listen to what she wanted. Here the intersections of age and gender factored into Lily’s case, making older criminal justice professionals and college employees feel the need to take care of this young women whom they saw as incapable of making her own decisions. They all felt that their own opinions were better for the survivor than leaving her in charge of her own life. Ultimately, Lily had a horrible experience with her school’s sexual assault process because it was so disempowering.

Ahrens and colleagues (2007:38) found that nearly 75% of survivors in their sample who disclosed to someone about the crime told informal support providers, such as friends, in search of support. Friends also tried to act as authority members over the
survivors. In Beth’s case, her peers convinced her to go to the hospital, even though she did not want to:

…My friends freaked out, told me I needed to go to the hospital. And I was like, “No. I’m not doing this. I’m not going to tell anybody about this, and just keep it quiet.” So they dropped it for a while, but after the basketball game when we got back to her house, we were watching a movie and I just started crying. It was 10:00 that night. They put me in the car and they drove me to the emergency room… I didn’t really want to but they sort of talked me into it. They’re like, “What if something is wrong? What if you have a disease? You could be pregnant.” They’re like, “You need to make sure that everything is okay.” And because I was in pain, I just sort of gave in; let them drag me there.

After the rape kit, nurses called the police, even though Beth did not want them involved in her case. Maier (2008) suggests that both the medical system and the police revictimize rape survivors. In the following example, these two institutions actually work together to revictimize this survivor. This is Beth’s account of nurses calling the police:

 “[The nurses said,] “We need to call the cops because this was an assault.” And so, I started crying even harder. And the cops came and interviewed Hillary and I. And, I wasn’t super cooperative with them because it had just happened. It was all sinking in. I was in shock and denial and everything all at once. And they were asking me super, super specific questions on how he touched me and where he touched me, what he did. It just brought the memories back into my head and I cried…”

Nina did not want to go to the hospital after the attack either and her friends did not listen to her wishes. They also talked her into going. Again in Nina’s case, the intersections of gender and race were pertinent to her experience:

Honestly, at the time, like when [my girlfriend] told me about the hospital, I was very vehemently against it, and she kept insisting. I started crying and I was like, “Listen! Really? This cannot come to light. I come from an Indian family. And also this is a shitty experience. I do not want to relive this. I just want this to be over and move on.” So then when Steve came over, it was weird. He was very gentle and like, almost like a dad. He was like, “Nina. I’m sorry. Put your shoes on. We’re going. We’re gonna take you there. I’ll drive you if you want.” But I mean, it’s [state university] so it was like walking distance. We didn’t need to
drive. But I mean, it was a mixture of anxiety and um, also kind of like, a submission. Like, “Okay, now I’m gonna have to go.”

Nina’s story also was spread around her dorm after the attack, despite her wishes:

… And [the police] later on faxed a report of what happened to the resident director at the time, even though I asked them not to notify anyone. Then the resident director then had a pep talk with me about it. She was very much like, um, “Yeah so. You didn’t tell me about this.” And I was like, “Yeah. I didn’t want anybody to know. I wasn’t actually even going to go to the authorities.” And she was just like, “Oh, yeah. You know, well, are you okay now?” And I was like, “Well, its two months later. I have no choice but to move on.” And so she was just like, “Well, you know, it’s a sad situation, but honestly Nina, like, things have happened to me where, with a guy friend, like, you never know with guys. You should never put yourself in that position. Like you should never, you should always be on guard especially if you are going to go drinking with a guy. He’s gonna take advantage of you.” And I was just like, “Right. I get it. Thanks. (Sarcasm.)” She was just like, “No but.” And I was like, “I asked them to be confidential. Why did they fax you?” And she was like, “Well, you live in the dorms so, we have to know about this stuff. We have to prevent it.” And I was like, “But it’s already happened I mean.” And she was like, “No, its just policy. But yeah so, be more careful in the future.”

Sexual assault survivors are treated like they do not know what is best for them. Their wishes are ignored after the crime occurs. Friends, family, and authority figures view the survivor as an irrational being who does not know what is best for her. In reality, survivors have an understanding that society does not work in favor of the victims and that is why (1) they do not want to get involved in the justice or campus systems.

According to Felson and Pare (2005:8), when sexual assault survivors do not report the crime to authorities it may be because of embarrassment (Bechman and Taylor 1994) or also because they are worried that (2) the justice system is ineffective or (3) that they will not be believed (Feldman-Summers & Ashworth 1981; Fisher et al. 2003; LaFree 1980). Lily knew from a past sexual assault case that the justice system does not always work in favor of survivors. Here, Lily talked about the punishment that the offender (her step-
father) received and how the sentence did not help her, even though he was found guilty:

…I think he complied with the one year of mandatory therapy. And he had to pay some fines cause he broke the law in Illinois, so, you know, he had to pay money to the state of Illinois and not to my family who is now without a parent and without half the bill paying and all that. So, it was a terrible experience to go through. I did not want to repeat that again, especially for something as dumb as a stairwell incident that I just needed to recover from, personally. It didn’t affect anyone but me, and I didn’t want to drag in police and, defendant, and all that. I know what happened. I can find healing in different ways. And it felt like the university was trying to push it, make it a bigger deal. And, um, I didn’t want that…

The following is Lily’s reasoning as to why she did not want to press charges in the college case:

Now you’ve dragged it out. And now it’s like really ugly and you involve lawyers and all that. And I was like; “I don’t have the resources for that. I don’t have the mental capacity for that right now. I don’t want to talk about anything. I don’t want to defend my position. And like, why I was coming home at three in the morning. I was also drinking. I was wearing a skirt and tights and it was cold out. Like, I don’t want to defend any of that to anyone else, like I am already sick to my stomach about, like, all the “what ifs.” I don’t want to talk about this to anyone else.”…

Despite what authority figures think, sexual assault survivors make rational choices when they do not want to report a sexual assault. Though school administrators, criminal justice professionals, friends and family think that reporting is the best option for survivors, survivors know that they face an uphill battle if they move forward with a case through the justice system or through their schools. Instead of being the irrational people they are treated as, sexual assault survivors know what is best for them and would like to be respected for the decisions they make in their own cases. Malia articulated this when talking about how her parents should have handled her case:

I think that they should have asked me what I wanted from the beginning. If it was okay to tell, for example, my siblings. They should have just been more open, instead of telling me what to do, sending me to these [university] police, instead
of *forcing* me to do the disciplinary process. If it was more of an open dialogue, than telling me what to do so that *they* could feel better. I tried to tell them that. “You’re making *me* do all this so *you guys* can feel better about this situation, but it’s not helping me.” They just never really got that because they felt like not doing anything was the worst option ever. I said it’s not bad because it’s what *I wanted*. It will make *me* feel better, but they couldn’t reconcile that.

Ultimately, survivors want to have more autonomy in their cases. Though it is true that survivors are going through trauma and that the assaults affect them in numerous detrimental ways, including perceiving one’s own health as fair or poor instead of good or excellent (Golding, Cooper, and George, 1997 cited in Golding 1999:191), these survivors know what is best for them. They want more control over how their cases are carried out and they want to be heard. Sexual assault survivors do not like an approach where they are treated like weak and wounded people. Most want to make their own decisions. Being viewed as fragile is a stereotype survivors resent. They resist the feminine stereotypes society tries to force them into like the roles of emotional, weak, promiscuous, and/or liars, by rejecting traditional gender roles. They focus on strength and reject the stereotypical roles. The following are examples of women talking about strength and overcoming obstacles after the attack. Even when society paints the picture of rape victims as emotional and weak, these survivors prove otherwise. Jenny discussed the rejection of the “weak” stereotype that society places on survivors:

I went to therapy…She made me feel like a stupid victim who can’t do anything…So I just said, “Screw that,” and I didn’t go back to her…I just went to that one therapist and that was what she was supposed to specialize in too. So, she sucked. She made me feel worse about it…She just made me feel like a victim. Like I couldn’t. I don’t know. Maybe it’s because I don’t like the word victim. That’s like, what she kept calling me. It just pissed me off…Victim just makes me feel so weak. Like I could easily take a route on this. Like, I am so hard on people about this. When you use like drugs or alcohol and other stuff and depend on that, because I don’t do that, I get really mad at them. Because I think like, you’re being that victim. Letting it get the best of you. Like, using those things as such a
crutch. And I feel like I’ve done better than that. I feel like I’ve overcome a lot more.

Similar to Jenny, Erica also rejected the coddled sexual assault survivor myth:

…I am always like, “I’m strong.”…I don’t want sympathy. I’m not a tragedy. I don’t want to tell anybody because then people will be like, “Oh my goodness. Are you okay? Let me coddle you.” I don’t need that.

Anyah also wanted to feel empowered after the attack, and not be forced into what she saw as a weak role that she did not identify with. Here she argued that we need police to empower survivors and to make them feel strong. “[The police need to] make them feel like, “Okay! You can do this!” Instead of like, “Okay, no. You can’t do anything about it. We’re just going to sit here and watch you.”

Molly also identified with strength over weakness. When I asked her if the crime affected her schoolwork, this is how she responded: “No. I was, maybe I was more determined to do well, to be a very strong woman.”

Kat agreed. She said, “Well yeah, it’s more so, why is this woman a weak woman or something like that is the idea I always get and it’s like, no, no, no. You are the victim of some psychotic person’s behavior. You know?”

According to Thompson (2000), recovering from a traumatic life event, such as rape, can result in positive outcomes for survivors. For example, they may experience an increased self-worth or meaning in their lives (Thompson 2000:325). Erin also discussed her newfound strength after the crime:

[Life] definitely changed. If you would have asked me a year ago, I would have said it changed it for the worse, but now I’m much more aware of what is going on around me. I’m a much stronger person. I appreciate life more. I appreciate my mother to death now. Just knowing that she’s there and it strengthened my relationship with my girlfriend Mary. I mean, she is probably the only other friend who knows.
Kat identified with strength after the attack. She explained her strength after the crime in this way:

I think [the crime] made me a stronger, better person. If I wouldn’t have gone through what I went through when I was younger, let alone to have my parents to guide me. My parents have always taught me growing up that you have hardships in life. You can choose one of two things. You can choose to let it consume you and control you, or you can control it and become stronger because of it. So, I’ve always chosen the latter and I’ve always chosen to take what happened to me and try and better other people or at least make people aware of what’s going on and let them know that they are worth it. You know, they are capable of taking care of themselves and defending themselves and you don’t have to stand there like a frozen popsicle and take it. It’s okay to react. You don’t have to be treated like that. You’re not a piece of meat. You’re not a piece of property. Some people are sick mentally and or possessed for a short period of time. Whatever way you want to look at it. You know.

As I have shown, authority figures, friends, and family strip survivors of autonomy. They do this by labeling survivors as liars, objectifying women, slut shaming, and taking survivors’ autonomy. Survivors are treated like weak people in need of assistance, but many of them identify with strength. In response to this disconnect, survivors try to take back control of their lives after the crime by rejecting traditional gender roles. They reject these roles by speaking their minds, standing up to authority, through advocacy and through physical aggressiveness.

**Survivors with a Voice**

In my sample, 21 out of 28 or 75% of survivors (Joelle, Jessica, Lily, Natasha, Nina, McKenzie, Beth, Jenny, Eva, Ashley, Becky, Bella, Erica, Rose, Kim, Meghann, Molly, Kat, Anyah, Malia, Juliet) spoke their minds after the assault/s. The following are examples of survivors standing up for what they believe in. Jessica discussed how she confronts people who make rape jokes, ever since she has been assaulted:

… I tell people now, “Don’t make that joke. It’s not funny.” Sometimes I get into
fights with people about it. They’re like, “I don’t see the big deal.” And then I have to tell them, “Well, I’ve been assaulted and it’s not funny.” And they’re like, “Oh sorry.”

Eva also confronted people who are insensitive to rape survivors on Facebook:

…The number one thing, and I post this status over and over again… I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again. Rape is not a word to be used lightly. And this is possibly my number one pet peeve in the world. And I’ll use this example. When you beat someone in a video game, you did not rape them. Another one is, I’ve heard multiple guys say this, when they find an attractive woman they’re like, “Oh. I’d let her rape me any time.” And it’s like, “No. No. If you actually got raped by someone, male or female, you would feel so powerless.” …Rape, it’s lessening how serious it is. It’s taking away the power of the word. I just want to be like, “Just think about what it is.” It’s not. You don’t use it as. People post things like, “Oh my God.” I’m obviously a huge Blackhawks fan. “Blackhawks raped (another team).” I’m like, “No. They did not. It is a violent, brutal, heartless crime. It’s not synonymous with winning or beating somebody at something.”

Not only did survivors confront people who took rape lightly or as a joke, they also regained power by verbally standing up to men. This was especially apparent in rape survivors’ romantic or potentially romantic relationships. Nina said:

I was dating a guy and he asked to come over after like a month or two of dating. And I was like, “Well, are you a rapist?” And he was like, “No, I’m not.” And I was like, “Uh, are you sure...” I actually went on another date recently, over the summer, and he was Indian… We walked around downtown and got coffee. And he was like, “Well, want to come see my place?” I’m like, “Well, I mean. I don’t think you’re a rapist. But I’m not, one can never be sure.” And honestly, he was very offended when I said that. And then to me, my intuition was if you’re fuckin’ offended, FUCK you. I can say whatever the fuck I want, and if you’re offended, that’s a red flag to me. It’s almost like a, it’s like a test for me now. Like, I’m very like, well most guys are rapists. Like, I’m very bitchy about it, you know, so like, I put it out there. It’s on my radar. I’m not a stupid, trusting, undergrad anymore, you know, so. So I’m probably more abrasive and offensive to men. It served me well I think.

Erica described a similar scenario:

I mean, let’s say with my husband now. Often when he says something like, “Man. I wish that my shirt was ironed.” I take it like, “So, do you want me to iron your shirt? Are you saying that I am a bad wife because I didn’t iron your shirt?
Do I have to iron your shirts after I wash them, before I hang them up?” He’s like, “I just said I wish the shirt was ironed. I will iron it. You can iron it. I don’t care.” And he always tells me, “I am not the enemy. I am not the enemy. You have so many people out here in this city, when you go outside to deal with, to be cautious with. Not me.”

If they were not speaking their minds towards their partners, they were doing so towards other men. The following are examples of this behavior.

Jenny picked fights with sexually aggressive men at the bar:

…I went up to him as a joke. They were like; “I’ll buy you a drink if you go. I’ll get you a drink if you get that guy to get you a drink.” Something stupid. It was a bet. So I went up to him and I was like, “Hey! What’s up? My name’s Jenny.” And it was a joke. And he was like, “What’s up beautiful?” I turned around and I started laughing. I couldn’t even, I couldn’t do it. It was just ridiculous. So then he came up to me a bunch of other times. And I was like, “I’m really not interested. Sorry if you really thought so.” That’s when he came up to me, because it was like four times, and I was like, “Dude! It was a Goddamn joke. Not now. Not ever. Why would I have any fucking interest in you? You’ve grabbed my arm. You’ve grabbed my ass. I’ve told you repeatedly to stop touching me…”

Eva spoke her mind to men on the train:

…This was the beginning of last semester and I was on the Metra. We were coming home and I forget what the comment was, but they made a comment about one of the co-workers. I went off. On. Them. I was screaming at them. It was an overreaction. It was. But I was very emotionally raw at that time…I wish that I could remember [the comment] but it was something that was like, so, you know, like women as objects. I’ve become pretty much a feminist. Whereas that didn’t really matter. It’s not that it didn’t matter, but I didn’t, when I talk about myself I didn’t say, I’m a student, I’m liberal, I’m a feminist. That didn’t cross my mind and now it’s big. My religious views on Facebook are feminism and lattes.

Molly also has confronted people on the train since her attacks:

…There have been recent times when I have gone to visit my parents in India. Like if you take public transportation and somebody is pinching you or somebody is like, you know. It comes automatically to me to turn around and trash the person. I always do that and it just happens. There have been times where the person will be like, “I’m sorry. The driver just put on the brake and I just fell on to you.” And I’m like, “Hold on. Don’t talk to me.” And I would just slap the person. I would say something really bad…It’s mostly Hindi. It’s mostly in an
ethnic language. I would say something really bad. (She laughs.) It sounds much more severe when it’s in the ethnic language...It’s like, “Do you have your legs? Can you stand straight?”...It’s kind of being sarcastic in a really mean way. Like, “Are you disabled or something? What’s wrong with you?” So that’s what I’ve done.

Survivors also regained power in their lives by standing up to authority. In the following examples, survivors stood up to police, the offender, and even to school officials. Here they confronted the police.

In Ashley’s case, an officer accused her of not acting like a typical rape survivor and she faulted her for making up the story in order to get back with an ex-boyfriend. Ashley contacted a family member who was a police officer in order to stop the demeaning treatment:

Yeah, my aunt’s husband (an officer) was really upset with how things were happening and wanted to get involved but his brother said that he was going to make sure that she didn’t talk to me like that again or that I would get a different police officer. I just haven’t heard from anyone since he talked to her.

Kim was a rape survivor who had Asperger’s syndrome, a high functioning form of autism that is linked to difficulties with communication. In Kim’s case, the officers also accused her of lying and they eventually charged her with filing a false police report. Kim defended herself by hiring an attorney who is now pressing charges against the officers for not taking Kim’s disability into account with her case. For example, officers interviewed Kim for extended lengths of time and also accused her of acting strangely, without taking into account that Asperger’s is a syndrome where people have trouble adhering to socially appropriate norms. This is how Kim dealt with the police:

**Researcher:** Okay can you talk about it a little bit? What does Asperger’s mean to you?

**Kim:** Mine, it’s difficulty expressing emotions. It’s on the Autism spectrum. For me, it has a lot of tapping and like, difficulty expressing things.
Researcher: Okay. Did the police know that you had Asperger’s?
Kim: I told my attorney.

Though some survivors find empowerment through dropping a case, others find it through pursuing the case. What the individual survivor’s wishes are is what needs to be taken into account. In the following cases, survivors also stood up to the men who victimized them. Even though this process was often extremely difficult, women forced themselves to fight these defendants. In Jessica’s case, she wanted the offender to pay for what he did to her:

… They said that there wasn’t enough evidence. So they’re like, “We’re trying to get him to plead guilty to a lesser charge.” So he was like, “I will only plead guilty to the regular assault if it doesn’t go on my record and I don’t got to jail.” I was like, “No! That’s stupid. I’d rather just go to court and go to trial and lose than let you get off like that.”…

Beth also sought power through the school justice system. Even though she was petrified of the court case, she was determined to go through with it. This is what Beth had to say:

I hate the kid. I can’t even stand to look at him. I wish he were behind bars. My roommate had said that he had done this to some other girl at a party. And that girl had never turned him in. It makes me disgusted that he just keeps getting away with things like this and thinks it’s okay…I don’t remember if it’s in the police report but on Friday, if I decide to be a witness, they’re allowed to question me and ask me questions and I’ve have to go into specific detail on what he did and how he did things. If I don’t decide to be a witness, I’m not allowed to talk, but I’m allowed to leave and enter the room whenever I want, and if I don’t want to come back, I don’t have to.

Beth ended up following through with the case and the defendant was expelled from the university.

Rose was also aggressive towards the offender:

…I can tell you that right before I got married, I received a phone call from [the offender], asking me to go see him in the hospital. And that he had something to
tell me. I told him *then*, on the phone, that if he *ever* bothered me again, that I would go to the police. He said that I could not prove anything. And I said, “At the very least, I could prove statutory rape. It’s in your best interests to just leave me alone.” And I did tell him too, because he has a lot of family in Syria, and I was already getting married, and my ex was in the marine corps. I did tell him that one of my biggest comforts was knowing that I was marrying somebody who could potentially fuck up his family… I was like, “I hope that with the war that we are in right now, your village, wherever the fuck your family is at, will get diminished. I don’t agree with the war, but I agree with that.”

Even though Natasha was extremely frightened of the offender after the attack, she became angry weeks later. He had not only raped Natasha, but he also stole money from her on the evening of the assault. Natasha says, “…It was like $100 or something and. So basically, I was mad at that point. So I messaged him and was like, “I want my money!” But he never responded.”

Erica dealt with her offender when she passed him on the street by acting indifferent towards him. Here is her logic:

He recognized me. He smiled. He tried to talk to me. I was just like, “Hi.” And I got off the train. So yeah. I walked away from it because I mean, I wasn’t bothered. I wasn’t nervous because as of late, everything about me is different. I recently started working out. Over the last year, I have been eating clean. Boxing. All of that. I’m really strong. I bench press like 75 pounds. So like, I’m not worried about him hurting me. I just didn’t want to acknowledge him. I find that indifference hurts people more than hate *ever* could.

McKenzie regained power by going to bars to assert herself when men approached her for a sexual encounter. Unfortunately, this attempt at power and control sometimes backfired. The following is an example:

*McKenzie*: Right after [the rape] happened, I swore off men for the rest of the summer. So that following year, senior year, and into my first year out of school, I think I kept putting myself in shitty situations to try and *win* that time. I went to crappy bars full of assholes just so that I could say “no” to men that approached me, that I thought were assholes. And sometimes that worked and sometimes that got me into situations that I really did not want to be in.

*Researcher*: Was that a form of empowerment?
McKenzie: When it worked. (She laughs.)
Researcher: When it worked. What about when it didn’t work?
McKenzie: That was really scary. I got into a situation last fall where I went home with a guy I thought was an asshole. And we hooked up. His only blanket was a bear skin. And as we were hooking up, he had a roommate that kept trying to come in to the room. And so I was like, “Yo. You need to not do that. What you’re doing is not cool.” And he went off on me and started calling me a bitch, an uppity bitch…He was screaming about how I better watch out in the morning because he was going to kill me. And the guy I was hooking up with tried to laugh it off like it was a joke. That was really scary. And so leaving the apartment in the morning was really scary. That was the last time I did that. (She laughs.)

Not only do survivors stand up to the police and the aggressive men including their offendors, they also regain power by confronting school officials. In Joelle’s case, the assistant dean of her school was trying to expel her from the university after the assault. Joelle’s grades dropped into the solid C range after the crime. Her dean wanted her to earn at least a C+ average to stay in the program. Though this dean encouraged Joelle to finish up her degree at a neighboring school, she did not want Joelle to continue on in the program at her original university. Though the dean said this was due to the grade point average issue, Joelle believed it had to do with reporting the rape to the school and the dean just hoping all of the negative publicity would disappear if Joelle were no longer enrolled in the school. Joelle did not understand why the assistant dean did not act sympathetically and help her stay on track in school. Instead she made life more difficult for Joelle by putting her on academic probation and threatening to kick her out of her program one semester short of graduation. Joelle responded by trying to go over her head to the dean:

…I called the head dean when he finally got back into his office and told him the circumstances, and he says to me, “Well, just have the assistant dean call me.” In other words, he was willing to [help me]. He never questioned anything. He never said, “Why this? Why that?” You know, “What’s going on?” He was like, “Have
her call me.” Because he felt like, his response to me was “I can try to reason with her on this and get her to work something out.”

Unfortunately for Joelle, she was still pushed out of school. Despite her best efforts to stay at the university and keep fighting, she was ultimately asked to leave.

In addition to standing up to authority figures women also started to reject other traditional gender roles in other areas of their lives. For example, instead of worrying about getting married and having kids, Eva focused more on demanding respect and being an independent woman:

… I was not looking for a guy. I was not interested. I was all about school, because I am very much about my career, school, and everything. I’m definitely not one who’s like, “I need to find my husband.” It is happens, if I never get married, I never get married. I will always have something in my life that I love…But, um, I have been really working on demanding respect and learning to respect myself. Like I said, I would send [sexy] pictures, just do what they wanted because I would just zone out and just be like, “Okay. Fine.” It gets it over with.” And um, I didn’t care. And I don’t want that anymore. I don’t want to be that. I don’t want to have to deal with more than what I already have to deal with.

Erin also took her focus off of marriage and kids and focused on bettering herself after the crime happened:

So I will be done with [my MBA] next year. I have no idea where I see my future. I really don’t. Um, I think if you had asked me before the assault, I would have said, “Oh! I’ll be married with kids.” Now I don’t want marriage. I don’t want kids. And I don’t know if the two are related to each other, but. So my plan right now is to just get my degree. Figure out what I want with my career.

**Advocates**

In addition to being outspoken in order to regain independence, autonomy, and power, 21 out of 28 or 75% (Yolonda, Jessica, Lily, Nina, McKenzie, Beth, Jenny, Eva, Ashley, Becky, Bella, Rose, Kim, Treasure, Brian, Meghann, Molly, Kat, Anyah, Malia, and Juliet) of survivors also become engaged in advocacy work. They were determined to
educate people and to improve the situation for survivors who came after them. They became involved in sexual assault awareness at their schools, they chose occupations to improve the plight of oppressed groups, and they joined social networking sites in favor of empowerment and those dedicated to survivors of violence. When I asked Brian how the assault affected his life, this is what he said: “...It certainly makes me a really good activist. It makes me a really empathetic person.”

Juliet also noted a link between being a sexual assault survivor and becoming an advocate:

There’s absolutely a link. I did it because. It took me a while to actually be able to articulate this… It was after my first ER call. I was talking to [a friend] about it that had done work in domestic violence activism and [worked in] shelters and I said, “I felt like I didn’t do anything for this girl. I was there. I was able to give her the information she needed. She hugged me afterwards. That was fine, but I couldn’t change anything about what happened to her. I knew I couldn’t change anything about it. I felt like I was ineffective. I couldn’t do anything.” She said, “But you were there. The medical staff and the police. Everybody had their job. Your only job was to be there for her.” Then I realized, no one had really been there for me. I didn’t want anybody else to go through that where there’s nobody there for you. You are afraid. You don’t know what is going on. The whole purpose of this advocacy group is because victims are re-victimized by the system. Sexual assault has definitely been an interest of mine in terms of the activism part of it. I did finally realize that I was working through what had happened to me by helping other people.

Jessica also became involved in advocacy. Specifically, she helped put on a play about sexual assault at her university:

… I was like; “This may be a good experience to work on the show and try to see if I can prevent this from happening to somebody else.” I was really glad that I worked on it. It was really good being in an environment with people that understood these issues and were passionate about them. The show turned out really great. I got all of these e-mails from people like, “This changed the way that I think about sexual assault. I want to get involved with activism now.” I was like, “Okay! Awesome!”

Later, Jessica became even more involved in further advocacy work at her university. She
said:

…I am involved with everything. I’m a university educator so we have to do a 40-hour training for that and they teach you how to respond to a sexual assault. I’m also on the university Hearings and Appeal System. We have our own system for handling sexual assaults…We also had to be trained for 12 hours. We’ll weigh what happened and decide the appropriate punishment, if any…

Lily also became active in advocacy at her school. Here, Lily talked about speaking out against sexual violence at her university. She told her assault story to students and administrators and encouraged the improvement of how sexual assault survivors are treated on her campus.

…I was like, “I’m gonna speak.” I worked it out. And I did it. It was definitely empowering because people, like, get up there and say, “Well, I didn’t know I was assaulted until I heard this person’s story and it resonates with something that happened with me. And I guess I was assaulted and.” Yeah, just naming it and being able to identify and know that, “Hey! I’m not what I imagined a sexual assault survivor in that crumpled state is. I’m fine. It’s been awhile. I’m okay. It was terrible at first but I’m fine.” So it was definitely a benefit.

Because of Lily’s speech, the university changed numerous ways of handling sexual assault. For example, they no longer pushed the survivor to take the path that they thought was best for him or her and instead encouraged survivors to choose the path they wanted to take. They also gave survivors more privacy after the crime occurred and they centralized their help center to one place on campus, making the aftercare process more streamlined. According to Kingkade (2014) some universities such as Loyola University Chicago and the University of Texas-Brownsville have created phone apps that allow survivors to access a variety of sexual assault services and resources in their area (This type of program could increase survivor privacy and autonomy and help survivors like Lily regain control over their lives.

Although Nina did not specifically engage in advocacy work, she chose a
profession where she could advocate for oppressed people. By aiming to become an attorney, Nina could advocate for people who needed her help:

… Ideally I’d like to work in the field as an attorney. Practice area, I would take what I can get at this point, but. But I do find that I want to advocate for a group. So it’s like, I remember working for a big company, broker dealership, where my boss billed, you know, like $1,000 an hour and I didn’t feel as much of a connection with the work. Whereas, when I advocated for an immigrant or an injured worker, anybody injured in some way, I felt more of a connection with the work and I felt a passion there. So I would like to ideally help a person or people that would need my help….if I did criminal I would do that. I would try to help, like somebody victimized. But um, I think I would more, I would fare well, I think, advocating for the little guy. Whereas, the man, I don’t really feel a connection working for. I can bartend to pay my bills.

Other survivors used social media to show support for violence-survivors or to encourage empowerment. Jenny said:

…My little things, I’ll just like, you know, Facebook. Go on the Slutwalk thing or I will watch my little SVU. Just like, little things that help me that you wouldn’t think do. [As for Slutwalk Chicago], I just like, just this year, like just decided that I want to be [involved in that.]

Ashley also became involved in “Slutwalk.”

…Like I know tonight me and my friend are going to help determine the set up for the Slutwalk, this year, in December. But um, I think we need to do more things like that, like, not the Slutwalk, but what the Slut Walk promotes. They need to promote more things like that. Like, not like, “Don’t walk in dark alleys.” Or like, “Walk in well lit alleys because you are going to get raped.” …I think that they need to stop making people like afraid of what could happen….

According to Wonderlich and colleagues (2001), there is a link between being a rape survivor and suffering from an eating disorder. Ashley and her friend (both rape survivors and survivors of eating disorders) started to run an online site about eating disorders in order to encourage young women that they are beautiful just the way they are:

I think that just in general, my self worth changed and so I didn’t feel like school was necessary. And since I have been kind of getting better, it’s changed. Now I want to go to school. I have something that I want to do. It’s like I have goals
now. And also, working with [the advocacy group] with my friend has been really helpful because it kind of keeps my mind busy when I’m not focusing on something with school.

In addition to becoming outspoken and advocacy, survivors regained power in their lives through violence against men. This was done not only in self-defense, but also to prove that they are no longer the victims that society sees them to be. This is an important finding because it shows that men’s violence against women may actually lead some survivors to exhibit violence against men after the attack. Unfortunately, this violence can happen to innocent men who did not hurt the survivor in any way. It may also lead to a criminal record for the survivors, though that was not the case in my sample.

**Violators**

In my sample, 8 out of 28 or 29% (Yolonda, Beth, Jenny, Bella, Rose, Meghann, Molly, and Kat) of survivors also regained power through physical violence or the idea of it. This affected them in their personal lives and at work and school. The following are examples of physical aggression in survivors’ personal relationships.

Molly said:

I’ve *slapped* many men. I’ve slapped so many men that my husband. In the early times that we were dating, he would come and surprise me. Like, I’d come into the kitchen or something and he’d come to suddenly hug me. For me, automatically, I would turn around and *smash* him. (She laughs.)…So he would be like, “What.” And I would be like, “Don’t do that to me. That just comes automatically to me.”… yeah, he used to get hit a lot. (She laughs.)…

Bella was attacked two times by two different men and when a family friend tried to attack her for the third time, Bella found a baseball bat and threatened to kill him. Here is Bella’s story of that incident:
And he tried to continue to feel [me] and throw me on the bed. I fought him off. Like, I was pushing him off me… So he finally got off me and. I got up from the bed and I went to the closet we had in the hallway. I like baseball, so I always had a Louie slugger. (She laughs.) I grabbed my bat and I go to him, “If you don’t leave my house now, I swear to God, I will end up in jail, because I will end up beating this bat into your skull.” (She laughs.)… And finally, he tried one more time and that’s when I kind of grabbed the bat and hit his stomach…I go to him, I was like, “Dude, don’t. Please. You need to leave. I don’t want to hurt you. Right now, I’m like, I will hurt you and I may end up killing you. You need to stop disrespecting me and leave.”…[After each assault, I became] more vocal and more violent. (She laughs.)

Yolonda had a difficult time at work after she was victimized because she was afraid of people. She worked at an amusement park at an attraction where people paid to test their strength by holding a hammer and seeing how hard they could hit a metal piece. Yolonda was happy that she had that particular job, because she knew that she could use the hammer if anyone attempted to harm her. Yolonda discussed this job:

For the most part, I tried to get on this one game that had a hammer. I know it sounds bad, but…It’s a big hammer. You know. If anybody. You know… I was just. I felt like I needed to be somewhere where there’s just something I could have to protect myself or. And at [the amusement park], there’s a bunch of strange people. I mean, you have people walking up to you to ask you questions and things like that. I mean, for the most part, I tried my hardest to do my job, but at the same time, when people have something to ask you, they are going to walk right up to you…

Not only did violence factor into survivor’s work lives, but it also touched them at school. In the following example, Kat had just lost her best friend in a car accident. A football player at her school made an insensitive comment about her deceased friend, and she physically attacked him:

I didn’t go back to junior year for months. I don’t know if you know who John is, but he was saying how [my deceased friend] was a piece of trash, and a piece of shit, and they shouldn’t have let me pray for her over the announcement. I ended up hearing this as I was walking down the ramp, into the cafeteria. I grabbed him by the front collar of his shirt, by his neck, flipped him over the table with one arm, in front of the lunch teachers, and the whole jock table. And they
were all sitting there and I was like, “What did you say?”… (She laughs.)…I also think that I reacted the way I reacted when my friend passed away because of what had just happened to me prior [the rape]. I don’t think that I would have ever lashed out at [that guy] physically like I did. You know?… Oh, it was just funny. Still, to this day, I have no idea how I was physically able to do that. I literally took the front of his shirt and twisted it and lifted him up onto the table. The whole jock table was full. Everybody was in their football uniforms. I just remember taking my knuckle from my index finger and pushing it in to where his Adam’s apple is. I was holding his shirt and I was like, “What are you going to say about her dude? What? Excuse you?” I’m like, “You don’t even know her, do you?” He’s sitting there, “No. No. No.” All of his friends were sitting there and they were all wide eyed. A couple of them, “Oh Damn! You got schooled by a girl.”… I just thought it was funny because I ran into him years later. He like, looks at me, drops his jaw. And I hadn’t been in [that particular grocery store] in like ten years. You know? Looks at me, drops his jaw, and just starts running backwards out the other way of the aisle. (She laughs.)

Survivors described how being physically violent and ultimately rejecting traditional gender roles helps them regain power in their lives after the crime. Jenny admitted to getting in to at least five physical attacks in the past year with men who objectified her in public places. This is what Jenny had to say about this behavior:

I get into a lot of fights, if I’ve been drinking. With guys. Not women. With guys. It’s mostly stemmed from when they try to hit on me. So I just have outbursts. I’m known to do that. It’s really embarrassing because it’s really trashy but I think that’s where it comes from [the rape]. Cause it’s kind of like me in a way like, taking back that control. But it’s unbelievable.

Jenny further described these incidents:

I like, leave bruises on their faces. It’s insane. It’s crazy. Some guy was stalking me around the bar. I was like, “I’m not going to tell you one more time. Get away from me.” And then he just did again, so I just like, punched him, in the face. I saw him the next week, and it was a huge thing. It was just like, I have these things. I think that it’s just like, to prove I am not some little weak ass. You can’t do that to me. So I just go overkill.

Similar to Jenny, Bella defended herself from her attacker when he showed up at family gathering by rejecting traditional gender roles. She used her threatening demeanor to warn the man to stay away. She says, “So I think I kind of had build up that
mechanism of being a bitch. Where it was just like, “I see you. You see me. I’m still here.

It’s my sweet 16 [birthday party, but] I’ll stab you.”

Brady and colleagues as well as Smith note that victims can feel less vulnerable and more in control of their lives by signing up for self defense classes (cited in Madden and Sokol 1997:133). Kat also enjoyed the power of physical violence and she used this legitimately by teaching self-defense classes and inspiring others. Here she described her self-defense classes:

It’s your traditional martial arts, kung fu defense that they teach you. I kind of developed that to keep it simple and more tactical, practical, like, one move and the person is stunned or moves so they let go of you and you’re done. It has a lot to do with krav maga. If you know that martial arts form. It was created by the Israeli Defense Forces. And they’re pretty much, the krav maga is basically like, one strike and you have a broken arm or you’re dead. So if you’re grabbed and you are in a hostile enough situation where you feel like you need to react, it’s one of those things like, you know, gouge their eyes or break their arm, or something like that. That’s, that’s pretty much what I teach. (She laughs.)

Kat was proud of herself for the physical strength that she carried after the attack. Here she described what it is like to be a small woman throwing a large man to the ground during a self-defense seminar:

…Everyone looks at me and they’re like, “Wow. She’s tiny. How is she going to drop this guy?” The guy that I have been working out with, he’s a body builder. He’s a national body builder. The guy can lift like, you know, 6-700 pounds. He’s a short little guy, but he is very muscular. They’re looking at me like, “Yeah! You’re going to take him down?”

Beth focused on getting self-defense training after the attack in order to physically prepare herself for any future assaults…She says, “The police officers at [my university] teach a self-defense class. I missed the deadline by two weeks. They take girls…They teach victims of sexual assault how to defend themselves in those situations…”

When survivors of sexual assault reject traditional gender roles by doing violence
not in the name of self-defense or for their own protection, they complicate their lives. While the rejection of traditional gender roles by standing up for themselves and becoming advocates are healthy and empowering ways to heal from a violent crime, violence against innocent people is not. It could lead to a criminal record or even further violence against those who engage in it.

In conclusion, survivors have independence, autonomy, and power stolen from them through the actual crime, and when dealing with professionals, friends, and family who are uneducated about how to handle sexual assault cases. Victims are treated like they do not know what is best for them and their honesty is questioned. They are continually subjected to gender norms that disempower and anger them. Survivors are treated like weak people in need of assistance, but many of them identify with strength. In response to this disconnect, survivors try to take back control over their lives after the crime by rejecting traditional gender roles. They do this in both constructive and harmful ways. Specifically, they note becoming verbally aggressive, standing up to authority, becoming active in advocacy, and physically aggressive. Through their rejection of traditional gender roles, they regain agency and power that equips them to heal after a sexual assault occurs. Even when they appear to be despondent, most are fighting and surviving.

You tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.
Maya Angelou
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I discuss some solutions to the complicated problem of sexual assault on American high school, college, and university campuses. Though there will be some differing obstacles as to how these policies can be implemented on high school campuses with minor survivors as opposed to a college or university campuses with adult survivors, I include suggestions from high school, college, and university interviewees. (The logistics of implementing these specific policies would vary by state and institution and needs future research attention.) Though there is no one perfect solution on how to prevent or decrease these crimes, a good start is to learn from survivors who have lived through the aftermath of these attacks. In this chapter, survivors talk about what they wished had happened in their cases, what they perceived had worked well for them during that time, and they also offer heartfelt suggestions on how to improve the lives of sexual assault survivors who seek help though institutions such as schools and the criminal justice system. I also revisit the importance of understanding intersectionality for practitioners who work directly with survivors of sexual assault. Finally, I discuss future research topics for academics studying sexual assault after 2013.

Survivors’ Suggestions on How to Deal with Sexual Assault on Campus

At the policy level specifically, survivors want procedures that protect them and simplify their lives. At the individual level, they want caring, compassionate, and understanding
advocates who can help them heal after the crime. I will begin by discussing potential policies that survivors perceive as useful.

Protecting Survivors

Sexual violence in schools is often ignored as typical youth culture (The Panos Institute 2003:17). To begin with, survivors want educational institutions to acknowledge that rape is a problem on high school and college campuses. They need developed written policies and educational programs that define behavior that constitutes sexual assault and rape, along with definitions of consent and sexual coercion. According to Kilpatrick, definitions of violence vary by criminal justice agencies when compared to public health organizations (2004). Different or vague definitions of offenses can lead to confusion while clear and concise definitions would better protect potential survivors. High schools, colleges, and universities need to include students in the discussions about anti-violence policies. They also need to be able to communicate with students about sexual health through a sex positive approach, tackle survivor bullying, and put a focus on rapists as the people who can prevent these crimes. According to Rozee and Koss (2001), there needs to be prevention training for men because rape is a gender issue. Rape prevention programs that focus on women to stop rape fail because they reiterate beliefs that allow men to reject accountability for this crime (Rozee and Koss 2011:298). Finally, it is imperative that sexual assault survivors have more control over their own lives and over the outcomes of their cases.

Rape and sexual assault are not a focus on many high school, college, and university campuses. Every survivor (100%) in my study mentioned the need for greater awareness and education about sexual assault at educational institutions. They perceived
such education to be nonexistent and realized the great need for more dialogue around this topic. While educational institutions do offer training on a variety of safety related topics, rape and sexual assault received minimal or no attention. Malia said:

The thing at [my university] is that freshmen have to take PE their first year. There are six sections, three a semester, but two of those have to be mandatory sort of health classes. They’re called “Contemporary Topics.” They never even touch the subject of safe sex, sexual assault. We talked about cardiovascular activity, diversity, stress management. Things that are very juvenile and my dad’s thing was, “Why don’t they teach you [about sexual violence]?” in that somewhat stupid contemporary topics class you had to take?

In addition, survivors suggested that anti-sexual assault classes define what sexual assault is, how it normally happens, and what to do if it does occur. Nina said:

Um, but so maybe, policy wise, making that a prerequisite to anything. And making that a class that’s required for guys and girls, like as part of your bachelor’s degree, you should know. “This is what sexual assault is. This is what can happen. This is your recourse.” Even though that sounds stupid, I think if that’s a requirement, I think people would be forced to actually know something about it, whereas a lot of times, I don’t even think that. Like, I got lucky that I was in the social sciences and I heard about it, but, I think probably from these pre-med people, who spend all of their time in the corner studying biology, they probably don’t even know.

Along with defining what sexual assault is and is not, high school and college students and people who work with them need to clearly understand what constitutes consent. Jessica, as an anti-sexual assault educator was thoroughly trained about sexual assault at one of the few schools in my study that tackled this topic head on. Jessica said:

… And we are trained on what sexual assault is and consent… Any time somebody touches you, like sexually, or engages with you sexually without your explicit consent. It doesn’t even have to be verbal consent. Like if somebody doesn’t seem comfortable. There’s ways of consenting without it being verbal. Like, if they are reciprocating the activity, if they seem to be enjoying it, then yeah! Go ahead! That’s consent. But if you don’t know or they seem like they are not into this, haven’t given you any indication. Like, “I don’t know. I don’t know if I want to do this. I do not feel comfortable.” You do not push them. You stop. You either said no or you didn’t say anything, if you did anything besides say yes
or rip their clothes off, that is assault. So like, touching somebody in their bathing suit area, having sex with them, or forcing them to have oral sex against their will. That’s all assault. You just have to get consent. If you are not sure whether they are in to it, ask! (She laughs.). We got a pretty rounded training. Whereas like, the jury in a court case does not. It’s just like a bunch of randoms. So I think it would be more effective.

Sexual coercion also needs to be considered. According to Eva, the terms related to sexual assault are very confusing and students need to understand them better. Eva said:

I think that there needs to be some type of, during orientation, transfer or freshman, that, like I said before, that says, this is what is against the law. Just like, “This is against the law and this is not okay. This is not technically against the law, but it is not okay.” One of the biggest things is sexual coercion. I have this too and I have a couple of other girls where it’s like, “I don’t know how to feel, because I was coerced. Was I raped? I kind of gave consent.” Explaining what each term means because they are used so interchangeably, sexual abuse and sexual assault. Rape and molestation and everything. What is what?

In addition to education and precise definitions of terms related to rape and sexual assault, high schools, colleges, and universities need to include students in the discussions about anti-violence policies. After policies are created, educational institutions cannot assume that the job of policy creation is over. These policies need to be reevaluated yearly, with the encouraged participation of students who want to be involved in the evaluation process. Malia expressed unease with how her school seemed to ignore her suggestions to help future survivors on her campus:

Um, I hope that they are getting better in terms of how they handle it. We, students will get an e-mail if there was reported sexual assault or a misdemeanor of some type but I don’t know how they handled it. I’ve talked to some people my sophomore year who supposedly deal with sexual assault cases and I offered myself up as a peer advocate because I wanted to help out with what I thought they were missing, and they never followed up with me or contacted me about it, so I don’t know how much they’ve changed or if they took any of my critiques into account. I hope that they have.
In addition to education, defining key terms, and evaluating policies yearly with the assistance of educated students, survivors want high schools and colleges to be able to communicate with students about sexual health through a sex positive approach. (In my study 61% of survivors perceived their educational institutions as either completely silent about or vocally in opposition to discussing sex and/or rape). Abstinence education and purity culture targets mainly women for messages about how appalling it is to be a sexual person (Valenti 2009). If schools cannot talk about consensual sex with their students, they are further creating an environment where criminal sexual assault and rape are taboo topics. This kind of shaming might silence survivors who need assistance.

McKenzie briefly discussed how her university had an event called “Sex Week.” Students with the oversight of one sex educator ran this event on campus. It approached sex from a non-shaming and positive standpoint. Panelists talked about anything from pornography to different prophylactics and methods of contraception. By openly discussing sex, this university was an outlier who did not construct sexual activity into a taboo topic to be shamed. Because of their approach, they created a more open environment for students to also talk not only consensual sex, but also rape and sexual assault.

In addition to rape and sexual assault education, definition of key terms, evaluating policies yearly with the assistance of dedicated students, and communicating with students about sexual health through a sex positive approach, higher educational institutions need to tackle survivor bullying. Although the main focus of rape and sexual assault needs to be on the offender, sexual assault survivors (79% of the survivors in my study) encounter bullying and harassment from their peers and this treatment is especially
troubling to them. According to the National Women’s Law Center, young women and girls who drop out of school due to sexual or gender based bullying and do not return can suffer long lasting economic impacts. They make lower wages in their lives and have fewer safety nets to rely on when crises occur (National Women’s Law Center 2012:2).

This abuse also needs to be curbed by educational institutions. The following survivor talked about bullying after the crime. This survivor ended up opting for online high school classes instead of staying in the school where the harassment was happening.

Anyah said:

…I know that a whole bunch of my friends were saying that a whole bunch of people from [my town] were talking about [the rape]. I know that a couple of my so-called friends were saying that I didn’t actually get raped. People said that I wanted it. That I’m a whore. That I’d do anything and stuff like that. Just. Yeah. And it was suppose to be my best friend from forth grade and she was the one going off and saying that…

There also needs to be a focus on the rapists. According to anti-sexist advocate Jackson Katz, instead of focusing on men who rape, we concentrate our attention on women who “get raped” (2006). We also have a problem with the way we look at rapists, as though they were a small number of sick individuals instead of the “products of a culture that glorifies and sexualizes male power and dominance, and at the same time glorifies female subservience and submission” (Katz 2006:149). An examination of masculinity and a culture that accepts violent masculinity needs to be studied. According to Juliet:

**Juliet:** I think we need to do a lot more awareness on the part of men. I think the problem lies in masculinity. The problem lies in a culture that accepts all of this. I think we need to start looking to educating men about the proper way to deal. How not to rape people.

**Kelly:** How could we do that?

**Juliet:** I think most men don’t rape people. Statistically, most men are not rapists.
You’re seen those numbers where it’s like, the average is six victims per rapist.

**Kelly:** So how do we get to boys, or boys and men? How do we educate them or how do we get them to listen?

**Juliet:** I think that we need male advocates.

While 32% of survivors in my sample noted that they wanted women as advocates (64% did not indicate a preference for men or women), it would be useful to have men who are advocates as well. One positive example of anti-sexist men working to end abuse focuses on educating men and boys about the role men can play in stopping other men’s abuse. This can be through productions such as *The Vagina Monologues* (Katz 2006:267). According to Katz, “When a man stands up for social justice, non-violence, and basic human rights- for women as much as for men- he is acting in the best traditions of our civilization. That makes him not only a better man, but a better human being” (2006:270).

Furthermore, it is very important that sexual assault survivors have more control over their own lives and over the outcomes of their cases. As I discussed in the chapter on gender, survivors do not appreciate the lack of autonomy that they think some administrators, friends, and criminal justice professionals try to force upon them. Ullman and Townsend (2008) found that survivors who worked with rape crisis center advocates tended to experience less stress after the crime. These centers are unique in that they focus on empowering survivors. The client and crisis worker also develop a partnership that is collaborative instead of one that is an arrangement of unequal power (Ullman and Townsend 2008:299-300). They know what they want in the case and want the opportunity to follow the path that they feel is best for them. Lily suggested:

So the center that [my university] just set up in…, I think is amazing. So there is one person who goes out and is the contact person for, for everything. So that
person is the only person you have to reach out to and that’s the only jump you have to make. And then *everything* else is kind of put out for you, and then you’re helped in each of those, if you want to do it. There’s no agenda pushed. There’s no, “We need to do the reconciliation. We need to do the mediation.” There’s no, kind of, pushing any one agenda, besides the one that you think will be the most beneficial to you.

Overall then, sexual assault survivors can be protected by policies at educational institutions when these policies acknowledge that rape is a problem on campus. Survivors desire improved written policies, specific examples of forbidden behavior, a definition of consent, and sexual coercion. Next, they suggested that administrators evaluate policies, which I recommend happens yearly, with student involvement. Third, they wanted access to a healthy sexuality forum. Furthermore, high schools and colleges need anti-bullying policies that cover bullying not only from the offender, but other peers too. All of these approaches help protect sexual assault survivors. Lastly, survivors wanted more of a voice in their own cases. Anyone who deals with sexual assault survivors needs to understand that although survivors are hurt from the crime, they still know what they want and they do understand what is best for them. In addition to protection, survivors desired less complicated lives after the sexual assault/s.

**Simplifying Their Lives:**

Survivors in this study had their lives turned upside down because of the crime. Because of this, survivors recommended that if a student is sexually assaulted, institutions need to help them deal with the attack in the simplest way possible. This begins with educational institutions creating a space that can help survivors with the many issues that a sexual assault brings into their lives, including legal, mental health, housing, and educational assistance. In order to simplify survivors’ lives, they want to be informed about their
cases (21% complained about being ignored when it came to updates on cases), deal with
school staff that are trained about sexual assault (57% criticized the incompetence of
school staff when dealing with sexual assault cases), and also have the option of a mentor
after the crime occurs (see Meghann).

Sexual assault complicates survivors’ lives. Survivors had to deal with many
different departments at their schools in order to get their needs met. This process often
became frustrating and unhelpful for them. Due to these kinds of experiences, survivors
desired a central place on campus where they could go to get all of their needs met after
the crime. This center would include sexual assault aftercare, legal advice, help with
changing class schedules if the survivor and offender attended the same classes, and
support with changing housing options if the survivor and offender lived in the same
dorm. Lily said:

One place. It’s like a one stop shop, for, if you’re assaulted, like, all you have to
do is get yourself to go to this one place. You can know all of your options. They
can help you with your options. They can help you change your class schedule so
that you don’t see the person. They’ll help you move out of your dorm, since it’s
the only option.

Aside from a centralized place on campus, survivors also wanted to simplify their
lives by being informed about the progress on their cases. Too often, survivors are never
informed about the stance of their cases and their lives remained uncertain because the
sexual assault case outcome was very important to them. Most survivors’ experiences
with the legal system are more harmful than helpful. They are denied the services they
seek and few cases (only about 12%) result in conviction (Greeson and Campbell
2011:582). Yolonda talked about trying to get information from the police about her case:

Yolonda: And um, for the most part, it was mostly just is there ever going to be
anything that happens [with the case]? I really honestly don’t think so because that was the only phone conversation I’ve had with [an officer].

**Kelly:** So it was a phone conversation? They never sat with you and interviewed you or anything, about the night?

**Yolonda:** Uh. They did that when I went and gave the statement but after that, I only had that phone call, that I called the one officer and then I kept like going in to see if I could talk to them, to see is there was anything going on? Is there anything I can do? It was like that and…they were like; sometimes they were like, “Oh! The officer isn’t here so he should be back in a few. You can sit and wait.” I’d sit for like an hour and then I’d leave or it was just like, kind of a wild goose chase.

In addition to having updates on the status of their cases, survivors wanted to simplify their lives by dealing with school staff that were educated and sensitized about the seriousness of rape and sexual assault. In Becky’s case, the professor was not educated on how to handle these cases and she complicated Becky’s life by telling her whole class about the crime. Becky explained:

**Becky:** …I guess someone had said, “Oh hey!” Because I was a theater major. So it’s very like, class participation there. “Where’s Becky?” And she’s like, “Oh. This happened to her.” So when I would come and visit to be like, “Okay. I’m here to get my stuff.”

**Kelly:** She told everyone?

**Becky:** She told the class.

**Kelly:** She told the class that you were assaulted?

**Becky:** Yes. Yeah. So it was really, that was difficult. There were people that I didn’t even know that well that were coming up to me, talking about it, so.

**Kelly:** Did that contribute to the fact that you wanted to get out of there?

**Becky:** Oh! Most definitely.

In Becky’s example, not only did this professor complicate Becky’s life after the crime occurred, but she was also a part of the reason why Becky ended up dropping out of that college and transferring to a community college instead. Becky was not alone. Out of the 28 survivors in my sample, 36% of them did not graduate with their intended degree from the school in which they were enrolled at the time of the crime or they were on a leave of absence due to the sexual assault at the time of the interview. In other
words, one in three survivors in my sample were not attaining their academic goals due to the sexual assault as a contributing or sole factor.

In addition to knowledgeable faculty and staff when handling these cases, Meghann suggested simplifying sexual assault survivors’ lives through the assistance of mentors. These mentors would act as supportive friends and assistants when college became overwhelming. Meghan said:

I think that they should require counseling and I think that the students should maybe even get a mentor. Something that will make it a little bit easier on them. I think that they can even go as far as, for just a while, their mentor can walk them to class. Stuff like that.

Survivors want to feel safe and they want their lives simplified as much as possible after the crime. They suggested that this could happen by schools creating a centralized space where survivors can go to get various needs met and by keeping survivors informed about the status of their cases. They also suggested that educational institutions train faculty and staff about sexual assault, and provide mentors for students after these crimes occur. In addition to being protected and simplifying their lives, survivors also wanted to heal after the crime.

**Survivors’ Perceptions about Healing after the Crime**

Survivors want to heal after the crime occurs. This can happen by encouraging staff to notify survivors about a variety of free counseling options that are available at the educational institution. As well, educational institutions should provide empowerment options for survivors who would benefit from helping others who have been sexually assaulted. They also need an authorized leave of absence after a sexual assault, so that their educational lives are not adversely affected by the crime.
Though colleges and universities often have sexual assault survivor aftercare on campus, survivors are not always informed about these services. Becky experienced this problem:

**Becky:** …Maybe they can just offer more assistance with [sexual assault aftercare]. Like, when I told the teachers about it they said, “Oh yeah! The RVA (a city aftercare program for sexual assault survivors).” But what about at school? They never said go to a counselor here at school.

**Kelly:** Oh, they didn’t? Even though they *had them there*, they didn’t tell you about them?

**Becky:** Yes.

In addition to actually notifying survivors about the aftercare options at the school, survivors would benefit from empowerment activities where they could regain some influence in their lives. The survivors I interviewed wanted to help other people who had been sexually assaulted. Juliet previously emphasized the importance of becoming a victim advocate for other sexual assault survivors so that they would have support, because she did not feel like she had anyone there for her when she was sexually assaulted (See Chapter Four).

Students can also heal if there is a policy in place that allows survivors to take an authorized leave of absence if they choose after a sexual assault occurs. Because sexual assault survivors may encounter many issues that affect their lives adversely, such as depression, fear, anxiety, PTSD, lower self-esteem, and problems with social adjustment (Messman-Moore and colleagues 2000:18), an authorized leave of absence would give them the time to regroup so that their grades are not negatively affected as much by the crime. Malia talks about the influence that the attack had on her academic life:

So it wasn’t the end of the world but it was *very different grades* from what I had been getting. *Actually*, the end of my freshman year, while the disciplinary process was going on, I had a teacher approach me who asked if I was doing
okay. I seemed really distant and distracted in class. I had done well throughout the rest of the semester so my grade wasn’t impacted, but she saw a noticeable difference in *my presence* in her class when the disciplinary process was going on.

Allowing students to heal after a sexual assault occurs should be central to any high school or college policy initiative. According to the survivors in my study, they would have benefitted from being notified about on-campus counseling and aftercare options, empowerment activities, and authorized leaves of absence if they chose to take one. All of these approaches would have helped to simplify survivors’ lives when they were trying to also succeed in school after the violent crime.

**Survivors’ Perceptions about Whom Universities Should Hire to Work with Victims after a Sexual Assault Occurs**

While survivors suggested a series of improvements that could be made at the policy level in order to restore the lives of sexual assault survivors or potential victims, and all sexual assault survivors are different, some of their suggestions focused on the individuals whom they would like to work with after a sexual assault. In this section, I will discuss the 28 survivors’ perceptions about the people that they find most helpful to work with during the aftercare process, for those who did want assistance after the crime.

Sexual assault survivors want to heal after the attack. In order to do so, educational institutions need to be very careful with who they hire as therapists and anti-violence educators. Survivors ultimately want to work with people who are open-minded and understanding of many different cultures and lifestyles. Specifically, anti-violence educators and therapists need to be educated about the specific hurdles that male survivors face when they are raped, how income and race comes into play in these cases, and how gender roles affect victims. These specialists need to understand that every
campus is unique and they need to possess a deep understanding of the students, faculty, and staff at each specific institution in order to determine how sexual assault cases can be handled the most effectively.

This dissertation has thoroughly examined, intersections such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and religion influence people’s lives on a daily basis. In chapters two, three, and four, I focused on one main intersection in each chapter because that was the way that survivors typically talked about intersections in their lives. I then explored how these varying intersections simultaneously influenced survivor’s lives and affected victimization experiences in diverse ways. For example, gay male survivors do not face the same barriers to help that heterosexual females or males face (Sivakumaran 2005). Not only do male survivors need to be acknowledged as the survivors that they are, but according to Brian:

_A lot of gay men I know have dealt with sexual violence in their lives in some way and don’t talk about it to other people. And it’s just kind of assumed, it’s assumed to be, there’s like, no space for it… Sexual violence services are so focused on women. That’s great. That’s wonderful. But the space, even in [big liberal cities] don’t have groups for male survivors. Kind of lax. So, there are kind of two folds, right? How do you address adequately providing for male survivors and then how do you adequately address providing for gay male survivors? Which, often times the male survivors that you are providing for are gay just because of the power dynamics and sort of the way that violence happens._

The way that educators can best handle a gay male rape case may not be exactly the same as the way they handle a case for a survivor with different intersections affecting the case. For example, recall Jessica’s story and how difficult is was for her as a black heterosexual female to report her rape by a popular black man on her predominantly white campus. Reporting the crime would have made her an outsider not only at her predominantly white university, but also within her more close knit black community on
campus (see Crenshaw 1991 for the different barriers in violence cases due to race and gender). Because survivors recognize the importance of these multiple intersections in their sexual assault cases, they need college staff, professors, criminal justice professionals, and advocates to be aware of these intersections and the differing ways that they affect survivors.

While these sexual assault supporters need to be aware of different intersections affecting survivors’ lives, they also need to be very familiar the specific institution that they are dealing with. Some educational establishments are more survivor friendly than others. For example, being aware of the parietals rule in Malia’s case was central to an advocate helping her with her incident. Parietals were a rule that two students of the opposite sex should not be in each other’s dorm rooms after a certain time of night. Because of this rule, Malia was frightened to leave an offender’s room after parietals on the night of the rape, because she did not want to get into trouble by the university. Malia also argued that her Catholic school treated women who were caught in men’s rooms more harshly than men caught in women’s rooms after hours. This university specific rule was central to Malia’s case. According to Malia:

**Malia:** …the whole parietals rule, they *never* emphasized during freshmen orientation, that if you feel unsafe, you could leave and not get in trouble for being in a guy’s dorm past the time that you are allowed to. It’s very *shaming* almost.

**Kelly:** Okay. How do they shame?

**Malia:** Almost like *staying over* in a guy’s room is like, frowned upon. If you were *caught*, it was like you were violating the school, violating God’s will and I just felt so *guilty*.

**Kelly:** So, the way that you’re phrasing it, you’re saying that if the girls were staying over in a guy’s room. Was it the same thing if a guy was in a girl’s room?

**Malia:** No. There’s a *huge* disparity in terms of how rules are enforced in a girl’s room versus a guy’s dorm on campus.

**Kelly:** Talk about that. That’s interesting.
**Malia:** Guy’s dorms are much more lax about drinking policies. They are friends with their RAs. They have parties in their dorms on weekends whereas girls’ dorms, they are very strict in terms of alcohol and drinking. RAs aren’t really your friends. There are quiet hours. There are no parties in girls’ dorms.

Any advocate helping Malia after the crime should be aware of the gender and religious obstacles that this survivor was facing as opposed to a survivor from another institution.

All survivors face different barriers to assistance after the offenses due to unique personal intersections, as well as specific institutional barriers that are exclusive to each survivors’ school. Advocates need to really understand intersectionality and educational institutions in order to adequately assist each individual survivor to achieve the greatest level of success with his or her healing process.

Next, survivors prefer to work with advocates who were also sexual assault survivors. Of the 28 survivors, 29% of them noted the importance of education through other survivors. They wanted individuals who would respect their wishes, believe and not blame them, and listen to them. They also suggested that educational institutions employ more women in policing and as therapists.

Survivors prefer to work with other people who have also been sexually assaulted. They expressed a desire to be around people who had been through the same ordeal. They also think that having actual survivors tell their stories would educate students about how serious this crime really is. Malia articulated:

> Um, I think maybe if you had survivors who were willing to come and speak. Actually tell their stories so people could see that this is something that does happen. It’s not something to be joked about. It actually happens. I think the perception is, is that everyone is just overly cautious and this never actually happens.

Anyah agreed. She said:
I would get people who [are] \textit{rape victims}. I would get \textit{them and} I would have them go to school and have a talk about it. Have them share their experiences. So even if it was \textit{scarring} towards the kids or not, they still need to know about it. Honestly, if that was me and I heard about it in school, I would be more aware about it. It’s just one of those things where they are more focused on, “Oh! Let’s have the football game. Let’s have a \textit{rally}, or whatever. Have a spirit thing for the sports.” It’s all about sports. Something about \textit{caring} for everybody. They’ve never had an assembly for the sexual thing. They’ve never. I’ve never experienced that, so.

Although sexual assault survivors as educators and advocates were perceived as ideal by sexual assault survivors, ultimately these men and women just wanted to work with people who were respectful, who believed them, and listened to them. As I have tried to show, survivors often felt that family and friends blamed them for the sexual assault. They felt that people close to them questioned their actions and re-victimized them. That is why it is essential that high schools and colleges hire educated and qualified advocates who are knowledgeable about intersectionality, rape, sexual assault, and victim blaming because these survivors’ first encounter with an advocate will have an influence on his or her entire healing process after the crime.

Survivors also expressed a desire for more female advocates, including at the law enforcement level. Due to their mistrust of men (46\% of the survivors in my sample), these survivors expressed a desire for assistance from women, again displaying how the intersection of gender matters in these cases. The following is an example of Molly’s deep distrust of men that carried over into her relationship with her father, even though he was a kind, nonviolent man:

I do feel comfortable more around women…. I cannot be with closed doors. I cannot be. I’m actually that way with my dad too. My dad and I have had a relationship growing up like that, but he understands. He knows. He understands but he is hurt that I cannot spend time with him, because he is alone. Every time that I go and visit him, I \textit{won’t} sit next to him. I won’t let him hug me or things
like that. I’m like, “No.”

This distrust of men pushed survivors towards a desire to work with women after the rape. Though women sometimes proved to be disappointing and men surprisingly helpful, survivors did want to talk to women more than men in these cases. Jessica articulated:

And then they called the cops and the cop came. He was kind of; he seemed like he didn’t know what was happening. Like, “Oh yeah. We wanted to send you a female cop but we didn’t have any. So here is this big, scary Black man.” (She laughs.) I was like, “That’s not the best circumstance because I just got raped by a big, scary Black man.”

Ultimately, sexual assault survivors prefer to work with advocates who are aware of different intersections affecting survivors’ lives. They also want advocates to be very familiar with the specific institution in which the assault took place. Survivors also prefer to work with people who were sexual assault survivors themselves, though they do not require this connection. What is vital to survivors is the perception that school staff, advocates, and criminal justice personnel will respect their wishes, believe and not blame them, and want to listen to them. Survivors also suggested that more women in policing and as therapists would be useful for the healing process after the crime.

**Summary of the Dissertation**

In summary, this research explored how 28 high school, college, and university sexual assault survivors in the Midwest in 2013 perceived institutional responses to their sexual assaults. I gave an overview of how survivors viewed the sexual assault reporting process and how they assessed the way that their cases were handled. Specifically, in-group survivors were generally concerned with keeping a prestigious appearance. This facade prevented them from reporting their victimizations to the police, in contrast to out-group
survivors who did not report out of a distrust of the criminal justice system. I examined how out-group survivors were at a disadvantage in getting help after the crime due to a lack of funds for therapy and other financial barriers to assistance. I also examined how the perceived income level of the attacker factored in to how survivors dealt with the aftermath of their cases. Specifically, if the offender was identified as an in-group member, the survivor perceived him as a person who would probably not be punished for the offense and therefore, he or she did not pursue the case. In this way, it is possible that survivors’ beliefs about punishment set the stage for the failure to hold some aggressors responsible.

I also explored how survivors’ social locations through race, income, and gender influenced their experiences. While survivors of color perceived race as central to their sexual assault cases, white survivors did not, although they did acknowledged that race was an issue in the cases of survivors of color. I also explored how survivors disliked men of the same racial or ethnic group as their attacker, even if the offender was the same race or ethnicity as the survivor. I also discovered who was depicted as criminally prone in campus e-mail alerts about crime, who was actually prosecuted for sexual assault, and how race, violence, and culture are articulated differently depending on the race and ethnicity of the interviewee.

In chapter four, I assessed the essential components of sexual assault prevention and aftercare programs on campus through the eyes of sexual assault survivors. I learned how stereotypical gender roles imposed on survivors affected how they reacted to their cases and in their lives after the crime. Specifically, in order to regain power after the offense, they rejected traditional gender roles by being verbally aggressive, standing up to
authority, becoming active in advocacy, and through physical aggressiveness.

In this conclusion, I suggest future research topics for studying sexual assault post-2013. I also investigate solutions to sexual assaults in American high schools, colleges, and universities from the points of view of the 28 sexual assault survivors who I interviewed. Specifically, I analyze both policy and individual level resolutions to these crimes.

**Future Research**

Future research needs to address how a renewed interest in sexual assault on college campuses by the American government in 2014 might have changed the plight of sexual assault survivors when compared to before that time. Additionally, other important intersections such as age and ability could add to the understanding of the various standpoints of sexual assault survivors. Third, future research should explore the topic of sexual assault on college campuses from the perspectives of various people affected by these crimes, in addition to survivors. Doing so would help the aftercare process for the copious groups of people who are challenged by these crimes, although not directly so. Next, a focus on sexual assault survivors’ victimizations prior to high school and college could assist policy makers in understanding if or how childhood abuse affects academics and educational life when in high school or college. Last, future research needs to focus on survivors outside of the Midwestern United States. Doing so would offer a comparison group to see if survivors across several sections of the United States face similar or different barriers to recovery.

I collected data from January through July of 2013. In 2014, the Obama administration focused on sexual assault on college campuses and pushed universities
and colleges to hold more attackers accountable, encouraged the reporting process to become simpler, and urged places of education to reexamine their sexual assault policies. Because of this widespread interest in these crimes on American college and university campuses, survivors in 2013 may have faced a more hostile environment on campus when compared to sexual assault survivors who were victimized after 2013. Future researchers should explore how the changes to sexual assault policies on American college campuses have impacted the lives’ of sexual assault survivors since the enactment of Obama administration controls. Before and after research could answer which polices are working and what still needs to be done to improve the plight of sexual assault survivors.

Next, I studied the intersections of race, income, and gender and how they applied to sexual assault cases. Though these intersections are important to take into account with these crimes, they are not the only intersections that matter. For example, future research should focus on men as sexual assault survivors. Though it is more common and is important to study women as survivors, we know very little about men who are victimized. The rape of men has received little scholarly attention because data are scarce and literature is concentrated on female survivors (Pino and Meier 1999:979-980). Age is also another intersection that may influence sexual assault survivors’ lives in different ways. We need a focus on these and other intersections to best understand how those play out in these cases and how to specialize treatment towards diverse groups of people.

Future research should include interviews with survivors, but also defendants, involved families, college administrators and staff, and criminal justice professionals. Doing so would give a well-rounded view of high school and college sexual assault from
the various actors who are involved in these cases. For example, according to Polaschek and Gannon, offenders’ perceptions about sexually violent crimes are that they are not a serious offense (2004:300). Their justifications for the crimes they commit are also important to understanding how to prevent these offenses in the future. By looking at different groups of people involved in sexual violence outcomes, we would be better prepared to understand how families and different institutions work together or clash. The researcher could gain knowledge on policy ideas that would work well with the various individuals and institutions involved in these cases. This research could also provide further ideas about aftercare for various people aside from the survivor who are affected by these crimes.

Fourth, a focus on high school and college sexual assault survivors’ victimizations prior to high school and college could assist policy makers in understanding how childhood abuse affects academics and educational life when the survivor is older. According to the National Women’s Law Center, feeling unsafe at school is correlated with skipping class, lower academic performance, and even dropping out of school (2012:2). It is possible that previous victimizations in childhood hurt older survivors’ educational experiences as well.

Last, survivors outside of the Midwest also need to be studied. Though it is possible that data will be similar, location might matter in these cases. Future researchers could study topics similar to mine and compare their data to mine in order to see if high schools, colleges, and universities in different areas of the country handle sexual assault cases differently than in the Midwest. If so, altered policy ideas might apply.

If policy creators remember one point, let it be the point made by Jessica Valenti

Now, should we treat [people] as independent agents, responsible for themselves? Of course. But being responsible has nothing to do with being raped. [People] don’t get raped because they were drinking or took drugs. [People] do not get raped because they weren’t careful enough. [People] get raped because someone raped them.”
APPENDIX A

DISSERTATION INTERVIEW GUIDE
Dissertation Interview Guide

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview. During the following 90 minutes, we will be discussing several areas related to sexual assault. Specifically, I will touch on questions about your experience as well as offender characteristics. I will also ask some demographic information about you. Remember, your participation is voluntary and you may stop the interview or skip questions if you feel the need to do so. Again, thank you very much for coming here. Your knowledge is invaluable and may help decrease or prevent these crimes on campus. Do you have any questions?

Intersectionality Questions:

1A. In what country were you born?
   
   **If not the United States:**
   1B. How long have you lived in the United States?

2. What gender do you identify with?
   (Male, female, transgender, other)

3. If you don’t mind telling me, what year were you born?

4A. Do you identify as a member of a racial, ethnic, or other minority group?
   
   **If yes:**
   4B. What group do you identify with?

5. How would you identify your sexual orientation?
   (Straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, other)

6A. What college/university did you attend?
   6B. Did you graduate?

7. Were you ever enrolled in an ESL program before college?
8A. Please tell me the jobs you’ve held.
8B. Did you work full-time/part-time?
8C. During college, did you work during school breaks?
8D. Are you currently employed?
   **If yes:**
   8E. Where?

9. What kinds of work did/does your father do?

10. What kinds of work did/does your mother do?

11A. In the U.S., we usually identify three socio-economic classes – upper class, middle class, and lower class. How would you classify your parents’ socio-economic status?
11B. Based on what indicators?
11C. Please describe the community that you were born in.
11D. Please describe the community that you currently live in.

12A. What is your marital/partner status?
   **If attached:**
   12B. What is your partner’s employment status?

13A. Do you have children?
   **If yes:**
   13B. Please tell me their ages.

14A. Now I am going to ask you a few questions about the offender. Was this person a stranger?
   **If no:**
   14B. How did you know this person?
   14C. Was this person someone that had authority over you in any way?
Questions About the Assault:

Now I am going to ask you a few questions about the assault. Are you ready?

15A. I really appreciate that you agreed to participate in this project. Would you mind telling me what happened to you? (Probe about assailant, how the victim responded, how it ended, what the victim did first.)

15B. Were you at school at the time of the attack/attacks? If not, were you enrolled in school?

15C. Where did the assault occur?

15D. What time of day did it happen?

15E. Did you ever tell anyone about it?

If yes:

15F. Please tell me about that.

15G. Why did you choose to confide in that person? (What did that person do/say? How did this help/not help you?)

15H. Did anyone else become involved?

If yes:

15I. Please tell me about that.

15J. What was their first response? (What happened?)

15K. Did they help you? How? Tell me about that. Were their responses unhelpful? Explain. What did you think, say to them at the time? Thinking about it now, were they helpful or hurtful? Explain.

If yes:

15L. Why?

If no:

15M. Why not?

If no:

15N. Why not? (Prompts: Were you scared? What were you afraid of? Why?)
16A. Did you ever let anyone at your school (high school or college) know about the sexual assault?

**If yes:**
16B. Who?
16C. Please walk me through their responses.
16D. What, if anything, did they do to help you?
16E. What could have been done differently, if anything?
16F. Did reporting the incident lead to any consequences for the offender?

**If no:**
16G. Why not?

17A. Did anyone from within the criminal justice system ever become involved in your case?

**If yes:**
17B. Who?
17C. Can you please walk me through their responses?
17D. What, if anything, did they do to help?
17E. What could have been done differently, if anything?
17F. Did reporting the incident lead to any consequences for the offender?

**If no:**
17G. Why not?

18A. Did anyone ever place blame on you for the sexual assault?

**If yes:**
18B. Who blamed you?
18C. How did they blame you?
18D. How did you feel about being blamed?
18E. Did being blamed influence your classes and schoolwork? (in high school and/or college)
18F. Did being blamed influence reporting decisions?

**If no:**
18G. Please describe how people responded to you if you told anyone about the sexual assault.
18H. Did anyone comfort or console you after the assault?

If yes:
18I. Please describe what they did.

19A. Did you experience any after effects after the assault?
19B. For example, how did you feel mentally?
19C. How did you feel socially?
19D. How did you feel physically?
19E. Did these symptoms affect your schoolwork? (in high school and/or college)

If yes:
19F. Give me an example of how.

19G. Did these symptoms affect employment?

If yes:
19H. Give me an example of how.

20A. Did you continue to see the offender after this event?

If yes:
20B. In what capacity? (Prompt: Tell me about the first time that you saw him or her.)

20C. How would you characterize your relationship with this person today?

21A. Did your relationships with friends change after the sexual assault?

If yes:
21B. In what ways did they change?

21C. Did your relationships with school officials (in high school and/or college) change after the sexual assault?

If yes:
21D. In what ways did they change?

21E. Did your relationship with your parents change after the sexual assault?

If yes:
21F. In what ways did they change?
21G. Did changing relationships influence your classes, schoolwork, and/or grades? (in high school and/or college)
   **If yes:**
   21H. How?

22A. Tell me about your grades and classes after the assault. (in high school and/or college)
22B. Did your grades change when compared to before the incident? (in high school and/or college)
22C. What, if anything, did your school do to keep you on track with your homework and in your classes? (in high school and/or college)
   **If the school (high school and/or college) was proactive:**
   22D. Did you find it helpful?
   22E. Why or why not?
   22F. What could have been done differently, if anything?
22G. Did the assault have any influence on employment?
   **If yes:**
   22H. How?

23A. Did you know about the rape policies at your high school and/or college?
   **If yes:**
   23B. How did you learn about them?
   23C. When did you learn about them?
23D. Did your high school and/or college hold anti-sexual assault events on campus such as “Take Back the Night” or “The Vagina Monologues?”
   **If yes:**
   23E. Do you think that these events are helpful for bringing about awareness of these crimes? Why or why not?
   23F. When did these anti-sexual assault events occur?
   23G. Do you think that they were held often enough?
23H. Overall, what do you feel was your high school and/or college’s stance on sexual assault?
23I. What was the Greek system like on your campus?

23J. Did the Greek system influence sexual assault on your campus?

**If yes:**

23K. How?

23L. What is your definition of sexual assault?

23M. What does it include?

23N. What does it not include?

23O. Where did you learn these beliefs?

24. How, if at all, does the assault impact your life today?

25A. If you worked on a college campus and had the opportunity to create policies to **prevent** student sexual assaults, what would you create?

25B. What policies and changes, if any, would you make to help survivors, **after an assault occurred**?

26. Is there anything else that you would like to add that I have not asked you?

27. Can you refer to me any survivors that you know that were sexually assaulted in college that may want to participate in this study?
APPENDIX B

SURVIVOR QUESTIONNAIRE
Survivor DEMOGRAPHICS:

1. What is your current age? *(Circle number)*
   1. 19 or younger
   2. 20-29
   3. 30-39
   4. 40-49
   5. 50 or older

2. What was your age at the time of the assault? *(Circle number)*
   1. 19 or younger
   2. 20-29
   3. 30-39
   4. 40-49
   5. 50 or older

3. In what year/s did the sexual assault occur?
   2. 1991 15. 2004
   4. 1993 17. 2006
   5. 1994 18. 2007
   8. 1997 21. 2010

4. Which year in high school or college were you assaulted? *(Circle number)*
   1. Freshman year in high school
   2. Sophomore year in high school
   3. Junior year in high school
   4. Senior year in high school
   5. After graduating from high school but before college
   6. Freshman year of undergraduate college
   7. Sophomore year of undergraduate college
   8. Junior year of undergraduate college
   9. Senior year of undergraduate college
  10. After senior year while pursuing an undergraduate degree
  11. During graduate school

5. What high school did you attend? *(Write response)*
   ________________________________________________
6. Did you graduate from that high school? (Circle number)
   1. Yes
   2. No

7. What college did you attend? (Write response)
   ____________________________________________________________

8. Did you graduate from that college? (Circle number)
   1. Yes
   2. No

9. What gender group do you identify yourself as belonging to? (Circle number)
   1. Male
   2. Female
   3. Transgender
   4. Other:_______________________________________________________

10. How would you identify your sexual orientation? (Circle number)
    1. Straight
    2. Gay
    3. Lesbian
    4. Bisexual
    5. Other:_______________________________________________________

11. What racial or ethnic group do you identify yourself as belonging to? (Circle number)
    1. White
    2. Black or African American
    3. Hispanic
    4. Native American and Alaska Native
    5. Asian
    6. Two or more races
    7. Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander

12. Please indicate your annual household income. (Circle number)
    1. $0-$19,999
    2. $20,000-$39,999
    3. $40,000-$59,999
    4. $60,000-$79,999
    5. $80,000-$99,999
    6. $100,000 and over
13. Which religion do you identify with, if any?

1. Christian – Protestant
2. Christian – Catholic
3. Christian – Mormon
5. Christian – Orthodox
6. Jewish
7. Muslim
8. Buddhist
9. Hindu
10. Unaffiliated – Including Atheist and Agnostic
11. Other, please specify:

_______________________________________________________________
Offender DEMOGRAPHICS:

1. What is the offender’s current age? Please estimate if you are unsure. (Circle number)
   1. 19 or younger
   2. 20-29
   3. 30-39
   4. 40-49
   5. 50 or older

2. What was the offender’s age at the time of the assault? Please estimate if you are unsure. (Circle number)
   1. 19 or younger
   2. 20-29
   3. 30-39
   4. 40-49
   5. 50 or older

3. If the offender was a student, which year in high school or college was he or she in when the sexual assault occurred? Please estimate if you are unsure. (Circle number)
   1. Freshman year in high school
   2. Sophomore year in high school
   3. Junior year in high school
   4. Senior year in high school
   5. After graduating from high school but before college
   6. Freshman year of undergraduate college
   7. Sophomore year of undergraduate college
   8. Junior year of undergraduate college
   9. Senior year of undergraduate college
   10. After senior year while pursuing an undergraduate degree
   11. During graduate school
   12. The offender was not a student.

4. Which high school or university, if any, was the offender attending during the time of the assault? (Write response)
   High School:__________________________________________________________
   College/University:_____________________________________________________

5. Did he or she graduate from that school? (Circle number)
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. Don’t know
   4. The offender was not a student.
6. Did the offender attend the same high school as you?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. Don’t know
   4. The offender was not a student.

7. Did the offender attend the same university as you?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. Don’t Know
   4. The offender was not a student.

8. What gender group did the offender identify with? (Circle number)
   1. Male
   2. Female
   3. Transgender
   4. Other
   5. Don’t know

9. If you know, which sexual orientation did the offender identify with? (Circle number)
   1. Straight
   2. Gay
   3. Lesbian
   4. Bisexual
   5. Other
   6. Don’t Know

10. What racial or ethnic group did the offender identify as belonging to? (Circle number)
    1. White
    2. Black or African American
    3. Hispanic
    4. Native American and Alaska Native
    5. Asian
    6. Two or more races
    7. Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander
    8. Don’t Know

11. Please indicate the offender’s annual household income. (Circle number)
    1. $0-$19,999
    2. $20,000-$39,999
    3. $40,000-$59,999
    4. $60,000-$79,999
    5. $80,000-$99,999
    6. $100,000 and over
    7. Don’t Know
12. Which religion did the offender identify with, if any?

1. Christian – Protestant
2. Christian – Catholic
3. Christian – Mormon
5. Christian – Orthodox
6. Jewish
7. Muslim
8. Buddhist
9. Hindu
10. Unaffiliated – Including Atheist and Agnostic
11. Other, please specify:

_______________________________________________________________
REFERENCE LIST


VITA

Kelly Pinter was born and raised in Lake Zurich, Illinois. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she attended the University of Illinois at Chicago, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice, with Highest Distinction, in 2003. From 2005 to 2007, she also attended the University of Illinois at Chicago, where she received a Master of Arts in Criminology, Law, and Justice, again with highest distinction.

While at Loyola, Dr. Pinter taught at several schools, including the University of Illinois at Chicago, Loyola University Chicago, the College of Lake County, Harper College, and Kaplan University. Dr. Pinter also won the United Way Fellowship in 2009 and the Community Stewards Fellowship in 2008, for her outstanding involvement with activism and the community.

Currently, Dr. Pinter is teaching at the College of Lake County, Harper College, and Kaplan University. She lives in Lake Zurich, Illinois with her partner Adam, and their two children, Hanalei and Dexter.