

Annotated Bibliography of Recent Research on Sexual Assaults on Black Women

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SOCIAL SCIENCE:

Amar, Angela Frederick. "African-American College Women's Perceptions of Resources and Barriers When Reporting Forced Sex." *The Journal of the National Black Nurses Association* 19.2 (2008) 35–41.

Through her research, Amar found that "African-American and White women experience violence at equal rates except in the 2024 age range where African-American women experience greater violence" (36). Given this information, she conducted a field study at an unnamed historically African-American college in the south. Arguing that little research has been done specifically focusing on female African-American college-aged sexual assault victims, Amar seeks to fill this void by discussing specific barriers this group of women face in reporting rape and offering solutions to this problem. She points to personal anxiety, negative treatment of the victim, lack of accessibility to campus health professionals, lack of health insurance, and relationship to the offender as harmful barriers African-American college women face in reporting rape or sexual assault.

Avegno, Jennifer, Lisa D. Mills, and Trevor J. Mills. "Sexual Assault Victims in the Emergency Department: Analysis by Demographic and Event Characteristics." *The Journal of Emergency Medicine* 37.3 (2009) 328–334.

In this article, the authors focused on emergency department trends, treatment, and management when dealing with victims of sexual assault. They found that black victims were significantly younger and more likely to know their perpetrators than white victims. The authors argue that standardized documentation of sexual assault patient visits (which, to this point, have not been utilized) would be beneficial to medical, legal, and social understandings of race, age, and gender demographics of victimhood.

Boykins, Anita D., et al. "Minority Women Victims of Recent Sexual Violence: Disparities in Incident History." *Journal of Women's Health* 19.3 (2010) 453–461.

The authors of this article examined forensic data to determine any differences in assault or care between black and white women who reported sexual assault and sought out emergency care at a hospital emergency department over a period of two years. While there were no differences seen in terms of care of victims, the study found that black women were more likely to have weapons used in their assaults, to report any illicit drug use at the time of the assault, and to be assaulted in a city environment than white women. In sum, the authors argue that "both coordinated responses and comprehensive, individualized care by specially trained providers are important in the emergency care of minority women who are victims of recent sexual assault" (453).

Chung, Heewon, Thema Bryant-Davis, and Shaquita Tillman. "From the Margins to the Center: Ethnic Minority Women and the Mental Health Effects of Sexual Assault." *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* 10.4 (2009) 330–357.

This article uses an intersectional methodology to examine the ways that social traumas, such as racism, sexism, and poverty, overlap and interact with sexual assault trauma for African-American, Asian-American, Latina, and Native American women. The authors argue that because of the social context of their lives, these types of women face higher rates of psychological impact, and face greater barriers in gaining protection, including "discriminatory policies, financial constraints, social stigma around mental health issues, language issues, and mistrust of agencies based on personal and historical experiences of violations" (330). Overall, the authors argue that trauma scholarship, counseling, and legal policy should include investigations and discussions of sociocultural context into their studies to better equip sexual assault survivors of ethnic minority status.

Donovan, Roxanne A. "To Blame or Not To Blame: Influences of Target Race and Observer Sex on Rape Blame Attribution." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 22.6 (2007) 722–736.

This article examines "how victim race, perpetrator race, and participant sex affect perceptions of a rape survivor's promiscuity (jezebel stereotype) and strength and/or toughness (matriarch stereotype)" (722). Donovan found that most female participants endorsed the black sexual predator stereotype. Black females were perceived as more promiscuous only when the perpetrator was a white male, a conclusion Donovan connects with the jezebel stereotype of African American women. Finally, Donovan found that, contrary to previous studies, black perpetrators were not penalized more than white perpetrators. She believes this is due to changing racial attitudes in current times.

Fagan, Jennifer, et al. "The Influence of Gender and Race on Sexual Assault Among High Risk Drinkers." *Race, Gender, and Class* 18.1/2 (2011) 215–229.

This article focuses on the relationship between high risk drinking and sexual assault on predominantly white college institutions (PWI) and historically black universities (HBU). The authors found that while the frequency of high risk drinking was significantly less among HBU students, "frequent high risk drinkers were more likely to have been sexually assaulted and to have sexually assaulted others" at both institutions (215).

Freedman, Estelle B. "'Crimes Which Startle and Horrify': Gender, Age, and the Racialization of Sexual Violence in White American Newspapers, 1870–1900." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20.3 (2011) 465–497.

This article focuses on late nineteenth-century newspaper reporting of rape, arguing that such reporting has served to naturalize the stereotypes of both the black man as rapist and the black woman as promiscuous, which served to maintain white supremacy. Also, the author of this

article centers on these newspapers' emphasis on young female rape victims as a way of "girling" rape, which they coupled with the racialization of sexual violence.

Freeman Jr., Daniel H., and Jeff R. Temple. "Social Factors Associated with History of Sexual Assault Among Ethnically Diverse Adolescents." *Journal of Family Violence* 25 (2009) 349–356.

The authors of this article studied 1,634 ethnically diverse adolescents in Texas to determine how living arrangements and family structure associated with sexual assault history. They found that adolescents who lived in non-traditional family households and those who identified with multiple race categories were more likely to report rape. The authors emphasize the necessity for and intervention policies to focus on ethnically diverse girls *and* boys, given that the numbers of female and male sexual assault victims in this study were nearly equal.

Irving, Toni. "Decoding Black Women: Policing Practices and Rape Prosecution on the Streets of Philadelphia." *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 20.2 (2008) 100–120. In this article, Irving examines over two thousand cases of rape involving black women that were not investigated in Philadelphia between 1995 and 2000. Irving argues that "sexual ideologies help construct complex social hierarchies that in turn structure rights," and therefore seeks to uncover rape narratives that have been ignored or left out of discourse (100). She views rape as a metalanguage that, for black women, is undercut by competing sociolegal/political systems that ignore or dismiss their narratives. Overall, she finds that "instruments of power work together to reinforce particular behaviors at an institutional level" and claims that scholarship must discuss and elaborate on stories of black women rape in order to create change on all levels (104).

Krebs, Christopher P., et al. "The Sexual Assault of Undergraduate Women at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 26.18 (2011) 3640–3666.

Here the authors focus on the "prevalence of different types of sexual assault among undergraduate women at HBCUs and make comparisons to data collected from undergraduate women at non-HBCUs" (3640). They found that there was a significantly lower rate of reported rape among women at HBCUs than non-HBCUs, and the authors connect a lower frequency of alcohol use at HBCUs to this statistic. Claiming to be the "first study to produce estimates of the prevalence of sexual assault among undergraduate women at HBCUs," this study argues that reducing the amount of alcohol use on any campus will reduce the amount of sexual assault as well (3657).

Porter, Judy, and Laverne McQuiller Williams. "Intimate Violence Among Underrepresented Groups on a College Campus." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 26.16 (2011) 3210–3224.

Porter and Williams studied a sample group of 1,028 students on a northeastern technological college campus. Their findings concluded that students who are typically underrepresented (deaf, racially diverse, lesbian, gay, or bisexual) were significantly more at risk for sexual assault. The authors urge college health professionals to avoid using a “one size fits all” approach to addressing sexual and dating violence” and instead maintain greater awareness of diverse races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and abilities (3221).

Roberts, Sushma T., et al. “Sexual Trauma Disclosure in Clinical Settings: Addressing Diversity.” *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation* 11 (2010) 244–259.

The authors in this article focus on the various factors of personal and cultural difference that determine whether a sexual assault survivor will choose to share his/her trauma with mental health professionals. Their conclusions also state that African American women are less likely to disclose information, largely because of receiving negative social reactions. The authors argue that clinicians must be multiculturally sensitive and researchers/scholars refocus their attention on individual and cultural diversity.

Sommers, Marilyn S., et al. “Forensic Sexual Assault Examination and Genital Injury: Is Skin Color a Source of Health Disparity?” *American Journal of Emergency Medicine* 26 (2008) 857–866.

In this study, Sommers, et al. found that injuries to the external genitalia of sexual assault victims are reported to be three times as prevalent in white women than in black women. The authors point to difficulties with injury detection in dark skin and (less likely) differences in the properties of black and white skin as possible explanations for this statistic. The authors urge practitioners to “increase their vigilance when examining individuals with dark skin to ensure that all injuries are identified, treated, and documented” (864).

Sullivan, Terri N., et al. “Problematic Situations Associated with Dating Experiences and Relationships Among Urban African American Adolescents: A Qualitative Study.” *The Journal of Primary Prevention* 31 (2010) 365–378.

The authors of this article conducted a qualitative study of 44 African American middle and high school urban students. Through their studies, the authors found six problematic categorical trends in adolescent relationships that may lead to violence or victimization: difficulty approaching dating partners, conflict resolution among friends and partners, emotional expression and intentional malicious communication, physical aggression and joking among adolescents, peer influences, and media and technology. According to the authors, these issues prevalent among African American youth can be addressed through curricular communication and education.

Tillman, Shaquita, et al. “Shattering Silence: Exploring Barriers to Disclosure for African American Sexual Assault Survivors.” *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* 11.2 (2010) 59–70.

This article provides “a critique of the current literature examining barriers to disclosure for African American women, such as intrapsychic factors, the damaging effect of an unsupportive response to initial disclosure, stigmatization of African American female sexuality, apprehension regarding racism, and racial loyalty” (59). The authors of this article call for greater diversity training, more diverse samples of participants in future studies, and funding for cultural “psychoeducation” of clinicians to lessen the barriers for female African American sexual assault disclosure (66). Finally, they claim that policy changes must be made on various levels (media, education systems, criminal justice systems, etc.) in order to eliminate systemic barriers to disclosure faced by African American women.

LEGAL/ LAW REVIEW:

Alexandre, Michèle. “‘Girls Gone Wild’ and Rape Law: Revising the Contractual Concept of Consent and Ensuring an Unbiased Application of ‘Reasonable Doubt’ When the Victim is Non-Traditional.” *American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy and the Law* 17 (2009) 41–78.

Defining “non-traditional” women as those “who do not fit the profile of the stereotypical rape victim,” this article primarily focuses on how the current judicial standard for contractual consent is particularly detrimental to women of color and other non-traditional victims of rape (1). Alexandre argues that the current treatment of consent applied in cases with non-traditional victims virtually nullifies rape shield laws (laws enforced to make the sexual history of a victim inadmissible in court). She argues, instead, for a continuum-based standard of consent (one where consent is not finite and can be changed or withdrawn at any time in a sexual encounter/relationship).

Franklin, Travis W. “The Intersection of Defendants’ Race, Gender, and Age in Prosecutorial Decision Making.” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 38 (2010) 185–192

While this article does not focus on race and rape per se, it does analyze the way race, age, and gender interact in terms of prosecutorial charging decisions and can therefore be applied to sexual assault cases. Through his case study, Franklin found that prosecutors’ decision-making processes were only affected by race when they interacted with age and gender. Ultimately, Franklin warns prosecutors to be aware of this intersection to “ensure that undue racial disparity...does not exist or can at least be corrected where it does exist” (191).

Rapp, Laura, et al. “The Internet as a Tool for Black Feminist Activism: Lessons From an Online Antirape Protest.” *Feminist Criminology* 5.3 (2010) 244–262.

Using two specific case studies, the authors of this article focus on the internet “as a tool for Black women to challenge violence against women of color” (244). The authors argue that organizations and scholarship have been centered on the treatment of Black male offenders and have virtually ignored Black female victims. In sum, this article shows how internet activity and

online dialogue can become an effective form of social protest specifically for Black feminist activists.