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# In Our Own Eyes, Through Our Own Voices: Deconstructing the Silence Surrounding Systemic Sexual Violence and Black African American Women

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**In Our Own Eyes, Through Our Own Voices**  
Deconstructing the Silence surrounding Systemic Sexual Violence and Black/African  
American Women

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors Requirements  
For the Department of Sociology

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## **ABSTRACT**

Systemic sexual violence against African American women has had pervasive, continuous effects on their bodies, identities, and notions of sexuality. It remains significant to examine the institutionalized rape of Black female bodies both historically and contemporaneously in order to both underscore their marginalization and position their lived experiences, which have long been overshadowed, at the center of dominant discourse. The sexual assault of Black women by both White and Black men and the implications it brings forth within the Black community continue to reflect the complexities of the intersection of race and gender in an analysis of White supremacy, male dominance, and sexual exploitation. Through qualitative research in the form of in-depth interviews with ten Black/African American women on Dickinson College's campus, I explore the women's ideas, concepts, and experiences with sexual misconduct and the intricate ways in which they grapple with the intersectionality of their identities. Findings reveal that while the embodiment of race and gender is not a monolithic experience, it does play a role in the ways in which the women perceive and experience sexual assault. Prevalent themes that arose include the normalization of sexual misconduct within the broader societal context as well as within the Black/African American community, the complex ways in which the race of a perpetrator of sexual assault influences the women's decision to report, the tendency of the participants to provide a gendered definition of promiscuity that played into self-policing on campus, and the utilization of a scale of severity when identifying different forms of sexual assault. The purpose of my research is to posit Black college-aged women's voices into the center of discourse about sexual violence as well as to delve deeper into the reasons and explanations behind the underreporting of rape and sexual assault, the assumed culture of silence around sexual violence, and the racial, gender, and sexual politics which influence the phenomenon, especially for Black/African American women.

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## **Introduction**

*I am writing because rape is... I am writing to understand. I am writing so I won't be afraid. I am writing so I won't start crying again... I am writing to allow myself to feel the anger. I am writing to keep from running toward it or away from it or into anybody's arms. I am writing to find solutions and pass them on. I am writing to find a language and pass it on. I am writing writing, writing, for my life.*

-Pearl Cleage, *Mad At Miles: A Black Woman's Guide to Truth*

On the night of my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, I was sexually assaulted at Dickinson College, and it has impacted me deeply ever since. What happened to me is very much a part of who I am, and aside from the support I needed in order to not be consumed by it, the one crucial element in my path to healing was being able to use language to actualize the experience and take control of what it meant for me. At first, I did not want to accept the assault as a reality, and I spent more nights than I want to remember refusing myself the opportunity to mourn. Without writing, I may not have ever articulated the effect that night has had on me. I needed words to speak of it, I needed words to grieve, and I needed words so that I would never again be voiceless. The epigraph that appears above encompasses both the purpose and the personal significance of writing this thesis. I write now not only because I want to open a platform for dialogue for Black women on Dickinson's campus in which they can share their perceptions and experiences with sexual misconduct and assault, but also because writing and understanding has allowed me to reclaim agency and to remember not to forget. My assault happened, it was real, and it must be spoken.

In my own experience, the complexities I faced that moderated my thoughts and actions were closely tied to my social position as a Black woman. Within the societal context, I occupy a space of subordinate status both because I am a racial minority and because I am a woman living in a patriarchal system. The intersection of race and gender plays an integral role in the way I experience the world around me, and it determines the way

my body is read by others. I contemplated if other Black women on Dickinson's campus shared a similar lived experience and understood the world around them through the lens of their racial and gender identity. In this paper, I explore how the social position occupied by Black women on a predominantly White college campus influences the ways in which Black women negotiate their sexuality and their perceptions of sexual assault. I aimed to examine whether Black women's understanding of the intersection of their racial and gender identities determined their conception and experience of sexual assault. What was discovered was that while the embodiment of intersectionality for Black women is not a uniform experience, the conjoining identities impact the ways in which Black/African American women construct silence around the issue of sexual assault, perceive notions of sexuality and sexual behavior, define different forms of sexual misconduct, and how their reactions to sexual misconduct are influenced by the race of the perpetrator. As a Black woman who is very close to the Black/African American community at Dickinson, I was able to gain access to the private thoughts and experiences of the Black/African American women that I interviewed as a part of my research. It is not easy to say if another figure who was not my race or gender would have been able to enter those same spaces, but what remains significant to acknowledge is that there is great complexity and difficulty involved in excavating the voices of those who live in a dominant rape culture that reinforces silence around the issue of sexual violence. My paper is a step toward investigating how individuals may discuss sexual misconduct and assault if there is no language to discuss it. When underscoring how Black women at a college like Dickinson negotiate perceptions of sexual assault, the phenomenon grows more complex because as a minority, they are already a vulnerable and marginalized population. I feel that their stories and opinions are important, but I also aim to maintain their protection

and allow them a space where they could grapple with the very silence that is the topic of my research. Furthermore, I offer suggestions on the ways in which Dickinson College may improve the ways in which it engages in discourse about sexual assault with the student body as well as how it may take into account the politics of race and gender and how they influence that conversation.

## **Literature Review**

### *Sexual Assault and Rape Culture*

Rape is an integral component of a culture of male dominance and hegemonic masculinity. The sexual and physical domination of women are both predicated upon and universalized by unhealthy masculinity norms which comprise the characteristics of a rape culture. Radical feminism has argued that rape is not a crime of sex, but a crime of power and domination. The radical feminist critique affirms that, “a woman-centered definition of violence is one that portrays violence as a form of social domination rather than a random and/or noninstrumental form of expression” (Simpson 1989). Systemic rape is a form of violence that reinforces the subordinate status of women, and rape culture normalizes the brutality committed against them while demanding their silence.

Female socialization plays an integral role in reinforcing the complacency of women within male-dominated rape culture. There are several “female dilemmas,” a concept underscoring the inescapability of victimization faced by female victims of sexual trauma, that include: dilemmas of female sexuality, scapegoating, dilemmas of female expressiveness, dilemmas of female dependency, and role conflict, role diffusion, and role overload (Waites, 1993, p. 45). The dilemma of female sexuality emphasizes the reality that

while a woman is taught that her gender is the most conspicuous aspect of her identity and that no matter what she does her body will generate reactions, her gender is the opposite of what is deemed “healthily adult” and she should be able to control the way others react to her (p. 46). Scapegoating refers to perpetual stereotyping of women as inferior as well as the proliferation of victim-blaming tactics that condemn women for the dehumanizing and destructive acts committed against them (p. 50). It blames the female victim for the attack or abuse she incurred, and reiterates that women are by nature masochistic, irrational, and that they bring maltreatment upon themselves (p. 50). Dilemmas of female expressiveness include the acceptance of women expressing feelings such as love, kindness, sympathy, and sexual responsiveness to men, yet the rejection of women displaying anger, aggressiveness, or defiance. While the former emotions have been normalized as “feminine,” the latter are defined as typical “masculine” behaviors, therefore women are discouraged from expressing them (p. 52). The dilemma of female dependency encompasses the obligation of women to protect men and foster their self esteem, an act that will in turn increase their female attractiveness. However, the double bind inherent in this dilemma is the socialization of women to be economically dependent on men (p. 57). Lastly, role conflict, role diffusion, and role overload represent the multiple and sometimes conflicting roles that women are expected to fulfill in society and within the family unit that are mainly support functions. All of the dilemmas mentioned present women with conflicting ideologies of what it means to be a woman, how a woman should behave, and what is expected of her on a daily basis; all of which generate a heightened sense of anxiety and complicate the ways in which women experience victimization and trauma.



Victim-blaming represents one of the most pervasive and destructive elements of rape culture. The uttered delusion of women both desiring and welcoming sexual attack can be connected to the female dilemmas of double binds brought up by Waites. For Black women especially, the double binds are transformed into triple or quadruple binds because they are multiple and intersecting due to the convergence of race and sex as identities that affect the treatment of Black women in a systematically racist, patriarchal society.

### *Race and Systemic Sexual Violence*

The systemic nature of the sexual violence incurred by Black women has advanced over the course of two centuries. In *No! The Rape Documentary*, Aishah Simmons traces back to slavery the patterned behaviors of dominant, White American culture that robbed Black women of the autonomy to own their bodies. From the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, White slave masters took ownership of Black women's sexuality and reproductive systems in a way that was both pervasive and systemic. Within the system of slavery, the Black woman's body was legally owned by White slave masters, and Black women were subjected to repeated rape and brutality. Historically defined as "chattel property," the denial of human rights to enslaved African American women substantiated the expropriation of Black female sexuality and reproduction for the sake of financial gain to White, male slave owners (Darling, 1999, p. 217). It became social custom and law that interracial children born to enslaved Black women as a result of sexual violence and rape were also subject to enslavement, making them profitable commodities while simultaneously transforming the Black woman's reproductive system into an object to be controlled. However, it was not only White men who benefited from the ownership of Black women's bodies. Black men also received advantages from White patriarchy, which was an integral

component of White racism (Simmons 2006). As men, they retained the privilege to exert dominance over their Black female counterparts, but it was in a way that took on different meanings and produced distinct implications due to their racial and gender position in an oppressive society.

In order to understand the nuanced meanings of patriarchy, as it was exercised by Black men, and White supremacist patriarchy, it is important to underscore and explain the concept of structural violence and the ways in which it impacts the discussion of violence against Black women by Black and White men. Structural violence is grounded in the analysis of “individual experience and the larger social matrix in which it is embedded in order to see how various social processes and events come to be translated into personal distress and disease” (Farmer, 2003, pg. 369). It is crucial to emphasize that the experience of rape can be affected by one’s social position, an occupied space within society delineated by one’s identity category. These categories include race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, religion, etc. In a society in which racism acts as a powerful social force, one’s racial identity is important in understanding how an individual may embody certain experiences. White men who enacted brutal violence against Black women and who participated in their pervasive rape operated from a position of power and within an institutional role that was built into a society that fostered hierarchical structures based on race and gender. Therefore, White men, due to their race and position of power, executed structural violence. While White men imposed the violence from a position of power based on both race and gender, Black men, who exerted violence in their personal relationships with Black women, acted as inflictors of interpersonal violence from a privileged position of gender, but a racialized position nonetheless. Interpersonal violence is defined by Iadicola and Shupe as the use of

power or an institutional role by an individual to control another person or cause them physical, sexual, or psychological harm (Iadicola & Shupe, 2013, pg. 104). In acting as individuals who maintained the hierarchical ordering of a patriarchal society and who reinforced the subordination of their Black female counterparts through domination, Black men inflicted both interpersonal and structural violence (Iadicola & Shupe, 2013, pg. 381). Therefore, by virtue of their social position, Black women have experienced rape by Black and White men differently, and that type of sexual violence brings forth different implications. In addition, Black men suffered the effects of the institutionalized rape of Black women by White masters in many complex ways, including the attack on and erosion of their masculinity to the extent that they were unable to protect the female members of their community. Fundamentally, both Black and White men perpetuated the view of Black women's bodies as expendable, but slavery in itself and the White racist and supremacist framework that has continued to reproduce and institutionalize its daunting effects have imposed social and psychological consequences on both Black women and men.

The systemic sexual exploitation of Black women at the hands of White men during the early to mid-twentieth century crippled the sovereignty of Black women. During the era of Reconstruction in the South, Black females were kidnapped, raped, abused, and sexually humiliated by White men pushing an agenda of White supremacy, coercion, control, and intimidation (McGuire 2010). During the shift from Reconstruction to Jim Crow era segregation, the pervasive rape of Black women by White men dishearteningly became routinized as a way to maintain the subservience of African Americans.

Widespread research has been conducted on mass rapes during wartime and the ways in which they have caused the destructions of cultures. Conceptualizing the systemic rape of

Black women within the White racial frame that envelops the history of the United States, it can be said that the systemic sexual violence that afflicted Black women's bodies symbolized a type of war on the African American community that aimed to either destroy or permanently cripple them. Ruth Seifert has documented that one of the main goals of war is the destruction or deconstruction of culture, rather than the defeat of an enemy army (Seifert, 1996, pg. 38). The aforementioned objective is achieved through the mutilation and destruction of human beings. Ultimately, sexual violence against women during wartime is meant to create social and cultural instability and thereby destroy a nation's culture. Since women tend to absorb the responsibility of holding families and communities together during periods of war, their physical, emotional and psychological suffering play an integral role in disbanding cultural solidarity (Seifert, 1996, pg. 39). The systemic wartime rape of women and girls reflects a vile aim to annihilate the elemental constituents of society and culture. In a way that parallels the use of sexual violence during wartime, the dominant American society that is White, patriarchal, and racist continues to exist in the United States, utilize sexual violence to dismantle family dynamics within Black communities, erode cultural unity, and reinforce White supremacist male patriarchy. Ultimately, rape is a weapon of perpetual subordination that dehumanized Black women's bodies and dismantles African American communities and culture.

Throughout the twentieth century, many Black women who had been continuously victimized vocalized their sexual exploitation in the church, within the press, and to the judicial system. Public protests took place throughout the South. Black women remained militant in their fight against White supremacy, racial violence, and with their appeals to the protection of Black womanhood (McGuire 2010). What is discouraging is that accounts of

rape and sexual violence against Black women are overlooked, if not excluded from the histories of the Reconstruction era, the post-Emancipation South, Jim Crow segregation, and the Civil Rights movement.

The widespread lynching of Black men continues to be at the center of discourse surrounding racial violence and White dominance, while the pervasive, systemic rape of Black women remains invisible. Patricia Hill-Collins touches upon explanations that underlie the tendency of the Black community to criticize and insist on the silencing of Black female rape victims, whose bodies have been invaded by Black men. She identifies the ways in which institutionalized rape and institutionalized lynching served as barbarous mechanisms of American society to subjugate Black bodies and maintain racial oppression (Hill-Collins 2004). The mechanisms were gender-specific in that men were victimized through systemic lynching and women were subjected to systemic rape. This twofold mechanism of oppression separated men's and women's experiences of brutal subjugation in a way that made their suffering, in some ways, exclusive of one another, rather than part of a shared ordeal. This perception, rooted in and reinforced by patriarchy, served as a blueprint for the way in which race and gender would later be viewed in society. Racial and gender segregation were viewed as distinct realities. This required that either race or gender be acknowledged as primary, but not both. As a result, the lynching of Black men became a phenomenon that "carried the burden of race" and the rape of Black women carried the secondary burden of gender (Hill-Collins, 2004, pg. 216). Since lynching has come to be perceived as more important than rape in Black gender ideology and discourse as well as understandings of American history, it has represented the most deplorable form of racial oppression. As a result, the protection of the Black male by the African American community became crucial. Simultaneously, the

brutal and humiliating experiences of rape faced by African American women on a systemic level remained, for the most part, invisible and entrapped within the dark shadows of dominant, patriarchal discourse.

The history of race and gender in Western society has constructed a system built upon the subordination of non-White and female bodies. At the junction of racial and gender oppression lies the Black woman's experience. Sexual violence against African American women and the ways in which they grapple with and perceive the phenomenon are permeated by the historical frameworks of racial and gender oppression, a reality that complicates their experience of sexual assault. The objective in examining the institutionalized rape of Black female bodies both historically and in its present context is to both underscore their marginalization and position their lived experiences, which have long been overshadowed, within academic discourse. The sexual assault of Black women by both White and Black men and the implications it brings forth within the Black community, especially in the scope of a predominantly White college campus, continue to reflect the intricacies of the intersection of race and gender in an analysis of White supremacy, male dominance, and sexual exploitation. *The Era of Institutionalized Racism* The history of the United States is built upon a white racial frame that has maintained the subjugation and oppression of Americans of color. Joe R. Feagin addresses the problematic foundation of the institutional racism that has become intricately interwoven in the infrastructure of the social, economic, and political systems of American society (Feagin 2000). Over the course of several centuries, African Americans have been subjected to the brutality of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, terrorization from White Supremacist organizations, and abysmal positions within the social and economic hierarchy. Today, African Americans continue to be barred

from and discriminated against in the realms housing, employment, and education (Feagin, 2000, pg. 89). Minority citizens are also disproportionately targeted by law enforcement, are often the victims of excessive force and unwarranted police violence, and continue to be vastly overrepresented in the prison population (Smith & Holmes 2003, 1037). While systematic racism is a form of racist politics that has been built into powerful institutions in the United States, another form of racism has also arisen that attempts to reproduce racially coded ideologies in non-racialized terms. Bonilla-Silva defines this colorblind racism as an ideology that, “explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics” (Bonilla-Silva 2010). It is the new face of systemic racism that has taken shape and earned significance within the foundation and development of American society. Many individuals in this era have ascribed to principles that aim to actualize the existence and perpetuation of a post-racial order in which the issue of race is no longer deserving of as much attention. However, those entrapped within the vicious cycle of a system built upon the ideals of capitalism, as well the contradictions between its historical formations and its proclaimed democracy, cannot ignore the truth that racism has not disappeared nor has it improved on a dramatic, or even acknowledgeable scale. Rather, it has changed its facade and has manifested itself in public policies, complex structures of social and political institutions, and deep-laden beliefs that generate dominance and justify seclusion and portrayal of Black bodies as “the other.”

David H. Ikard provides a compelling analysis of the falsehood of a post-racial society in the midst of the election of the first Black president. He notes that, “the stubborn persistence of economic inequality between blacks and whites, racial profiling among the police, the attendant prison industrial complex, zero-tolerance laws and policies in schools

(and beyond) that disproportionately target black and brown folks, and racial health disparities,” all demonstrate an “updated version of white supremacist ideology” (Ikard, 2013, pg. 8). Ikard examines the ways in which ideological discourse of white supremacy constructs a monolithic African American community that allows for the actions of individuals to impact how the collective group is perceived. In this way, “high-achieving” African Americans such as Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey are distinguished as exceptions to black inferiority, and poor or low-achieving Blacks who exemplify negative stereotypes of Black identity are subjected to a pathological approach that blames them for their underachievement rather than the broader White racial frame that perpetuates systemic oppression (Ikard, 2013 pg. 13). In a society that has long upheld democratic ideals and that has honored the protection of certain inalienable rights to all of humanity, the prevalence of the contradictory nature of an impenetrable racist system that has been at the foundation of American society and culture for over four centuries remains undeniable. The assertion that all men are created equal and therefore deserve fair and identical treatment has yet to be realized by the tyrannized minority who have not received these basic rights and principles outlined in their own country’s Constitution and Declaration of Independence. Today’s African American woman continues to carry on her shoulders a history of oppression that has persistently reproduced itself, reinforced her inferior status, and allowed dominant, White culture to strip her of her humanity and posit her as a second-class citizen.

The institutionalization of racism has allowed it to remain hidden beneath the veil of color-blindness while also ensuring that it is ever-present and pervasive. One example of this is the criminalization of the Black body. The proliferation of the criminalization of the African American community after the Civil Rights era as a consequence of the profit



maximization and cheap labor search strategies became integral components of advanced capitalism (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008, p. 625). The political and economic changes of the time all worked to strengthen and legitimize White supremacy while maintaining social control over inferior populations. The advancement of technology, globalization, and the growing reliance on foreign labor by the United States led to massive downsizing of the Western workforce. As a result, underemployment and cuts in crucial social services and education gravely affected impoverished Black communities and families who were unable to flee from urban ghettos, which became inescapable centers void of opportunities for upward mobility (Sudbury, 2002, p. 60). Sudbury (2002) noted that, “criminalization became the weapon of choice in dealing with the social problems caused by the globalization of capital and the protest it engendered” (Sudbury, 2002, p. 61). Racism continued to stigmatize the Black body as an aggressive criminal, a characterization that incited higher policing and mass imprisonment of African Americans.

In her work, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Angela Davis analyzes the trajectory of the abolition of slavery to the expansion of a penitentiary system. She discusses the transformation of Slave Codes to Black Codes and plantations to prisons as she analyzes efforts spurred from dominant, White supremacist frameworks to regulate and suppress the liberation of African Americans (Davis 2003). Laws became racialized and enacted policies that facilitated the future criminalization and policing of the Black body. The racialized system of crime and punishment explained by Brewer and Heitzeg (2008) is analyzed through the lens of critical race theory, which suggests that, “racial privilege and related oppression are deeply rooted in both our [American] history and our law, thus making racism a normal and ingrained feature of our landscape” (p. 626). The overrepresentation of African

Americans in the prison system is evident in the fact that African Americans are incommensurately arrested and convicted by the U.S. justice system in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts. According to the United States Census Bureau, the total resident population of the United States by July 1, 2011 was 311,587,816. Of that population, 243,342,323 individuals were White and 40,775,287 were Black. Research conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that by December 31, 2011, the total number of sentenced prisoners, both male and female, under state and federal jurisdiction was 1,537,415. Out of that number, 581,300 were African American prisoners. When combining Black and Hispanic prisoners, that number increased to 931,200 prisoners, as compared to 516,200 White prisoners. Although African Americans represent the minority population, they were overrepresented among sentenced prisoners under state and federal jurisdiction. Furthermore, the estimated imprisonment rate of the total number of sentenced prisoners under state and federal jurisdiction by December 31, 2011 was 492 per 100,000. The estimated imprisonment rate for White males was 478 and for White females was 51. On the other hand, the imprisonment rate for Black males was 3,023, and for Black females it was 129. It is undeniably apparent that the estimated imprisonment rate for Black prisoners is drastically higher than that of their White counterparts. This can be attributed to the racism, racial profiling, and White supremacist ideologies that have permeated the justice system.

There exists several other examples of the persistence of inequality through systemic racism, and they include wealth, health, and educational disparities between Blacks/African Americans and their White counterparts. In 2009, it was researched that the median wealth of White households was \$113,149. For Black households, it was \$5,677, and for Hispanic households was \$6,325 (Kochhar, Fry, & Taylor, 2011). In a study conducted by the Center

for Disease Control and Prevention in 2008, it was found that 30.4% of Hispanics, 17% of blacks, and 9.9% of whites do not have health insurance coverage (CDC, 2008). Lastly, analyses directed by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) demonstrated that in 2013, 39% of Black children were from families living below the poverty line, as compared to 12% of White children. Also, 28% of Black children were living in high-poverty neighborhoods in 2013 compared to 4% of White children. In the same year, the Black unemployment rate was twice that of the White unemployment rate (Rothstein, 2013, pg. 2). EPI also included in their report that public schools in the U.S., especially in the South, remain segregated despite the myth of integration and that achievement gaps between White and Black students continue to exist (Rothstein, 2013, pg. 14). The widening wealth/income, health, and education gaps between the different racial categories demonstrate the stark social and economic inequality that persists in the United States due to the continuous reproduction of institutionalized racism.

Through the use of terms that are non-racial in any explicit sense, White supremacist beliefs become encoded in language that implicitly justifies the stereotyping and “Other-ing” of Black bodies. Despite the claim of a post-race era, deep-seated conceptions about Black men and women that demonize and objectify them are still grounded in racism, and they facilitate the reinforcement of oppression. Portrayals of Black bodies as less than human and of Black women as lascivious and hypersexual not only minimized, if not eradicated, the severity of sexual violence against them, but also legitimized and rationalized their lack of protection.

*History of Gender Oppression*

Over the course of history, the phenomenon of women's subordination throughout the world has developed into an institutionalized structure that has become built into social, political, and economic systems. Feminist theory, in its diversity, has attempted to explain the causes as well as the impact of the acquired inferior status that subjugates the female species in all facets of life and existence. Studying gender through a social anthropological lens, one learns that the sexual differences between men and women have been utilized to justify the separateness of their roles in society as well as to fortify the concept of men's superiority and authority over the female mind, body, and capacity. Although power relations between men and women vary depending on the region of the world, the daunting reality remains that female subordination is almost universal.

Gender is one of the major determinants of status differentiation within a given society. A popular tool used to analyze gender is the triple role framework, which depicts three major roles (reproductive, productive, and socio-cultural) within a given society and describes how the nature and importance of the roles differ for both men and women. Reproductive roles entail the domestic tasks and child-raising responsibilities which are required to guarantee the maintenance of human resources. Reproductive work is essential for human survival yet it is seldom given significance or even considered "real" work. Reproductive labor is unpaid, labor intensive, and often restricted to females. The only reproductive role given to males is to impregnate their female counterparts. Productive roles are comprised of the work done by men and women in exchange for payment either in cash or other forms of compensation. Productive work includes employed labor, market production, and independent enterprises. Women's productive work is often less visible and more controlled than that of men, a reality that exemplifies the lack of autonomy allowed to

females in general. Socio-cultural roles refer to community management. It is an extension of reproductive roles into the community. Politics within a given community refers to participation in decision making on a political level. Often, women are deprived of leadership roles in this sector and their upward mobility is limited. The restrictive nature of certain roles within a society has both facilitated and strengthened gender stratification along social, political, and economic lines (Moore, 1988, p. 30). Feminism, which is geared toward the eradication of gender inequality and discrimination, aims to increase the fluidity of gender roles and to demonstrate that learned behaviors and assigned roles among men and women are not biological, rather they are based on an institutionalized process of socialization that occurs on both a conscious and subconscious level.

The two major theories of gender relations that have been used to explain the universality of female subordination are known as the coercive and voluntaristic theories. Coercive theorists base their analysis of gender on the macro and micro level. They focus on men's ability to maintain their advantages over women through their possession of and access to superior power resources. Essentially, men control economic, political, and ideological resources therefore they are able to ensure the inferior status of women. Zilla Einstein, a Marxist feminist under the coercive school of thought, maintained that a system of capitalism and patriarchy has sustained female oppression. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a micro structural theorist, argued that economic structures within a given society are the most significant phenomenon which has promoted female disadvantage. She also set out to prove that, "gender differences in organizational behavior are due to structure rather than to characteristics of women and men as individuals" (Acker, 1990, p. 83). Moss Kanter underscored that masculine principles dominated authority structures and defined which roles

within organizations suited both men and women. Alternatively, voluntaristic theorists include feminist scholars who take on the micro perception by focusing on the choices women make to influence their own status in society. Micro structural theorists employ the “exchange theory” to analyze gender and to observe the inequality in male-female interaction, especially within the institution of marriage. The exchange theory states that in order for a relationship to persist over a period of time, both the male and female must be able to provide equally valued resources to each other. If a partner does not have access to valued resources, something alternative must be provided. This concept introduces the idea of women’s sexuality being exploited as a resource and the reduction of women to mere sexual partners due to the reality that in many societies, men, either largely or solely, maintain access to valued resources.

Feminist theory and research has been vast and widespread in nature and has functioned to transform the conditions of society as well as inform its audience of the male-dominated structures which control the concept of gender and maintain the subordination of women. However, a consistent fallacy in the analysis of gender and female subjugation is the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive concepts. The Black woman often finds no place or pivotal point from which to initiate dialogue about her historical struggle and experience within the broad context of feminist theory. The paucity of research that analyzes the intersection of race and gender underscores the exclusion of Black women in dominant discourse.

### *Black Women and Intersectionality*

Complexities converge at the intersection of race and gender as they bind to build identity and experience. To be a Black woman is to be the antithesis to an ideal prototype framed

centuries ago. It was a framework dominated by White supremacy, racism, and patriarchy. Women of color can trace the experiences of their marginalization to a time that existed long before they grew into their bodies. Remnants of that time remain and they continue to shape minds and construct identities.

The experience of the Black female body and the way it is embedded in oppression must not be ignored. Racial and gender oppression affect the lives of Black women who face subjugation because of their very existence. Kimberlé Crenshaw notes that dominant conceptions of discrimination have reinforced the idea that discrimination is experienced on a “single categorical axis.” Along this axis, race and gender are analyzed and experienced as mutually exclusive categories, with the result that one is privileged over the other. Crenshaw underscores the fact that Black women experience the intersectionality of race and gender discrimination, and therefore they are excluded within the single axis framework in the realm of antidiscrimination law, feminist theory, and antiracist politics (Crenshaw, 1989, pg. 143). Ultimately, the distortion of the multidimensionality of Black women’s experiences plays a major role in the tendency of intellectuals to privilege race over sex, rather than exploring their intersectionality. It remains important to emphasize this intersectionality in order for the experiences of Black women to be more fully and completely understood.

While race plays a significant role in the identities and experiences of Black/African American women, it is important to understand the ways in which race and gender converge in impacting their lives and interests. The theme of intersectionality, a notion that refers to the “interlocking of and interactions between different social structures,” emerged from resistance to the perpetual tendency of mainstream feminist movements to exclude marginalized voices. The faces of those movements and the experiences and concerns that

dominated the discourse were those of race- and class-privileged group members (Crenshaw, 1989, pg. 140). Women of color and women of low socioeconomic status were often made invisible due to their position in society. Over the years, feminist theory has been criticized for being embedded in a White racial context that empowers primarily White women. Presenting a White voice as the universal voice of all women, White women reinforced their privilege and failed to recognize the ways in which their race moderated their experience with sexism, patriarchy, and gender dynamics (Crenshaw, 1989, pg. 154). Therefore, into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a call for a shift away from identity politics that fostered categorical approaches to the subject of the “woman” (Lutz, Vivar, & Supik, 2011, pg. 4). Identity formation that created strict, rigid boundaries between lived experiences was inherently exclusionary and constructed an “essentialist self-representation” that was limiting to all individual women (Lutz, Vivar, & Supik, 2011, pg. 4). Hence, poststructuralist and critical feminist theory took on the role of de-centering the woman and adopting a theory of intersectionality that took into account the multiple dimensions of women’s identities. The theme of intersectionality is deserving of emphasis in discourse about sexual violence and Black/African American women because of the complexities associated with the ways in which they are identified by society and how they view themselves. There exists an important connection between the tendency of feminist theory, antidiscrimination doctrine, and antiracist politics to overshadow intersectional identities, as discussed by Crenshaw, and the privileging of race over gender among Black women who have been victims of sexual assault by Black men, as was explained by Hill-Collins. If a Black woman has internalized the “single categorical axis” of identity, the obligation to be Black before being a woman or to be a woman before being Black has also become an inevitable dilemma. Such a crisis is



then embedded within the perception of sexual assault, the experience of sexual trauma, and the decision to report. Discourse on intersectionality is in itself politics that mandate its inclusion within the societal context, however it remains questionable if that discourse is maintained in the setting of rape culture, and if it permeates the lived experience and language of Black women, themselves.

In her manifesto for cyborgs, Haraway examines the politics of identity as being grounded in boundary construction, which she asserts is the root of separation and the history of all hitherto society (Haraway, 2008, pg. 326). She calls for a politics of affinity in place of politics of identity because while the latter creates strict, rigid boundaries between lived experiences, the former allows for more fluidity and the recognition of similarities across different identities. She offers individuals the option to choose multiple social realities and relate to diverse experiences. This multiplicity is especially important in discussions of intersectionality, and it exemplifies the rise of feminist theory that rejects constricting identity categories. Intersectionality and politics of affinity are both necessary in grappling with an understanding of the engagement of multiple identities among women.

Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* to bring to light the idea that differences exist among all women, and these differences often create inequality because of the hierarchical structuring of the social, political, and economic order. Not only were Black women marginalized by distorted conceptions of race and class, but their concerns were also obscured, or even eluded, by analyses that were incapable of grappling with the ways in which their identities are a product of the interaction of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989, pg. 140). Crenshaw critiqued antidiscrimination law for its refusal to recognize the multiple disadvantages faced by Black women due to this intersection. In antidiscrimination law, the

standard for sex discrimination was discrimination against White women, and the standard for race discrimination was discrimination against Black men. This practice rejected the hybridity of the discrimination and oppression face by Black women and made their claims irrelevant if they did not align with the claims of the aforementioned groups (Crenshaw, 1989, pg. 145). In proving that several courts were unable to deal with intersectionality, Crenshaw illustrated how antidiscrimination doctrine forced Black women to, “choose between specifically articulating the intersectional aspects of their subordination, thereby risking their ability to represent Black men, or ignoring intersectionality in order to state a claim that would not lead to the exclusion of Black men” (Crenshaw, 1989, pg. 148). She noted that such a dilemma would inevitably cause agitation within the Black community because putting Black women’s experiences and interests at the center of discourse created fear that doing so would divide the community (Crenshaw, 1989, pg. 148). Ultimately, while Black women share similar concerns with White women and Black men, their lived experiences are also more expansive than the general and standardized categories provided in antidiscrimination law and antiracist and feminist discourse. It remains important to maintain a space where the politics surrounding their intersectionality can be adequately addressed and posited at the center of legal, academic, and social dialogue.

### *Misrepresentation of the Black Female Body*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, White male professionals in the medical field supported and legitimized the objectification of the Black female body. Due to the perceived definitiveness of their work by a majority White audience, dominant views of Black female sexuality channeled into all other aspects of life including law, politics, and social policy (Darling, 1999, p. 217). Eugenics, a movement that promoted the genetic superiority of the White race

and that provided an ideological defense for the objectification of the Black female body, permeated popular culture and influential realms of knowledge and power managed by medical, scientific, population control, and welfare professionals (Darling, 1999, p. 219). Black women's lives and privacy rights were increasingly infiltrated by the state, which was shaped by systemic beliefs about racially and sexually prescribed normative behaviors representing Black women's immoral nature and vulgar sexuality. (Darling, 1999, p. 215). The vilification and hyper-sexualization of Black female sexuality escalated into an influential phenomenon that moderated the public health, birth control, and social welfare movements (Darling, 1999, p. 218). In the era of the Birth Control Movement, which occurred during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Black women were marginalized and excluded due to institutionalized beliefs spurred by biological racism. There was a common belief held among White men and women in that time period that Black female sexuality was plagued by promiscuity and that Black women reproduced at uncontrollable rates with no intent of limitation (Darling, 1999, p. 220). Although Black women were actually just as concerned as White women about limiting birth rates, racist and misogynist perspectives that had come to be relied upon as "science" allowed for the regulation of the Black female body by parties external to the family unit. State control of poor, Black women's bodies was facilitated by a pathological approach that blamed the women for the reproduction of their circumstances, an analysis that failed to acknowledge the unjust social order that fostered both impoverishment of resources and destruction of the self.

The widespread views that constructed Black women as a hyper-primitive and sexualized being continue to influence and inform racial and sexual politics affecting the lives of African American women, including how they experience maltreatment and trauma

and the ways in which they perceive the dominant society as well as their position within it. Stereotyped as *Jezebels* with a corrupt sexual nature, Black women were conceptualized as unlikely rape victims. If a Black woman was a victim of sexual violence, her own lasciviousness was to blame. This made it extremely difficult for Black/African American women to make compelling legal cases of sexual assault, and it refused to actualize their victimization. The hesitancy found among many Black women to report sexual violence can be connected to a hyper-awareness of the deep-rooted racial and gender oppression that both allowed and excused the colonization of their bodies.

The reason that I invoke the use of the metaphor of “reclaiming ownership of one’s body” is grounded in my own social position as a Black woman. I am connected to the history of colonization, slavery, and brutality through my ancestral lineage. Due to my phenotypic appearance, my body is read as a racialized body. Even my language grapples with the concept of intersectionality in that I continuously underscore my racial identity and cannot separate it from my existence as a woman. Fanon (1952) analyzed in depth the way in which Blackness is observed through a White, colonial, racist gaze. Black bodies are dehumanized and objectified through this gaze. The construct of race and color is so pervasive within the White racial frame upon which American is founded, Black skin is the first thing seen on Blacks/African Americans, and it immediately translates to “object” (Fanon, 2008, pg. 65). Subjectivity does not exist for Black people. Blacks/African Americans, during the era of slavery, were legally regarded as property, and their dehumanization continued to be reinforced by the White, dominant society through lynching, pervasive rape, denial of basic, inalienable rights, and through politics and the existing social order. To “reclaim ownership of one’s body,” therefore, is a crucial mechanism in taking

back and humanizing the body that was and continues to be commodified and objectified in a world that has yet to humanize the Black body. I continually refer to Black women's bodies to reinforce the reality that Black women have been reduced to an object that is less than human. It is essential that individuals understand this truth first and foremost before dignity and integrity is restored to Black womanhood.

American social and political spheres have been stained with historical representations that show Black women in a negative light. Dominant White supremacist standards defined a true woman as, "chaste, pure, and White," while they placed the identity of Black women within iconic images, such as Jezebel, the biblical wife of King Ahab who was consumed by erotic desires and passion (Roberts, 1997, p. 11). Mammy, an image that developed into a cult figure of the Jim Crow era, portrayed the ideal Black mother as passive and accepting of her inferior status, and loving and caring to her White master's children (Roberts, 1997, p. 13). In opposition to Mammy was the Black slave mother who was characterized as careless, unfit, and in need of moral guidance (Roberts, 1999, p. 14). The injustice that perpetuated the idea of the defective nature of the Black woman disabled her to encompass positive, essential elements of womanhood, and it denied her the autonomy to own her body.

Race moderates and distinguishes experiences of gender oppression, therefore it is important to separate White females' experiences from that of their Black female counterparts.

Historically, White women have been subjected to discrimination and subjugation within social and political institutions. They have been marginalized within the workforce and restricted to domestic labor, have only been regarded for the fulfillment of their reproductive roles, and have occupied a subordinate status to White men, which made them a vulnerable

population. In 1920, after the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution was ratified, White women were allowed the right to vote and offered the same citizenship rights as men. However, in many Southern states and in other parts of the U.S., Black women continued to be barred from voting and were not allowed that right until the 1960s (Norman, 1997, pg. 172). It is important to understand both the similarities and difference between White and Black women's experiences because while White women have not been completely stripped of their humanity, reduced to property while denied human rights, robbed of their identity and forced into enslavement, and incapacitated to own their own bodies and reproductive organs on a level as systemic as that of Black women, they do share the burden of oppression and subordination due to their gender (Darling, 1999, p. 220). However, to reduce White women to the level of Black females would be a contradiction to Eugenics and White skin supremacy (Darling, 1999, p. 220). Race protected White women from the types of dehumanization and objectification suffered by the Black female body. Furthermore, it is important to differentiate experiences of women of color with sexual assault from those of their White female counterparts. Olive notes that women of color are at elevated risks of sexual assault, and that they face more difficulties in their experiences due to factors that include race, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. When discussing barriers to reporting sexual violence among women of color, Olive says that, "battling a long history characterized by racial violence in the United States, stereotypes and racism that mark victims as responsible for their rapes or "unrapable", poverty, distrust of and alienation from public services, and the lack of availability of resources, such as rape crisis centers and health care" (Olive, 2012, pg. 1). What is foregrounded here is the fact that the institutional effects of racism and gender

discrimination continue to influence how women of color negotiate and deal with sexual trauma. *Resistance and Agency among Black Women*

While the Black woman has perpetually been deprived of the right to tell her own story and construct her own identity in mainstream media, there have been instances when she has utilized platforms to share experiences of victimization. It is thus important to distinguish the silencing of Black women's voices within mainstream discourse from complacency with that silence. Several historical figures, including Rosa Parks, Ida B. Wells and Fannie Lou Hamer, spoke out against the violation of the Black woman's body in an effort to achieve justice that was long overdue. However, even the types of women that were chosen to be the face of social movements and represent victimized women were based on gender and sexual politics. In an era when portrayals of Black women were shaped by negative stereotypes characterizing them as lewd, lascivious, and subhuman, the African American women who were in leadership roles or who were considered appropriate to represent the Black community had to essentially "bury normal, innocuous expressions of sexuality behind an image of either pristine asexuality or narrowly defined respectable married identity: (Harris-Perry, 2011, pg. 61). In order to aid in the advancement of the political and social agenda of the African American community, Black women had to present themselves in a way that combated the pervasive misconceptions of their character. Nonetheless, defiance and protest did live in the hearts of many who could no longer tolerate the defilement of Black womanhood, and it remains important to increase the transparency of their narratives in mainstream academic discourse.

The way in which the history of the Civil Rights movement has been schematized within the realm of academia and in public discourse has obscured the lived experiences and

contributions of African American women. Resistance to rape and sexual violence was a driving force behind the struggle for freedom, anti-segregation, and an end to White dominance during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rosa Parks, Ida B. Wells, and Fannie Lou Hamer spoke out against the pervasive rape of Black women during activist campaigns to end the lynchings of African American men. Rosa Parks is often revered as the strong-minded and determined secretary of the NAACP who refused to give up her seat on a racially segregated bus, was subsequently thrown in jail, and would later go on to be accredited with giving birth to the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Civil Rights Movement. What is often left out is that Rosa Parks was a militant detective, investigator, and anti-rape activist (McGuire 2010). One of the most important cases that she worked on was that of Recy Taylor, a 24-year-old Black mother who was kidnapped and gang-raped by six White men on September 3, 1944 after leaving a church service in Abbeville, Alabama. After being sent to investigate the case by E.D. Nixon, the local president of the NAACP branch office in Montgomery, Alabama at the time, Parks helped to create the Committee for Equal Justice, which would later become the Montgomery Improvement Association (McGuire 2010). Rosa Parks was one of several prominent Black female activists who led tenacious and passionate efforts to protect Black women's bodies and uplift Black womanhood.

On October 5, 1892, Ida B. Wells, activist and journalist, denounced the rape of "helpless Negro girls" by White men which had begun in slavery and continued at the present time without punishment of the offenders or justice for the victims. She also underscored the reality that innumerable Black men were being falsely accused of the rape of White women in order to justify their brutal murders and reinforce the constructed purity of



White womanhood. Wells spoke before hundreds of African American women in Lyric Hall in New York City, sparking an air of challenge and remonstrance (McGuire 2010). The heart of Wells's work focused on the intersection of race, gender, and class and the application of that framework to an analysis of sexual violence. She noted that ideas about gender difference were in fact deeply racialized constructs that functioned to further the goals of miscegenation (Hill-Collins 2004). Fannie Lou Hamer captured the plight of the incalculable amount of Black women who were vulnerable commodities to institutionalized rape when the freedom fighter declared, "A black woman's body was never hers alone" (McGuire 2010). Ultimately, the widespread kidnapping and rape of Black women by White men in the post-Emancipated South, especially in buses, taxicabs, trains, and other public spaces, were some of the primary catalysts of protests and resistance against White supremacy. African American women's fight for bodily integrity was a fundamental pillar of the bus boycotts which were organized throughout the South, and their voices reigned throughout the history of the Civil Rights Movement as they fought to reclaim their bodies and identities.

The historical lynching of Black men and the institutionalized rape of Black women are inextricably connected. On May 2, 1959, Richard Brown, Thomas Butterfield, Betty Jean Owens, and Edna Richardson, parked near Jake Gaither Park in Tallahassee, Florida after attending an Orange and Green Ball at their school, Florida A&M University. The group had been parked for less than 15 minutes when they were approached by four White men, Patrick Scarborough, David Beagles, William Collinsworth, and Ollie Stoutamire, in a blue Chevrolet. The two African American males, Brown and Butterfield, were ordered by Scarborough, who approached their car with a shotgun, to get out of their car and kneel in front of its headlights. The two Black women, Richardson and Edna, were also ordered out of

the car and held at knifepoint by Beagles. After Brown and Butterfield were ordered to get back in their car and drive away, leaving behind the two women, Richardson escaped the group of men and ran into the nearby park. Betty Jean Owens, left alone, was forced inside of the Chevrolet of the four White male assailants and taken to the edge of the town where they gang-raped her seven times before blindfolding her with a diaper and putting her back in the car to drive away. Throughout her ordeal, Owens's friends began a frantic search for her, aided by Joe D. Crooke Jr., an intern with the sheriff's department who was also a student at the all-White Florida State University. It was rare for police to help African Americans in criminal cases, and even more rare for the rape of a Black woman by a White man to be pursued by law enforcement, but the officer's aid would be the first of several atypical steps throughout Owens's case. When the White men were finally found driving down a road by Cooke, they were stopped and apprehended. Owens was found tied up and gagged in the back seat of the car. She was later taken to the hospital where her bruised body was examined and where she would be treated for severe depression (McGuire 2010). The rape incident outraged the community of students at Florida A&M University, and as a result, they led a series of protests demanding justice.

The students shared the rape of Owens as a collective rape of Black womanhood and a violation of the African American community. Her story was made into a representation of the sexual violence against and degradation of all Black women and Black womanhood. Buford Gibson, a student leader who spoke at a mass student protest after the rape, utilized the notion of the protection of Black womanhood to preserve nonviolence in the large demonstration, an act that was in contrast to the model used by White men at the time, in which the protection of pure White womanhood from Black men incited mob violence

(McGuire 2010). Throughout the rape trial, the White male defense attorneys attempted to erode the credibility and respectability of Owens, painting her as a *Jezebel*, a caricature of Black women who represented promiscuity, sexual aggression, and lasciviousness. This strategy exemplifies victim-blaming within a rape case but also reflected the racial and sexual politics of the era. The burden of her own rape was placed on her, and Owens's character along with the extent to which she struggled was called into question in an effort to portray her as desiring the sexual assault. The attorneys argued that Owens consented to the sexual encounter and would have struggled more and sustained more severe injuries if she actually repudiated the "intercourse," despite the use of threat with weapons by the White male defendants. After a number of failed tactics to provoke sympathy for the defendants, one defense attorney, Howard Williams, went as far as to say to the jury, "Are you going to believe this nigger wench over these four boys?" (McGuire, 2010, p.182). Owens testified on her own behalf, and her testimony was corroborated by her friends who were with her the night of the attack. As the jury deliberated and the crowd of spectators nervously awaited the verdict, the reality set in that this was the first case in Florida in which the possibility of a White man being executed for the rape of a Black woman would even be remotely possible.

Beginning in 1925, Florida had been sentencing convicted rapists to death by the electric chair. By 1959, the state of Florida had electrocuted 37 African American men who were accused of raping White women. In 1954, Abraham Beard, a 17-year-old Black male, was accused of raping a White woman in Tallahassee and was consequently electrocuted by the state of Florida. In Poplarville, Mississippi, two days after Owens was attacked, Mack Charles Parker, an African American male charged with the rape of a 24-year-old White woman who could barely identify him as her attacker in a police lineup, was lynched by a

White mob. A group of White men obtained the keys to his jail cell two days before his trial, viciously attacked him, and dumped his body in the Pearl River, all in the name of protecting White womanhood (McGuire, 2010, p. 184). On June 12, 1959, an all White jury found Betty Jean Owens's attackers "guilty with a recommendation for mercy" (McGuire 2010). While the case was notable in that it was the first time that White men were convicted for the rape of a Black woman in the state of Florida, a clear message was sent throughout the South that only Black men charged with the rape of White women would be subjected to the death penalty. Black women's bodies continued to uphold less value than their White female counterparts, especially in regard to rape and sexual violence. The verdict served as an undeniable example of state, structural, and institutional violence against African American women, in addition to the corporeal desecration of their bodies.

Throughout the African American Civil Rights Movement and especially as it neared the end of its peak, the issue of the rape of Black women by Black men surfaced from the burial grounds that kept unspoken narratives within its borders. While sexual assault of Black women by White men had been spoken out against and still went unpunished for the most part, the rape of Black women's bodies by Black men was a phenomenon surrounded by a culture of silence as well as fear and skepticism that one's story of victimization would not be believed. In her article, *They Didn't Treat Me Good: African American Rape Victims and Chicago Courtroom Strategies During the 1950s*, Flood underscores the distrust that African American female rape victims felt toward the criminal justice system in Ohio during the mid-twentieth century. To be a Black woman accusing a Black man of rape during that time was both a difficult and complex phenomenon due to the reality that it set Black women's identities at odds with one another. As an African American within a predominantly White

justice system that cared less about Black bodies, it would be a betrayal of Black men who faced continuous oppression and brutality at the hands of White supremacy. On the other hand, remaining silent would contribute to a long history of the silencing and invisibility of Black female bodies, and it would be a discredit to one's gender and sexuality. The concept of intersectionality remains important in analyzing this dilemma because viewing race and gender as mutually exclusive categories allows for the prioritization of one over the other, thus resulting in the minimization of either category. Black women faced the perplexity associated with the decision to report sexual assault by Black men because they were allowed to be either women or Black, but not both. Reporting the assault would, in a sense, defend one's womanhood and demand justice. Not reporting the assault would overshadow the protection of womanhood for the sake of uplifting and protecting the Black community from further demonization. Despite the foregoing pressures, the Black women who were interviewed in Flood's study ultimately decided to turn to law enforcement authorities with their accounts of sexual assault by Black men (Flood 2005). It is noted that during a rape courtroom trial involving a Black female victim, dominant, sexist and racist conceptions are alluded to, typically by White male defense attorneys, to promote the idea of Black women being promiscuous and sexually aggressive, and therefore unlikely rape victims (Flood 2005). In spite of the onslaught of misrepresentations about Black female sexuality that Black women were forced to endure within the courtroom, they continued to pursue sexual assault cases against their Black male counterparts. At the appellate level, interracial rape cases, which commonly involved Black male defendants, decreased during the 1950s in Ohio, and Black women more regularly appeared in court, testifying against Black male perpetrators (Flood 2005). Even the aforementioned shift was convoluted because the

explanation behind Black males being exclusively accused of and charged with the rape of Black women was that White men accused of raping Black women either never went to trial or were acquitted because of misconceptions of the Black female body and sexuality and the hegemonic racism that was the backdrop of legal and public opinion. Poor, Black female bodies already played contrast to the ideal of womanhood, which only viewed the White, middle class woman as chaste and pure. The sexual violence incurred by Black women was minimized, if not ignored, because they were characterized as impetuous, deviant, and hypersexual. It remains significant to document the intricately complex process of reporting sexual violence that confronts Black female victims, especially when the accused is a Black man. The way in which the legal system influenced the proliferation of the racist and sexist speculations of Black female sexuality, in itself, acted as state, structural, and institutional violence against Black women. Not only did the law promote injustice toward the Black female body, it also eroded its legal protection.

*Exploring the Hesitancy to Report Sexual Assault*

The complex paradox that is underscored throughout Aishah Simmons's *NO! The Rape Documentary*, is the hesitancy, and sometimes even refusal, of Black women to report incidences of rape and violence against them by Black men due to the notion that they must protect their Black male counterparts, especially in light of the racism which pervades societal perceptions of the Black community. It is noted by a woman in the documentary that Black women are taught that they are Black first and women second. The protection of their race is perceived as more important than that of their sexuality and their bodies (Simmons 2006). Such a mentality has facilitated the silencing of countless Black women's voices, who share a need to tell their story and shed light on the injustices committed against them. In

addition, both the dominant culture and the Black community have fostered spaces that do not allow for the stories of Black female rape victims to be heard. Since the era when the lynching of Black men was pervasive, it was made clear that the rape of Black women's bodies was less significant. The cause of many of the lynchings of Black men involved false accusations of the rape of White women. Dishearteningly, the rape of Black women, although it was undeniably happening and was widespread, was not punished.

The ways in which the Black male body has been brutalized throughout history speaks to the reasons why Black women have felt the need to protect them. Patrick E. Johnson utilizes an analysis of the documentary *Black Is, Black Ain't* by the late Marlon Riggs in his discussion of the politics of race, gender, and sexuality and the way in which they operate to reinforce normative standards of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality. Black men have faced a history of brutality and oppression engendered in the experience of slavery and its lasting consequences. The physical castration of Black men and its extensive and widespread nature during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was internalized and translated into the systemic, metaphysical emasculation of African American men (Johnson 2003). Both Johnson and Riggs discuss that, over time, Black men felt considerable pressure to reassert themselves both in their community and within dominant culture. In the Black community, there is a tendency to focus on the rehabilitation of Black men and their establishment as the patriarch in order to heal their emasculation and restore the Black family. The aforementioned inclination is problematic because it places the Black male body at the center of racial discourse while rendering the experiences of the Black woman invisible. Misogyny permeated the Black Power, Black Freedom, and Black Nationalist movements as Black men asserted themselves as dominant and cast their female counterparts

in the shadows. Black men, in an effort to rid themselves of the reprehensible history geared toward their subordination and the erosion of their masculinity, subjected Black women to the violence of silence and the privatization of their grievances.

Patricia Hill-Collins underscores the Western ideologies of Black male hyper-sexuality which both permeates the African American community and, “defines Black masculinity in terms of economic, sexual, and physical dominance” (Hill-Collins 2004). Positing the violence against Black women as typically occurring within Black heterosexual love relationships, Black family life, and within African American social institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Hill-Collins notes the vulnerability of Black women to violence and the pressures weighing on them to remain silent in order to uphold positive images of Black men. The sexual and physical violence incurred by Black women often happened at the hands of Black men they knew, and even loved. Due to the established hierarchy of oppression which elevated racism over systemic rape, their violation and suffering was relegated to the private, domestic sphere of their lives (Hill-Collins 2004). Black women were pressured to keep quiet about their plight and normalize being a silent survivor of sexual violence. It is noted that the aforementioned tendency devalues the experience of rape, erases evidence of the crime, and transforms it into a form of social control. The utilization of mechanisms aimed at preventing Black women from reporting assault was a way to regulate their behavior and censor their voices in order to force their conformity to a patriarchal system. The silencing of Black female victims of sexual assault also allowed for the reinforcement of rape culture and for the persistence of violence. The erosion of self-esteem, self-determination, and personal and bodily integrity are examined as traumatizing effects of the rape of Black women, especially within a culture that stigmatizes their sexuality and hyper-sexualizes their character (Hill-



Collins 2004). Fundamentally, the silencing of Black female rape victims, both deliberately and innately, fosters a form of violence which demands the burial of their voices.

Patriarchy and racism constructed and ascribed different sexualities along racial and gender lines while also shaping ideologies of sexual violence. In 1980, it was found that Black-on-Black rapes were not taken as seriously by law enforcement and other authorities as were sexual assaults involving White victims (Simpson 1989). While Black men were perceived as sexual threats and disproportionately charged with the rape of White women, Black women were scrutinized as sexual deviants and unlikely rape victims by both Black and White men. In addition, after an analysis of 272 police-citizen encounters was conducted, it was disclosed that White female victims received more preferential treatment from law enforcement authorities than their Black female counterparts (Simpson 1989). From within the realm of the judiciary to the private space of the family unit and the social sphere of the community, Black women's experiences with sexual violence were delegitimized and minimized.

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century was gradually approaching, research emerged which debunked the myth of the Black male rapist, and his demonizing stereotype as a predator of White women. Research conducted by the United States Department of Justice in 1997 found that sexual offenses were more likely to occur among perpetrators and victims of the same race, rather than those of different races (Wheeler & George 2005). It was also found that sexual assaults committed against non-White victims were less likely to be viewed as criminal acts, while Black sex offenders typically faced harsher legal sanctions than their White counterparts (Wheeler & George 2005). Although the research demystifying dominant, racist ideologies of rape was present, the aforementioned conceptualizations continued to have lingering social

consequences and affected the attitudes of the public toward rape and sexual violence. Wheeler and George analyzed African American, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic White female victims' responses to rape, and they found that there were significant differences in the females' responses to sexual violence, and those differences occurred along ethnic and racial lines. The findings implied that after a rape, non-White female victims were more likely to blame themselves and to perceive their community as pathologizing them, than were White women. African American and Hispanic women were also more likely to suffer severe symptoms related to the rape (Wheeler & George 2005). The data suggested that these reactions increased the propensity of non-White female victims of rape to underreport the sexual crimes committed against them.

The social and political climate of American society which vilified Black men, promoted misconceptions of Black female sexuality, and enacted systemic violence on Black bodies in the form of unfathomable, generational atrocities can all be cited as inhibitors of Black female voices in response to rape by Black men. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey conducted in 2000, approximately 3 Black women per 1,000 had been victims of rape or sexual assault. In another study, about 7% of Black women identified as rape survivors. When self-reports were accounted for, even higher rates of the sexual assault of Black women were revealed. In one instance, approximately 20% of Black adolescent females admitted to being raped. Furthermore, more than 30% of Black women participating in community samples and in samples of Black college students identified as rape victims (West 2002). While a substantial amount of Black women have reported the sexual violence perpetrated against them, many victims never report their rape, and it is a harsh reality that African American women severely underreport sexual offenses committed against them. The

lasting effects of a deplorable history and the construction of a culture of silence surrounding the rape of Black women are both daunting and lamentable as they persist in discouraging Black female rape victims from reporting violence.

<b>Rate of Black female victims of sexual assault (per 1,000)</b>	<b>Percent of self-identified Black female rape survivors</b>	<b>Percent of Black adolescent female rape victims</b>	<b>Percent of college-aged, Black female rape victims</b>
3	7%	20%	30%

Source: West (2002), *Battered, Black, And Blue: An Overview of Violence in the Lives of Black Women*.

The psychological, emotional, and personal experiences of African American women are innately political because Black women have had to deal with and negotiate meanings of and derogatory assumptions about their integrity and identity. The histories of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, racism, and patriarchy have all influenced the formation of the image to which Black women are expected to conform. Both the dominant culture and the African American community fashioned the mold of a “strong Black woman,” as an imperative to their acquisition of citizenship. The aforementioned ideal of a Black woman represents a figure whose identity is shaped around “self-sacrificial strength, and who confronts and overcomes all obstacles, provides boundless love and support to her family, and suppresses her own emotional needs while attending to those of others (Harris-Perry 2011). The strong Black woman is described as having, “an irrepressible spirit that is unbroken by a legacy of oppression, poverty, and rejection” (Harris-Perry 2011). Melissa V. Harris- Perry, in her book *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*, argues that the image of the strong Black woman was a racial and political construct that shaped the identity of Black women in narrow and limiting ways. While the construction was internalized by African American women as a source of empowerment and resistance to dominant ideologies

which vilified them, it was also misrecognition of Black women that obstructed their character and identity from being humanized. On the one hand, the model allowed Black women to have agency in defining themselves and offered a source of strength and pride as they continued to build positive images of themselves in the midst of racism and misogyny. However, in demanding that they be “super-strong,” the idea of the strong Black woman did not allow for them to be human, weak, or vulnerable (Harris-Perry 2011). As “self-denying caregivers” to their Black communities, Black women are expected to restrain their own needs for the good of their community, and they are judged based on their behavior and fulfillment of their ascribed role rather than on their inalienable human value (2011). Consequently, their subjection to shame is heightened, and the expectation placed on Black women, a marginalized population with lack of access to structural resources, becomes an unrealistic prison (2011). The complexities associated with the *strong Black woman* ideal reflect the racial and gender politics enveloped in American history and is an important vantage point from which to examine African American women’s silence concerning rape as well as their subsequent responses and reactions.

### *Sexual Violence on College Campuses*

The proliferation of sexual violence on college campuses continues to be an issue that calls for greater attention and that must be addressed. Incidences of sexual assault, acquaintance violence, and sexually aggressive behavior have been found to be particularly high and prevalent among adolescents and college-aged students (Schwartz, 1997, pg. 24). According to a report released by the National Institute of Justice in 2000, college campuses contain the largest concentration of women at risk for sexual assault. However, it was found that many of the women do not characterize sexual assault committed against them as a

crime due to reasons that include, “embarrassment, not clearly understanding the legal definition of rape, or not wanting to define someone they know who victimized them as a rapist, or because they blame themselves for their sexual assault” (National Institute of Justice 2000). In addition, the report outlined a number of limitations on the available research on sexual violence against college women that include:

- The failure to use a randomly selected, national sample of college women. (Many studies have sampled students at only one college or at a limited number of institutions.)
- The failure to assess the various ways in which women can be victimized. (Most studies have focused on a limited number of types of sexual victimization.)
- The failure to use question wording or sufficiently detailed measures that prevent biases that might cause researchers to underestimate or overestimate the extent of sexual victimization.
- The failure to collect detailed information on what occurred during the victimization incident.
- The failure to explore systematically the factors that place female students at risk for sexual victimization.
- The failure to study whether women have been stalked--a victimization that, until recently, had not received systematic research (National Institute of Justice 2000).

These limitations are especially important to consider when thinking about the ways in which race may be incorporated in the dialogue of sexual assault and how Dickinson College can facilitate effective discourse while also implementing effective strategies to prevent sexual victimization.

In *Researching Sexual Violence against Women*, Martin D. Schwartz provides several different analyses applied to the research of sexual and physical victimization, while proposing an integrative model designed to test the various theoretical approaches (Schwartz, 1997, pg. 27). The four theoretical categories that were explained included the psychiatric and psychological models, the cultural norms of violence and sexism, the social context, and

developmental models. The psychiatric and psychological models underscore the personal traits of the victims and offenders, cultural norms of violence and sexist perspectives are emphasized as factors that enable sexual victimization and reinforce victim-blaming, the social context model highlights the environmental and situational factors that foster acquaintance rape, and the developmental model asserts that violence that occurs in the home will manifest itself in future relationships (Schwartz, 1997, pgs. 25-26). Schwartz calls for an integrated model that includes the central psychological and sociological risk factors for involvement in sexual and physical relationship violence. This model takes into account the characteristics of the perpetrator, the social context, and the offense itself (Schwartz, 1997, pg. 27). Through an analysis of previous research about sexual assault disclosure, Tillman et al (2010) highlighted gaps in empirical studies and examined the factors that impact the decreased likelihood of African American sexual assault victims to report the crime. The article affirms that Black women receive less support when they disclose their sexual assault and explores both intrapsychic and systemic factors that act as barriers to reporting. Those factors included “inadequate or inappropriate sexuality socialization, rape myth acceptance, degree of self-blame, and secondary revictimization by mental health professionals and law enforcement” (Tillman, 2010, pg. 60). It is evident that Black and White women may experience hesitancy to report sexual assault for similar reasons, however there is a paucity of research surrounding sexual victimization and Black/African American women. What is generally known is that women at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) experience lower rates of sexual assault than women at non-HBCUs (Krebs et al, 2011, p. 3642). There remains a gap in academic discourse that focuses on the sexual victimization of Black women at predominantly White colleges and universities. It is apparent that an

integrative approach to an analysis of sexual violence is crucial in obtaining the complete picture of the phenomenon of sexual assault as it occurs in institutions of higher learning, and it can be prove to be especially informative when analyzing sexual assault against Black women and how the intersection of race and gender moderates their experiences.

In conclusion, the Black woman's body and experiences has long been brutalized and eclipsed in the realm of dominant discourse. It remains significant to position her generational suffering of systemic sexual violence at the center of academia and public dialogue in order that the racial, sexual, and class politics surrounding her adversity be more closely examined so that it may one day be eradicated. New models and policies must be developed that allow the Black woman to reclaim her body and identity, and the pervasive rape culture that exists in the United States must be addressed so as to unbury the countless female voices that have been silenced.

## **Methods**

The primary research method utilized for this thesis is qualitative, in-depth interviews. I also conducted secondary research that involved analysis of quantitative data gathered by the Counseling Center. Qualitative research refers to a range of approaches and methods utilized to study social life as it naturally occurs. Data collected is typically in the form of fieldnotes, interview transcripts, documents, and/or visual materials, all of which are non-quantitative in nature (Saldana, 2011, pg. 3). I chose qualitative research as my main method for this particular project because of the sensitive and personal nature of the topic of sexual assault. I wanted to be able to explore the unique and intimate details of the participants' beliefs and experiences that shaped the way they dealt with the issue of sexual assault. Capturing the

experiences and thoughts of a sample of African American/Black female students at Dickinson College is both invaluable and most effective in understanding their perceptions of sexual violence as well as their reasons for reporting or not reporting incidences of sexual assault. As a qualitative interviewer, my goal was to listen to the stories and explanations provided by the participants after being prompted by my questions. I aimed to give each participant her own voice, and to provide a platform for her to share her narrative. The “genre” of qualitative research that I employed was a case study, which is focused on a single unit of analysis and which permits in-depth examination (Saldana, 2011, pg. 8). My case study consisted of Black, female participants at a small, liberal arts college that is predominantly White. While my study does not include a large number of settings or participants, the information I gathered through the interviews and my analysis of the data will speak to the broader issue of sexual assault and how it is experienced by college-aged, Black women.

Before conducting any interviews, I first had to submit an application to Dickinson College’s Institutional Review Board due to the nature of my research topic and because I would be working with human subjects. I submitted my research proposal, informed consent forms, and interview questions to the IRB on February 14, 2014, and after making a few revisions, my project was approved on February 26, 2014. I conducted interviews from the end of February 2014 until the end of March 2014. In order to collect qualitative data, I met with participants for face-to-face, individual interviews that typically went from 40 minutes to an hour. I created a script for the email I would use to recruit participants. The email stated that the purpose of my study was to conduct research on African American women’s experiences at a predominantly White institution such as Dickinson College as it relates to



their perceptions of sexual assault on campus and their notions of sexuality. It asked for the participation of any respondent who was at least 18 years of age, identified as both Black/African American and female and who would be interested in being interviewed for a period not to exceed an hour. I stated my class year, major, and that I was a Posse scholar in the email. The Posse Foundation is a program which provides full-tuition, merit-based scholarships to inner city youth in specific cities throughout the United States. I specifically disclosed being in Posse because the scholarship program recruits a high number of culturally diverse students, and I wanted to target a diverse group in order to increase my chances of getting respondents for my research. Interested participants were informed to email me for an interview. I sent out the email in February 2014, to Joyce Bylander, the Special Assistant to the President for Institutional and Diversity Initiatives, and Paula Lima Jones, the Director of Diversity Initiatives, requesting that they forward it to their student contacts because their respective positions enabled them to have access to the contact information of culturally and ethnically diverse students. Joyce Bylander is also the Posse Liason, and therefore she was able to forward the email to the Posse mentors, faculty at Dickinson who act as mentors to groups of Posse students, and request that they tell their students about it. Paula Lima Jones included my email script in the Office of Diversity Initiatives e-newsletter, which is sent out every Friday to students who expressed interest in diversity initiatives at Dickinson. I also sent the email to the president of the African American Society (AAS), the captain and co-captain of the Third Degree Step team, and a member of Sigma Lamda Gamma Sorority, Inc. and asked that they forward the email to their members. All three organizations were chosen because of the high number of racially diverse members. They act as multicultural circles that promote diversity and the integration

of minority groups into the larger Dickinson culture. Due to their high minority representation, they were appropriate target populations because I was seeking out African American female participants, a subgroup of minorities on campus.

At the beginning of the spring semester, I planned to conduct research at four other colleges and universities that were similar to Dickinson College in size and the demographic of the student population. Those institutions included Gettysburg College, Franklin & Marshall College, Lafayette College, and Bucknell University. I had specifically chosen 3 out of the 4 schools, Franklin & Marshall, Lafayette, and Bucknell, because they were partnered with the Posse Foundation, and therefore it would be relatively easy for me to get in contact with the Posse liaison and mentors at those schools and request that they send out my request for research participants to the Posse scholars. I accessed each school's website and researched and took note of the multicultural student organizations and the individuals organizations with access to multicultural students or that catered to female students. I recorded a list of those contacts because I planned to reach out to them once my research proposal was approved by Dickinson College's IRB and request that they send my email blast to their members. After I submitted my proposal to conduct research at other schools to Dickinson's IRB, I sent an email to each of the schools' institutional review boards introducing myself, detailing the purpose of my project and my research questions, and asking if I would have to also go through their own Institutional Review Board. All of the schools except for Bucknell University responded to my email and stated that I would have to go through their own review process as well because of the nature of my topic, and they informed me to submit my application once my proposal was approved by Dickinson College. I planned to conduct in-depth phone or video recorded interviews with the

participants from the other schools and I would have contacted them via email to request their participation. I received notice from the Institutional Review Board at Dickinson College on March 3, 2014 that the approval of my proposal to conduct research at the other schools mentioned was contingent on explaining how the recordings of the long-distance interviews would be stored, transcribed, and secured. However, due to the limitation of time and the significance of having ample time to work on and complete my data analysis for the thesis, I decided not to pursue the research on other campuses. Because of my passion for the project, I would like to expand my research in the future to include more than one college or university.

Prior to conducting each individual interview on Dickinson's campus, the participants were required to sign a written consent form that detailed the purpose of the study, the risks of participation, and the confidentiality agreement. Respondents were informed that they would be given pseudonyms immediately following the interview and that no identifiable characteristics would be included in the transcription or in my research about them, aside from their race and gender. Due to the relatively small size of Dickinson College and the even smaller percentage of African American students, it would be important to leave out or change that information in order to prevent the participants from becoming overtly identifiable. All interviews took place in room 208 located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor in the Bosler building. The space was private, comfortable, and accessible. The interviews were recorded using an audio recording device. The presence of audio recording equipment evokes different meanings for different people, but it can reinforce the serious nature of an interview and construct an environment that may seem more formal to the participant (King & Horrocks, 2010, pg. 44). In order to create an environment that seemed more informal and in which the

participants would feel free to share their views openly and casually, I made small talk with them before the interview commenced, asked them how their day was going, and explained the purpose of the research in simple, basic terms. Although there was a table set up between the interviewee and I, and I sat across from her, the casual clothing I wore and the different positions in which I sat in my seat, sometimes with my feet on the seat, denoted that the interview was not meant to be overly serious in nature. Sometimes, when the participant laughed while giving an answer, I laughed along with her or smirked. For the more sensitive and personal questions, I made no apparent facial gestures or physical responses as I did not want to exhibit any judgmental reaction. At the completion of each interview, I gave the participant an opportunity to ask questions or add anything that she felt she had not said or that should be taken note of. For some participants, I asked whether it was okay for me to include certain information that she mentioned during the interview that could be identified as personal characteristics. In addition, I reiterated that the participant would have full access to the transcription of her interview once it was complete. Once the interview finished, I transferred the recording to my laptop, and then deleted it from the recording device. After each transcription was completed, I deleted the audio recording from my laptop. The interview questions were structured to analyze the women's perceptions and/or experiences of sexual assault on the college campus, how they defined sexual assault, the ways in which they understood and/or experienced racial discrimination and stereotypes, and their utilization of counseling services. Mental health resources available on campus were provided before and after the interviews occurred.

In relation to the larger Dickinson campus and culture, the participants that were interviewed are a minority group and represent a fraction of the students on campus. Their

experiences are essential and interesting to learn about since they may be overshadowed by the larger, White culture, and qualitative research allows for their experiences to be discussed in detail and elaborated upon in a way that is personal and developed.

As a qualitative researcher, it is important to be reflexive, especially during the interview process. Reflexivity refers to, “the realization that researchers and the methods they use are entangled in the politics and practices of the social world” (King & Horrocks, 2010, pg. 126). At the intersection of race and gender lies an array of complexities and politics saturated with the phenomena of discrimination, hierarchies, and violence. In approaching the topic of sexual assault, I facilitated the discussion of these politics and took note of the ways in which they moderated the interviews. As a Black female student, my positionality was parallel to the students I interviewed, and several of them were peers within my own social networks. I anticipated that I would represent a safe space in which the participants could talk openly about their experiences and reveal certain aspects of themselves or their viewpoints that they may otherwise have felt ashamed of doing. The participants did not feel reserved in honestly sharing their thoughts of race and gender and the ways in which they influenced the social context of Dickinson College. They were also relaxed in speaking of their own racial and sexual beliefs. However, I also took into account that it might be particularly difficult for participants to discuss experiences with me, as they may include other students who I know and because I am an individual who knows the participant, rather than a stranger who the participant may not have to face at a later time. Certain questions were more personal than others, and I made it a point to probe further only where appropriate and to an extent that it would not make the participant feel too uncomfortable. As the interviews were conducted, I realized that I was able to make the participants feel at ease and

create an environment in which they did not feel judged or like specimen to be analyzed and exhibited. However, I did have to encourage the women interviewed to elaborate on their experiences and explain certain beliefs or outlooks that they may have assumed was common knowledge among African Americans. Overall, however, my reflexivity in the research site proved to be relatively positive. Several of the participants even noted that they had cherished the opportunity to speak of the topic in the context of the research study because it brought to light conversation that they otherwise would not have participated in or even thought about as thoroughly or deeply.

As a victim of sexual assault myself, I tried to remain as objective as possible throughout the interviews and limit my reactions to the participants' responses to questions that asked about personal experiences with sexual misconduct. During and after the interview, I did not share my experience of being sexually assaulted with any of the participants. However, my personal experience did inform the types of questions that I asked and the ways in which I went about asking them. As a woman assaulted by a male member of the Black community, I remember feeling a sense of betrayal in reporting, and those same complex feelings reside within me today. I understood that not every Black woman would harbor the same feelings or express similar experiences, however I did im to examine if what I felt may have been reiterated in any of the interviewees' responses. One participant, Tracee, was aware that I had been sexually assaulted because I told her last fall semester 2013 during a conversation. That may or may not have influenced her decision to openly discuss with me her own experience with sexual assault at Dickinson. While I did try to remain objective, I take into account that I have "insider status" not only because I am a Black woman but also because of my personal experience, which may have influenced the types of questions I

asked and the ways in which I asked them. Particularly during Tracee's interview, I demonstrated sympathy through head nods, eye contact, and facial expressions as a way to show her that I understood what she went through and was still going through. I was a peer to most of the participants, and most if not all of the participants knew who I was. My status as an insider allowed me to create a space where the women could feel comfortable and be open to sharing their thoughts and experiences, but most importantly, it put me in a position to gain access to a population that is especially vulnerable due to their intersectional identity and historical marginalization. I was also able to initiate dialogue about a topic around which exists a blanket of silence. If it were not for my personal experience, my passion for researching topics surrounding violence and intersectionality, and my efforts in conducting this qualitative research, these women's stories and their voices may have never been listened to, captured, and posited at the center of sociological discourse about race, gender, and sexual violence.

In my research, I utilize the terms "Black" and "African American" interchangeably, however they do not denote the same thing, and it is important to understand their differentiation. The term "African American" refers to members of the Black Diaspora who are established and have been living in the United States since the eras of colonization and slavery. However, I also allow my participants to self-identify as African Americans regardless of the amount of time that their family lineage has been settled on American soil. The term "Black" can also refer to the Black Diaspora, but also encompasses individuals who hail from the Afro-Caribbean or Afro-Latin America.

Throughout my research, I largely schematized race within a Black-White dichotomy, and that decision influenced the way in which I presented information in my literature review

as well as the types of questions I asked and the responses I received from my participants. I used a Black-White frame in order to specifically situate the ways in which the identities of Blacks/African Americans are impacted by and interact with the dominant, White American society. My research may still be applied to other persons of color, however I recognize that while they may share similar lived experiences with race and oppression, the complexities and forms of oppression distinguish their experiences.

The research I conducted was also largely focused on heterosexual relationships and heterosexual dynamics of sexual assault. This is a limit to my research, but my findings are still significant in that they deal with issues affecting a marginalized population and they exemplify discoveries that grapple with broad notions that are inherent in dominant, White society.

Lastly, the way in which I define sexual misconduct, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and rape is directly dependent on how they are defined in Dickinson's Sexual Misconduct and Harassment policy, which can be found in Appendix B.

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### *Quantitative Data*

On March 28, 2014, Alecia Sundsmo, the Executive Director of the Wellness Center at Dickinson College, provided me with data showing counseling utilization rates by race, class year, and gender, as well as data on the number of students talking about sexual assault on campus. From the chart above, one sees that from 2009-2013, sophomore year students consistently utilized the Wellness Center the most out of other class years. This may be due to the fact that sophomore year marks a transition from the honeymoon stage of being a first



year to assimilation in to the campus. It also a time when students are declaring their majors at Dickinson, which can be a stressful time, and the course workload gets more rigorous. By sophomore year, students have spent a full year at Dickinson, which could have included both negative and positive experiences.

Female students at Dickinson utilize the Wellness Center more than their male counterparts and from 2009 to 2013, the percentage of female students using the counseling center has grown from 58.8% to 67.2%. On the other hand, male utilization rates for the counseling center has dropped from 41.2% to 32.6%. Transgender students made up 0.9% of the students utilizing the counseling center from 2011 to 2012, and only 0.2% from 2012 to 2013.

Anglo American/White students make up the greatest percentage of students who use the counseling center, a fact that makes sense considering that they also make up the majority of the student body at Dickinson. In ranking order of the percentage of students using the counseling center, they are followed by Asian American/Pacific Islander students, Hispanic students, and Black students. From 2009 to 2013, the percentage of White students utilizing the counseling center decreased from 82.9% to 77.8%. Asian American/Pacific Islander students made up 7% of the students utilizing the counseling center in 2009, and 7.8% of the students utilizing it in 2013. In that same time period, the number and percentage of Hispanic students utilizing the counseling center decreased from 25, (or 6.5%), to 12, (or 4.3%). For African American/Black students, utilization rates of the counseling center increased from 7 students, (or 1.8%) to 17 students, (or 4.3%) from 2009 to 2013.

Due to time constraints, the Wellness Center was unable to provide me with cross-tabulations of race and gender for the data provided, therefore out of all the racial categories

of students listed in the chart, we do not know how many were male or female. While that information would have been helpful, the data ultimately demonstrated that the demographic of the student body moderated the utilization rates of the counseling center among different groups, and at Dickinson College, male students and students of color under-utilize the counseling center.

During the 2012-2013 academic year, of all the students who sought individual therapy at the counseling center, 46, or 17.3%, self-identified as sexual assault survivors, some having experienced multiples incidences of victimization. This illustrated an increase from the previous two academic terms including 2011-2012, in which 11.1% of students admitted to being sexually assault, and 2010-2010, in which 6.8% of students self-identified as sexual assault survivors. Of the 46 incidences, 16 were perpetrated during the 2012-2013 academic year, and 10 occurred on campus. It is evident in this pattern that since 2010, more and more students have been talking about sexual assault on campus and seeking therapy for their psychological and emotional well-being.

### **Data Analysis**

While the embodiment of race and gender is not a monolithic experience and played out in different ways for all ten of the participants in my research, the social position of the Black/ African American women who were interviewed does affect the ways in which they negotiate notions of sexuality and how they experience and perceive sexual assault.

The prevalent themes that arose throughout the research can be divided into four categories that include:

- The culture of silence surrounding sexual violence,
- The effect of the race of a perpetrator of sexual assault on the women's decision to report,

- Black women's perception of promiscuity as gendered and their degree of self-policing, and
- The use of a severity scale when describing different types of sexual misconduct.

The females' narratives provide a window into understanding the complex ways in which the intersection of race and gender impact young, Black women's experiences with sexual violence as it occurs on a predominantly White college campus.

### *Sexual Assault- Scale of Severity*

In order to more fully grasp and explore the women's attitudes toward sexual assault and violence, it was important to allow them to explain how they defined sexual assault in their own terms. In this particular theme, I analyzed the similar responses given by participants who answered the open-ended questions, "How do you define sexual assault? How do you define rape? How do you define sexual harassment?" Several of the women described the three types of sexual misconduct in relation to each other, in terms of how severe each one was. The different acts were placed on a spectrum that allowed the women to judge the seriousness of each one. Of the ten participants, five of them had explained the different forms of sexual misconduct in terms of their degree of severity. It is important to analyze the connection between these themes because they exemplify the ways in which the women's perspectives of different forms of sexual misconduct can influence their experience with sexual assault and harassment as well as their reaction to their experiences.

The structuring of a scale of severity allows for the downplaying of certain acts of sexual violence that are perceived to be less severe than others. Once certain acts are minimized, they can be perceived as being less unacceptable and easy to overcome, especially within a rape culture that fosters unhealthy norms of masculinity. This can be dangerous because an act of sexual violence that is regarded as less serious than another also

carries the implication that it is less punishable. If the trauma is perceived as minimal, it is easier to normalize not seeking assistance.

When asked for her definitions of sexual assault and sexual harassment, Amiyah responded, “I define sexual assault as any kind of, um I don’t know the word for it, sexual forwardness that is not welcomed or that is not mutual I guess for both parties. I’d also define sexual assault as more aggressive than say harassment.” Using the phrase “more aggressive,” Amiyah began to compare and contrast the different types of sexual assault. When asked to define sexual harassment, she went on to say, “...it’s really hard because I don’t think there are fine enough lines, but I guess I’d say a lesser version of sexual assault in that it could be verbal, not always necessarily physical interaction.” Amiyah explained sexual harassment as holding less gravity than sexual assault, which became interesting later on in her interview when she shared a personal experience in which she felt sexually assaulted. I asked the question of whether she or someone she knew had ever been a victim of sexual misconduct at Dickinson. After she expressed uncertainty about how to define misconduct, I told her that it could include the definitions for rape, sexual assault, or sexual harassment, and that it related to the committal of non-consensual acts that could include touching or fondling. Amiyah replied,

I mean I’ve had it done to me at some point. I remember being at a party and hugging a friend that just completely grabbed my ass, like it was actually really uncomfortable. I walked away from the situation knowing that he was drunk and I didn’t wanna deal with it and he probably wasn’t fully conscious or whatever. Now that I think about it, that’s probably an example of sexual misconduct, but um, yeah it’s probably a really minor example.

In her personal experience with feeling like she was subjected to an act that to which she did not consent, Amiyah expressed a reaction of discomfort, however she also shied away from addressing the situation and made the decision to walk away, acknowledging that the person

who had grabbed her was under the influence. By labeling the experience a “really minor example” of sexual misconduct, she minimized its importance as well as its effect on her, despite the displeasure it caused. It is difficult to say whether downplaying the experience helps her to cope or if she genuinely regarded it as minor, however she did admit to “getting over” the situation five minutes after it occurred and noted that if something “drastically crazy” were to happen to her, she would be more likely to talk to someone outside of who was involved in the incident. It may not have been a serious situation for the participant, however it does raise the concern of whether women are socialized to not take certain situations as seriously as others in order to become complacent within a heteronormative rape culture in which sexual violence against women is inevitable.

Positing different forms of sexual assault on a spectrum of severity can be viewed as a contributor to the culture of silence that exists around sexual violence because minimized acts of sexual assault will be less likely to be reported or talked about. All five of the women who utilized this scale of seriousness expressed that there was silence around the issue of sexual assault at Dickinson. Of the five women, four of them had experienced a form of sexual assault or harassment, and neither of them reported it. When asked to define sexual harassment, Monica responded,

I don't know, when I think about that, I think about it in terms of some type of sexual assault occurring, a lesser degree of sexual assault occurring in like a professional atmosphere, 'cause that's where you hear about it the most like with someone at work or just between two people in a professional institution, I guess.

Employing the use of the phrase “lesser degree,” Monica demonstrates that she perceives sexual harassment to be less serious than sexual assault. She also conceives of the situation most likely happening in a professional environment. Not only does the scale of severity make it more difficult to view sexual harassment as just as serious as any form of sexual

assault, but the expectations of the conditions or circumstances under which sexual harassment occurs also limits scenarios or experiences that Monica would count as sexual harassment. If she was not sexually harassed in a professional environment, I question whether or not she would view it as sexual harassment or if it would have to be taken under more consideration before she decided how to conceptualize her experience. After being asked if she believed that sexual assault was a problem on Dickinson, Monica articulated that she believed it was because of students' difficulty and uncertainty with defining what sexual assault and what acts are regarded as sexual assault. Monica said that often the lines get blurred, especially with alcohol, around what constitutes as sexual assault. When I asked her to explain how that plays out on campus, she communicated,

...I don't think everyone understands what falls under sexual assault. I mean maybe I don't have a full understanding of what falls under sexual assault, but I think that people think it's really just like sex, like sex when both people don't say yes... I don't know. I've heard about more cases happening on campus that were sexual assault than I would have, I don't wanna say "liked to," but that are comfortable to know about, you know, on a campus that you're on. And those are just the ones that have been reported, so the question is, which ones haven't? Like if that many have been reported, I'm sure that there are a bunch more that haven't or a bunch more where both parties are like, "Was that sexual assault? What really happened?" I don't know if that was a clear answer.

While Monica did note that sexual assault was not limited to sex or sexual intercourse alone, she did implicitly express that she viewed certain forms of sexual assault as less serious or as "lesser" than others, thereby showing that she thought of them in relation to one another. She also realizes that students at Dickinson may not report sexual assault if they are questioning whether or not what they experienced would fall under their definition of sexual assault.

The ways in which different forms of sexual assault are perceived not only influences the way in which the victim experiences the assault, but it also affects how the victim reacts to the experience. One of the participants, Regina, also understood different types of sexual

assault according to their degree of severity. When asked to define rape in her own words, Regina explained,

Yikes. How do you define rape? Um something that's also unwanted, but it's a step up from sexual assault. But then again, one can argue that sexual assault, if verbally, is like "the raping of the mind," but that's just another thing. It's like sexual assault to the 2<sup>nd</sup> power.

In describing rape as "sexual assault to the 2<sup>nd</sup> power," Regina posits rape as more serious or more traumatic than sexual assault, although she does refer to sexual assault as a "raping of the mind." After being asked to define sexual harassment, Regina answered,

Sexual harassment, if we're going in degree, it's like rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment. So, I guess like a step below sexual assault because assault insinuates that there was some type of action whereas harassment is almost, and not saying that there is no action in sexual harassment, but almost as if the person felt like the perpetrator was about to sexually assault because of the harassment.

On Regina's scale of severity, rape is the most serious form of sexual violence. Following rape is sexual assault, then sexual harassment. Therefore, to Regina, sexual harassment is the least severe or least compromising form of sexual misconduct. In her definition, Regina also mentions the role that physical action plays in making an act of sexual misconduct more or less severe. While sexual harassment can include action, she described it as a precursor to sexual assault or rape, which would include some type of physical action. Later on in her interview, Regina disclosed that the definitions of the different forms of sexual assault are overlapping. Her ideas of sexual assault, as they were expressed to me during her interview, speaks to the complex nature of the phenomenon and to the fluidity of the different definitions that make acts of sexual assault hard to explain and conceptualize. It also speaks to the trouble the participants had in viewing certain acts committed against them as sexual assault. Perhaps it is this difficulty and uncertainty that influence the participants to construct a scale of seriousness when discussing sexual assault. The scale may make it easier for the

participants to understand the different acts that can be considered sexual misconduct. While the definitions of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct or violence, and sexual assault provided by Dickinson's Sexual Misconduct and Harassment Policy tended to help the participants ground their definitions in concrete terms, some of the participants still noted that the language was very similar for different forms of sexual assault and not distinctly unique for any one act. Some participants also remarked that certain terms used in the policy were confusing.

Regina's definitions of rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment impacted the ways that she would react if she felt like she was a victim of sexual misconduct. During our interview, I asked her how she would handle a situation in which one of her Black/African American male friends made her feel uncomfortable or violated through non-consensual sexual contact. She replied,

Firstly, approach. Since we're having this kind of definition, is it sexual harassment, assault, or rape? 'Cause I feel like harassment is like, "We're gonna have a conversation. This is how I feel. I'm not coming around you, you're not coming around me. We're not coming around each other." But, when it starts getting to assault and rape, other people need to get involved, if that makes sense.

When I asked Regina to clarify who the "other people" were who would need to get involved, she explained that she was referring to authorities at Dickinson. Regina emphasized the importance of having a face-to-face conversation with the male perpetrator of sexual harassment, if she ever felt that she was put in that situation. She also affirmed that distance would need to be created between herself and the perpetrator after the experience of sexual harassment. As one who viewed rape and sexual assault as more severe than sexual harassment, Regina explained that authorities would need to get involved if she ever felt that she was raped or sexually assaulted. Reaching out to authorities denotes that Regina felt



more strongly about the experience of rape or sexual assault and therefore it would become necessary to enact disciplinary action. In the case of rape or sexual assault, approaching the perpetrator to discuss what happened was not sufficient. In this example, it is evident that depending on how serious an act of sexual assault is perceived to be by the participant, the assault may or may not be reported to authorities. Regina's reactions to different forms of sexual assault are influenced by her perceptions of the assault.

I previously established that the downplaying of certain acts of sexual assault contributes to the proliferation of an unhealthy rape culture that fosters harmful norms of masculinity. While the five women who invoke the use of a spectrum of severity to describe sexual assault are, in some sense, complacent within this culture, there was one participant who acknowledged the existence of the scale and discussed her disagreement with it. Tracee disclosed to me her experience with being catcalled and approached by Black men in her hometown. After providing definitions for sexual assault, rape, and sexual harassment in her own terms, Tracee was given a few pages of Dickinson's Sexual Misconduct and Harassment Policy. When I asked her if the document changed any of her previous definitions, she replied,

Yes, I didn't include verbal but that's just 'cause I don't know, I guess in the culture I grew up in, verbal isn't necessarily like that outspoken and it's like if someone touches you, then you say something. But, if they're just yelling at you, you mostly ignore it or maybe you should take it as a compliment. I personally don't.

Tracee remarks on the normalization of verbal sexual harassment within her culture and her discomfort with it. Although she feels that women are taught to ignore the harassment or view it positively, she underscored that she does not perceive it to be a positive experience, rather she is often made to feel uncomfortable and even scared at times. After being prompted to elaborate on what she meant, Tracee went on to say,

So like for example, if you're walking down the street and someone decides to yell at you saying you have a nice body, can they get your number, or like can you sit on them and things like that, I generally think in the culture I was raised in, which is like African American culture which varies drastically depending on who you ask, is saying that, maybe not necessarily take it as a compliment, but like take it as is and leave it that. You can tell them to stop but like that won't really do anything. Maybe it's just society in general, but I feel like for a lot of women, especially in the African American culture, you encounter it down the street if you're ever like walking and someone is yelling at you, you kind of just have to sweep it under the rug even though it makes you uncomfortable.

The "culture" that Tracee referred to was "African American culture," which she explained can vary greatly and is not one conceptual thing. From her interview, I deduced that growing up as a member of a predominantly Black community, Tracee learned to perceive the normalized and accepted behaviors of the community as part of the Black/African American "culture" that she was a part of. However, she does make the distinction between the community and culture she grew up in and other Black/ African American communities. It is a complicated concept because African American culture is not monolithic, however many of the participants did allude to a "Black community" or "culture" that was unique to Blacks/African Americans. Nevertheless, Tracee's description of her experience exemplified the minimization of sexual harassment that is verbal rather than physical. Within her community and her "culture," Tracee observed that women who are victimized by verbal sexual harassment are taught to comply with the conduct even if they feel uncomfortable. In this way, male perpetrators of sexual assault and harassment are relieved of accountability for their actions, and rape culture is systematized and reproduced.

The tendency of the five women within this particular theme to construct a continuum of sexual violence according to severity is problematic because it reinforces rape culture, contributes to the delegitimization of certain acts of sexual assault, and it assists in the perpetuation of the culture of silence surrounding sexual violence. If victims of sexual assault

feel as if certain acts are not as serious as others or that they should conform to societal expectations that normalize female victimization, then it will become more commonplace to not speak of or report sexual assault. Even the language of Dickinson's Sexual Misconduct and Harassment Policy includes sentences that ascribe to the assignment of degrees of severity to different types of sexual assault. On page 15 of the policy under the definition for "Sexual Misconduct or Violence," it reads, "A single or isolated incident of sexual harassment may create a hostile environment if the incident is sufficiently severe. The more severe the conduct, the less need there is to show a repetitive series of incidents to provide a hostile environment, particularly if the harassment is physical" (Appendix B). According to these words, physical action aggregates the severity of an incident of sexual assault. The language, in a sense, constructs a hierarchy of severity of the different forms of sexual misconduct, and taking into account the subjectivity of severity, it begs the question, *What makes an incident more or less severe? Who decides? Who has the right to decide?* The ambiguity associated with these questions, along with the inevitability of minimizing certain forms of sexual misconduct over others when creating a spectrum of severity for different kinds of assault, further the perpetuation of a culture of silence around the issue.

### ***Culture of Silence Surrounding Sexual Violence***

Of the ten Black/African American women that I spoke with, seven had experienced some form of sexual misconduct or sexual harassment. None of them had reported it to authorities at Dickinson College. The research that I've conducted has reinforced the idea that there exists a culture of silence around the issue of sexual violence, especially as it pertains to violence against Black/African American women. The "culture of silence" that I frequently refer to from this point on encompasses the normalization of not reporting or

underreporting sexual misconduct due to mechanisms that are inherent in White patriarchal rape culture, including victim-blaming, self-doubt, and the demonization and hypersexualization of Black bodies. With these interviews, I allow the women to share their stories, explain their thoughts, and vocalize their grievances. Throughout this portion, the underlying question remains, How can participants talk about sexual assault if there is no language to talk about it? The significance of this research is also underscored in the reality that there would be a void within this realm of research without my presence as an African American female researcher who is capable of accessing a vulnerable, minority group and capture the stories and voices that have long been overshadowed. In each dialogue, I asked my respondents the question, “Do you believe that you or someone you know has ever been a victim of sexual misconduct?” All of the women responded “Yes” to that question, meaning all ten participants either were victims or knew someone who was a victim of sexual misconduct. The two major themes that arose in this particular category were, 1) the women’s perceptions of the Dickinson community as fostering silence around the issue of sexual assault and, 2) their inclination to remain quiet if assaulted by a member of the African American community. The women’s silence ranged from being a way to retain a positive image of the Black community and protecting the perpetrator from further discrimination to preventing the loss of opportunity by the perpetrator to participate in higher education.

Half of the participants in my research believed that sexual assault was a problem at Dickinson College while the other half responded that they did not know if it was because they felt that information on the issue was either not available or not accessible. Many of the respondents expressed frustration with not knowing, and they communicated that they would

feel more comfortable if they were more aware of the extent to which sexual assault is an issue on campus.

Among the women I interviewed was Denise. She appeared an assertive woman who was quick to challenge ideas that she did not agree with or that she felt were ignorant. She spoke of several examples in which she was considered to be “sassy” and “mean,” but she explained that it was her personality and that she wasn’t those things all the time. Denise was also adamant about maintaining her personal space, and she felt that sometimes students at Dickinson got too comfortable with her too soon. She explained it was not necessarily a problem, but she did note that it was strange to her when she first arrived at Dickinson. At the beginning of our dialogue, she said that she felt “awkward” answering some of the questions, however as time progressed, she grew more comfortable, and conversation flowed more smoothly. Most of the women progressively became relaxed because of the types of questions that I asked in the beginning of the interview. They were more informal than other questions and the content was not directly related to sexual assault because I wanted to ease my participants into the sensitive and heavy nature of the topic of research. Also, I had not been well acquainted with Denise before she agreed to participate in my research. After we had been talking for a few minutes, I asked Denise if she felt that sexual assault was a problem at Dickinson. She explained the “quieting” of the campus that she perceived had been happening since she was a first-year student. Comparing her first year experience of learning about sexual assault to the present day, Denise noted,

I feel like sexual assault is a problem everywhere, but like specifically, I didn’t necessarily think Dickinson had a really big problem with it, even though I’ve heard stories from like way back when. I didn’t know it was a problem now, you know what I mean? And so, I guess since I don’t hear about it, it’s not like real, I guess, since no one really talks about it. Freshman year, it was constantly drilled in our heads and then after that, it just kind of got quieter and quieter and quieter.

Since all first-year students at Dickinson College are required to take an online educational course on sexual misconduct and harassment, it is portrayed as a major and relevant issue upon arrival to the institution. Denise explained her experience of moving up in grade year as becoming less and less informed about the issue of sexual assault, a feeling she equated to the silencing of the campus. In her response, Denise mentioned the institutional role that Dickinson played in “drilling” knowledge and awareness of sexual assault to first-year students, followed by the gradual abandonment of that post, which in turn created an environment in which “no one talks about it.” It is difficult to say whether lack of dialogue surrounding sexual assault is a product of Dickinson’s or students’ avoidance of the discussion.

Regina was an outspoken interviewee who often gave lengthy responses to my questions. She elaborated on her thoughts voluntarily and spoke with little censorship. She is a self-assured and unapologetically honest woman, and she noted that her background had much to do with that. She spoke to me of her mother and siblings and how she has been impacted from the way she grew up in an inner city. Regina also maintained eye contact with me throughout most of her interview and spoke with passion and ease. She was a friend of mine, and the atmosphere of our conversation quickly was marked with the use of terms and language from academic discourse, making it a semi-formal yet casual space. When I asked her if she thought that sexual assault was a problem at Dickinson, she responded,

“I think it’s a problem everywhere. The fucked up thing is that I can’t even speak from experience and not like my own experience but like other people’s experience because people don’t talk about it. I’m not as aware of what goes on in terms of sexual harassment and assault or rape on this campus because people don’t talk about it. I feel like even giving a yes or no answer is kind of ambiguous just because I really don’t even know. I don’t even know what the statistics are on sexual harassment on campus. I don’t know how many men and women on campus have been harassed or assaulted or raped just because it’s something that takes place in a folder in the Dean’s office. It’s not something that’s a part of a panel

discussion... I think in that way, it shelters the student body from realizing that it is a problem. And it sucks to have this conversation and realize that you're a product of that, you're a part of the student body who kind of don't know what's going on, but I really have no idea as to how it affects students because it's not talked about."

Regina was more explicit than Denise in holding Dickinson College accountable for not maintaining a space in which sexual assault and harassment are openly discussed, and in which the extent of the issue on campus is made transparent to the student body. Her language was doused with dissatisfaction and vexation that stem from lack of awareness and ignorance of sexual assault on campus. Regina did not feel that she could even answer the question with a close-ended response because there is no way to know if sexual harassment and assault are or are not problems at Dickinson.

The term "transparency" was used by several participants when they explained feeling unfamiliar with the sexual assault policy at Dickinson as well as the frequency and extent to which incidences of sexual misconduct occur on campus. Amiyah was the first woman I interviewed, and she brought up the lack of transparency between the administration at Dickinson and the student body. She was both pensive and thoughtful in her explanations of her beliefs and perceptions of the social context of Dickinson and the issue of sexual violence, pausing before beginning many of her responses. Amiyah was also a friend, and we had grown to know each other since last fall semester 2013. She came across as demure in the beginning of our interview and she did little things throughout our conversation such as avoid eye contact for moments at a time and draw lines on the table we sat at with a piece of chalk for a few minutes, especially when she was answering questions directly related to sexual assault. Nonetheless, it seemed to me that her answers were honest and careful. When I asked her to elaborate on a statement she made about not knowing if sexual assault was a problem on campus because Dickinson was not transparent, she said,

I think it's really interesting how when there's a robbery in town or fire or something, we get the alert right away. But something that I think is equally as much as a crime or important to know, like an act of sexual assault on campus, is never given out in the same manner... I think that especially for college students, it's really helpful to know what's happening in our community as well as on our campus, and it's almost hypocritical to have us so invested in our community, Carlisle community, and these crimes and helping and all that, and not knowing what's happening in our own campus. So, that's what I mean by transparency.

Amiyah made an interesting point in her observation of the way in which information is distributed through campus-wide alerts about crimes such as robbery or about emergencies including fires, yet students are not warned about incidences of sexual assault in the same manner. Although the reason for not sending campus-wide emails about sexual assault cases may be rooted in the protection of the victim and perpetrator, in a way, the phenomenon may be read as the minimization of crimes of sexual violence. It may compel one to question why other crimes are deemed serious enough to alarm the whole campus yet crimes of sexual misconduct are not. Amiyah also pointed to the inconsistency in actions of Dickinson College to promote civic engagement with the Carlisle community and awareness of the issues affecting the surrounding neighborhood while keeping students in the dark about concerns that directly affect them on campus. From her response, I deduced that she felt a sense of dissatisfaction with the way Dickinson distributes information, or rather does not distribute information about sexual assault. Her voice and opinion is important to consider, especially because she is a member of a marginalized population that may not often be offered the opportunity to evaluate the way in which the institution communicates with its undergraduates.

Although there was an evident pattern among the participants of placing responsibility on Dickinson for perpetuating a culture of silence, there were also instances in which the women offered self-centered reasons as to why a victim of sexual misconduct may not report the incident. Sheryl was one such participant. She had a composed personality that



contributed to a amiable and relaxed atmosphere between us. I had not known her well before we met to conduct the interview, but have since taken up with her socially. During our dialogue, she remained candid with her answers and spoke in detail of her personal experiences and background. She grew up quite conservative and avoided using words referring to genitalia when describing unwanted sexual intercourse and penetration as forms of rape and sexual assault. Within the hour that we conversed, she left an impression on me as being a well-mannered and sincere individual. Sheryl did think sexual assault was a problem on Dickinson's campus, and in her explanation for her claim, she stated,

I feel that it is, but people don't see it as sexual assault or sexual harassment. I think that people sometimes may kind of like cuddle it like, "Oh that's my friend, so maybe that's not what he or she meant." I also think that people don't voice it as much just because they don't wanna be seen a certain way. They don't want people to take them as like they're joking around or something.

Sheryl utilized the example in which a victim of acquaintance rape may be hesitant to report because of uncertainty about whether the experience could be characterized as an assault. This reason is not uncommon and has been cited in research about the underreporting of sexual assault, especially on college campuses. It has been cited that most rapes are perpetrated by a friend or acquaintance of the victim. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, "about 85 to 90 percent of sexual assaults reported by college women are perpetrated by someone known to the victim" (NIJ, 2008). If the perpetrator is an acquaintance, it is rational to assume that the victim may feel more doubtful of the deliberate nature of the incident. Fisher, Daigle, and Cullen (2010) conducted a study in 1999 that asked victims of completed and attempted rapes to provide reasons why they did not report and to rank those reasons in order. The third most common rationale given by the victims was "not sure crime or harm intended" (Fisher, Daigle, & Cullen, 2010, pg. 144). This doubt was illustrated in Sheryl's response as she attempted to sympathize with an alleged victim of

sexual misconduct and offer explanations for the lack of reporting. Sheryl also brought up the silence surrounding the issue as a result of a victim fearing “being seen in a certain way” or possibly worrying that the claim would not be seen as serious and that the victim would not be believed. The participant’s social position may or may not have influenced her consideration of how the victim may be perceived others as a source of silencing around the issue of sexual assault, however as a member of a racialized community that has been hyper-visible for several centuries, it remains important to note the possibility of a connection. Sheryl was also one who described feeling stereotyped and hypersexualized on campus at later points during the interview.

Of all the participants, there was one who explicitly admitted to being sexually assaulted/raped on Dickinson’s campus. Her name was Tracee. I was acquainted with her before our interview, but we have since become more familiar with each other. Feeling a sense of empathy and connection with her because of my own personal experience with sexual assault, I showed sympathy throughout our conversation with reassuring head nods and comforting looks and gestures. While she was open and honest with me during her interview, she did show signs of discomfort and slight agitation when describing her experience with being assaulted by someone she had previously viewed as an acquaintance. She expressed that after the incident, she made it a point to avoid social atmospheres that he frequented. She explained that part of her reason for not reporting the assault was also that he was well-liked in the community. At certain points during our conversation, she paused and sighed, momentarily closed her eyes, and spoke in a tone stained with disappointment. But, in my eyes, it was not that she was necessarily sad. She seemed disheartened by the experience, but was moving toward a place of recovery. When I asked Tracee if she felt

sexual assault was a problem at Dickinson, she said that it was, but that it may not be known because people don't talk about it and many victims do not report. When I asked her how she knew that victims were not reporting, she replied, "Personally, I was one who didn't report. I just didn't think with the circumstances that had happened that it would get taken seriously. I thought I would kind of get in trouble, too. So, I just didn't report it." I went on to question why she thought that she would get in trouble, to which she answered,

'Cause I was under an influence or two, and (sigh) I just thought well, you knew you were under an influence, so they're gonna look at you like you were under an influence. I don't know, there's this stigma about the fact that you're under an influence. I think society teaches, "Don't get raped," and not "Don't rape." So, I was just going off the fact that like, "Don't get raped. You're sitting here under an influence around a male that you may or may not know. You should know better." To me, it just wasn't worth it.

Tracee admitted to blaming herself for the sexual assault at the time, and she stated that her use of substances that impaired her judgment made her feel as if she put herself in the position to be raped. She mentioned several of the barriers keeping Black women from reporting sexual violence that were brought up by Tillman et al (2010), although her reasons seemed more personal than racial. Her degree of self-blame was illustrated in her assertion that being under the influence in some way made the incident her fault. It was also a form of "rape myth acceptance" in that it shifted blame from the perpetrator to the victim, thereby justifying and reinforcing sexual victimization within rape culture (Tillman et al, 2010, pg. 62). Tracee also stated that society teaches "Don't get raped" rather than "Do not rape," a victim-blaming method of socialization that normalizes sexual violence. This is an example of the "inappropriate sexuality socialization" discussed by Tillman et al (Tillman et al, 2010, pg. 60). Tracee, however, was a complex case in that she expressed to me her rejection of the societal norms that enabled sexual victimization and socialized women to naturalize sexual assault and harassment. Although she did not agree with the sexist, patriarchal culture that

facilitated violence against women, she was still victimized by that same culture because once she personally was sexually assaulted, she articulated feeling accountable.

Various researchers have initiated studies aimed at exploring the reasons why Black/African American women underreport incidences of sexual violence, and several, including Olive (2012), Tillman et al (2010), and Simpson (1989), have cited their distrust of mental health and public services. In the research I conducted, only 3 out of the 10 participants expressed skepticism toward speaking with college health professional about issues regarding their physical, mental, or emotional health. The commonality among those three women was that they either preferred to address their concerns with friends or family, and/or they did not feel as if the Wellness Center at Dickinson was very helpful. Therefore, it was not distrust that kept them from seeking help, rather it was that the services provided at Dickinson did not seem to be beneficial to them. Most of the women, however, felt comfortable with college mental health professionals and thought that they could talk with them about anything. Two of the participants mentioned Joyce Bylander, the Special Assistant to the President for Institutional and Diversity Initiatives, as a confidant who they would trust if ever they felt that they were a victim of sexual misconduct.

#### Silence within the Black Community

The culture of silence that exists on Dickinson College's campus is a broader phenomenon reinforced by the pillar of silence within the Black/African American community. Three out of the seven women who indicated that they had been victims of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, or sexual assault, discussed race and its effect on the decision to report. They also referred to being Black women and how that might contribute to the silence that engulfs discourse on sexual violence.

Megan, an outspoken, assertive, and knowledgeable woman, declared that women of color would take into account a perpetrator's race when deciding whether or not to report sexual assault. She vocalized that she was well-versed in the law, and spoke of how that impacted a lot of the ways in which she viewed the world and navigated her own lived experiences. When answering several questions, she referenced texts that she had read either in class or on her own. Megan possessed a self-assured personality and many of her responses to my questions were detailed and thought out. I was also acquainted with her prior to the interview, and have since gotten to know her better. When I inquired about why she felt that women of color on campus would consider the race of a perpetrator of sexual assault, she explained,

...I think that women of color are much more hesitant, Black women are much more hesitant to report it if it's another Black man because we already feel so marginalized. I think people are very hesitant to do, like a lot of times there's this mindset of the community of color against the world. We have to work together and stand together to get everybody out of here and to be successful and to be better than wherever we came from. I think that's very admirable. I do think when it comes to sexual assault, it plays against us because we see those same things and we're like, "You know. I know where I came from. I know where you came from. If I bring this up, you're going back. And if you go back, you're never going to have this chance again." I feel like a lot of people are very hesitant to feel like they're stealing that from them. So, they just won't report. I think people won't report White men because they just don't think it matters, like who's gonna believe me? But I think there's a lot more emotion put into the decision whether or not to report if it's a Black man.

In Megan's explanation, several important notions came up. As members of a marginalized population, Megan noted that Black women on campus feel a sense of antagonism to the White students who make up the majority of the student body. In some sense, the White students are a parallel to the larger, dominant White society to which Black bodies are the antithesis. These feelings of tension and difference described by Megan evoked feelings of an obligation to preserve solidarity within the Black/African American community. Megan's use of "we" in speaking of that community demonstrated that she identified with and is a part of it. She remarked that the opportunity to receive an education from Dickinson College was

a means to a better life for Black students, and reporting a Black man for sexual misconduct would cease that opportunity. Embedded in her response also is the assumption of a certain class status of members of the Black/African American community. In the lines that read, “I know where I come from. I know where you came from,” Megan seemed to assume that the Black students attending Dickinson either all know each others’ backgrounds or share the same backgrounds. Her assertion that the opportunity to receive higher education would not come again if it was lost at Dickinson seemed to be influenced by the idea that wherever the accused Black student came from would either be void of that opportunity or that he or his family would not be able to send him somewhere else. Her reasons may be founded on these assumptions, but they could also be attributed to her belief that the criminalization of the perpetrator after being accused of sexual assault may act as a barrier to further education. Lastly, Megan expressed that reporting sexual assault by a Black man would be like “stealing” his chance to receive an education. In this instance, the concerns of the Black male overshadowed the victimization of the Black female, a phenomenon examined and discussed thoroughly by Hill-Collins (2004). Ingrained in Megan’s response was the notion that the protection of the Black male is what maintains Black solidarity and not the protection of the Black female. According to her, if a Black woman is sexually violated by a White male perpetrator, she must question whether she will be believed, and that doubt alone may keep her from reporting. In each scenario, the Black woman is devalued and made invisible. She is obligated to remain silent about her suffering because in neither case were her grievances posited at the center of discourse and identified as the most significant factor in her decision to report.

Monica, a forthright and somewhat brazen woman, reiterated similar sentiments to those of Megan. Monica was a friend, and the general mood established by our dialogue was casual. Periodically, she played with her scarf and looked down or away while answering questions directly related to sexual assault. She took her time to think of her responses to several of the questions I asked and occasionally asked for clarification if she was confused about what I meant. After I asked her how she would handle a situation in which one of her Black/African American male friends made her feel uncomfortable or violated by doing something sexually inappropriate, Monica admitted that “if it was rape or something,” she would not know what she would do. I probed further and asked why she would not know, to which she replied,

What the horrible thing about it is not only, if I did report it, not only would I have a stigma put on me by own community, but I would also be further...I don't wanna say statistic, but he'd just be falling into another stereotype that the entire campus already expects out of him. Not to say that I wouldn't do it because I don't wanna put him into that stereotype, but it just sucks to even have to think about that like I can't even just think about what I need to do but I'm also thinking about how whatever I do will affect my entire community on campus.

Ikard (2013) discussed the way in which White American society perpetuates a monolithic construction of Black identity that requires the individual to represent the collective group. Monica disclosed that reporting a Black male perpetrator of sexual assault would not only expose him as such to the campus, but it would attach to him the stereotype of *Black male rapist* that has been pervasive in historical and contemporary representations of Black male sexuality, a reality underscored by Hill-Collins (2004). While she clarified that the perpetrator being Black would not necessarily deter her from reporting, she acknowledged the burden that would be placed on her as a Black woman to have to be constantly regulating and refining the image of the entire Black community on campus. It is important to note that Monica, along with several of the other Black/African American women, reference this

burden or reoccurring thought in which they must think of the implications their actions may have on other Black members of their community. The “burden” seems to be one that is perceived to be enforced but also internalized and taken on by the individual woman, thereby making her complicit within the phenomenon.

Denise offered a personal illustration of her family life to support her claim that the race of a perpetrator would affect a woman’s likelihood to report sexual assault, especially in the case that the offender was a Black male. She explained that the media often depicted crimes committed by Black men as more egregious than if a person from another race committed them. She went on to say that this made victims of crimes committed by Black men more inclined to report them, even if they may not have reported a non-Black perpetrator. According to Denise, the awareness of that phenomenon would make Black women who have been victimized by Black men less likely to report in an effort to combat Black men’s demonization in the public eye and reduce the injustice of their hyper-criminalization. Describing how the women in her family dealt with victimization, Denise stated,

Most of the Black women I’ve known, specifically my family, their husbands, boyfriends, sons have done some really crazy stuff, and they just refuse to report it. And I’m like, “You’re an idiot. You need him behind bars.” But, the first thing they’re saying is like, “No, ‘cause they’re gonna treat him worse ‘cause he’s Black.” And I’m like, “Regardless, I think he should go.” So , I do feel like non-Black people would report it on the quickness, and for Black women, I feel like you would have to do a lot more convincing to get her to report it, if that makes sense.

Denise observed that the women in her family were hesitant to report Black men who were their intimate partners or family members because they felt that the Black men would be treated “worse” in a racist prison system that has long oppressed Blacks/African Americans. Nonetheless, she personally disagreed with their decision and often encouraged them to



report. I asked her why she felt Black women would need more convincing than non-Black women to report victimization, and she said,

My family are huge Black rights activists...For them, it's not that Black men or Black women do no harm in their eyes, it's just that they're mostly striving for equal rights, but they feel that "the man" or "the system" is holding them down. So, they kind of have that mentality of trying to protect their own up until they can't protect them no more. There's that mentality, and I also see it in other Black families that I'm not necessarily related to.

The history of Black activism that is prevalent in Denise's family fostered a sense of unity among members of the Black community. Within her own family and other Black families that she observed, the reporting of assault or violence perpetrated by Black men was perceived as an erosion of Black solidarity and the protection of the community.

The thread that travels through these women's stories and explanations is the negotiation of intersectionality within a system that treats race and gender as mutually exclusive categories. Crenshaw (1989) took into account the fact that Black women are allowed to be either women or Black, but not both. She discussed at length how that created a reality in which positing Black women's concerns and experiences at the forefront of race or gender discourse would create a divide in the Black community because it would in some way exclude the interests of Black men. Black men are at the center of race discourse, and addressing their concerns and maintaining their protection is what preserves Black solidarity and what contributes to creating a positive image of the Black community. The presence of a Black woman who has been victimized by a Black man threatens that solidarity. In addition, the hyper-awareness of the way in which the Black community is being perceived on a predominantly White campus acts as further pressure for Black women to think twice before reporting a case of sexual assault by a Black man. It is for this reason that the women seem unable to report or understand why a Black woman would be hesitant to report when taking

into consideration the implications it would cause for the Black/African American community.

To illustrate that, among the participants, there is not a uniform opinion on how silence around the issue of sexual misconduct varies by race, I posit the voice of Leslie. Leslie possessed a cheerful and upbeat character. Throughout our interview, she was easygoing and earnest in her efforts to answer the questions as best she could. When I asked her if she thought that the race of a perpetrator of sexual assault would affect a woman's likelihood to report, she restated similar ideas brought up by Denise and others in that she felt that Black men were often accused of sexual assault by White women because they were Black. She was skeptical as to whether White women would "feel as obligated to say something" if the perpetrator was non-Black. She held the negative depictions and stereotypes of Black men accountable for this conceivable discrepancy in reporting. I followed up with Leslie and asked her how she thought the situation would play out if the female victim was Black and the male perpetrator was White. She responded that she thought the Black victim would say something, but that she didn't know. When I changed the race of the hypothetical perpetrator to Black, she said,

Oh man. I think a Black woman would say something. I feel like Black people are very not into Black-on-Black crimes and stand up for a lot of Black-on-Black crimes, so I think that the woman would say something just because it's like, "You don't do that to your own people" type of thing.

For Denise, the victimization of a Black person by another Black individual is perceived as unacceptable and a violation of the collective community. In that case, she felt that Black women would be adamant about reporting sexual assault by Black men. When I repeated the question but changed the race of both the female victim and the male perpetrator to White, she stated,

I feel like for White women, they might say something, but I feel like other White women are not as outspoken and would be a little more afraid to say something. Depending on how much power the other person has, it just depends. I feel like with White women, sometimes they're really outspoken and they're like, "I will stand up for this." Other times, they're kind of like afraid.

Leslie upheld certain beliefs about the qualities of Black and White women. Generally, she felt that Black were outspoken and assertive, which made the more likely to report victimization regardless of the race of the offender. White women, she thought, were not as vocal and tended to be more fearful to report, unless the perpetrator was a Black man. Due to a White woman's position of power in a dominant, White society, she may feel more confident to report if she felt sexually assaulted by a Black man. White men, in a White, patriarchal system, are in a higher position of power than White women, therefore White women, according to Leslie, may be more hesitant to report. Her explanation demonstrated, to some extent, her belief in racial and gender stereotypes that impact how women address the issue of sexual violence.

### ***Effects of Race of Perpetrator on Decision to Report***

Statistical data and academic research have shown that most rape in the present day are intraracial and that Black women are less likely to report sexual assault than their White female counterparts. After having analyzed the hierarchy of oppression, as it is explained by Hill-Collins (2004), and the ways in which it forced Black women to subvert their experiences with gender oppression while prioritizing racism and its brutality, it became important to explore whether or not the same notions of protecting the one's racial community outweighed Black women's personal experiences with sexual violence at the hands of Black men on a predominantly White college campus. Through the discussions, several of the women also offered explanations on how they would react to perpetrators of

sexual assault according to their race. In describing how the race of a sexual assault perpetrator would affect her decision to report, Megan asserted,

...I have a feeling like what I said, if it was somebody of color, I might be a little less inclined [to report]. Knowing me, I would probably still do it (laughs), but I might not sleep as well at night. If it was a White guy, I'd be like, "Fuck him. He did this to me, and this is what's suppose to happen." I believe in the legal system. I believe in the judicial system. To be completely honest, I probably wouldn't report it to Dickinson. I would probably report it to the police.

She noted feeling more insistent about reporting a White male perpetrator of assault than one who was Black, and even implied taking more drastic measures in addressing the assault. On the other hand, she would be more hesitant to report the Black male perpetrator, and went on further to explain that she would address the Black male directly and declare statements such as, "Do you recognize that this is what happened? Do you understand what we all have at stake being here? We're here for a reason. You literally just ruined it." By utilizing the "we" pronoun, Megan is highlighting that she and the Black male are members of the same community, and she used language that insinuated that they have the same goal while being at an institution like Dickinson. While she would intend to be firm, her inclination to not report the Black male perpetrator to the police stemmed from anticipated guilt of taking away the opportunity of a Black man to continue in an institution of elite higher education. It is representative of the burial of a Black woman's experience of sexual trauma beneath the layers of racial solidarity, as described by Hill-Collins (2004) as well as Simmons (2006) in *NO! The Rape Documentary*.

In contrast, Monica expressed more hesitancy to report a White male perpetrator of sexual assault, explaining that as a Black woman, she feared that she would not be believed. When asked if the race of a perpetrator would influence her likelihood to report, Monica replied,

Unfortunately, well...I would be far less likely to report if it was a White guy 'cause I just feel like it would be a fight that I would not be winning. I feel like if it was anyone but White, I'd be more willing to report 'cause I don't wanna speak as if there is only Black and White on campus, but then there is hesitation for women to report in general on campus. It's too small of a campus, and the fact that I know about cases that I was not involved in speaks to you how much people talk and how it's not as private as it should be. So while I would like to say that, "No, I would report either way," there's too much. Either way the woman is gonna have a stigma put on her and as a Black woman, the stigma would be put on me.

It is evident that she didn't believe that she would get justice if she decided to pursue a case of sexual assault against a White male. McGuire (2010) provided a historical analysis of the systemic rape of Black women by White men and the desecration of Black womanhood by White, patriarchal, and racist institutions that subjugated the hardships of the women into chasms of silence and insignificance. The history of a Black woman's inferiority to a White man has been institutionalized and is reinforced in the narrative of Monica, a Black woman who is fearful that her identity will prevent her from successfully charging a White male student of sexual assault on a college campus. Monica also disclosed that due to the small size of the campus and the sense of community that exists and is significant for Black students, a Black woman who accused a Black man of sexual assault would be stigmatized and would no longer be able to consider the community a safe space. Either way, she would be denounced, a reality that presents powerful barriers to the reporting of sexual assault by Black women.

Amiyah was another participant who felt that Black men were repeatedly accused of sexual misconduct due to their race and because they were perceived as violent. When I questioned whether the race of a perpetrator of sexual assault would be taken into account in her personal choice to report, she replied,

I think so. I think the same way I'm talking about race and the Black man being accused, I could easily experience the same thing. I spoke about my own person of color grabbing my

ass and I didn't tell anyone about that. Would I have reacted as calmly if it was someone of a different race? Probably not. So, I definitely see that playing out in my own life.

Amiyah had revealed to me that there was an incident that occurred on campus in which a man of color whom she was trying to give a hug at a party touched a part of her body without her consent. She felt uncomfortable and violated by the experience, but she ended up walking away because she did not want to address the situation at that point and she believed that he was probably drunk. Amiyah went on to speak of the increased likelihood of a less calm reaction if the man had been White. Ultimately, she showed greater affinity with Black men and therefore would attempt to diffuse a situation of unwanted physical touching by a Black man. White men are more likely to experience a more reactionary response.

While there were women who would react differently in situations in which they felt sexually victimized, according to the race of the offender, there were also several women who insisted that race would not play a factor in their response or their decision to report. Regina emphasized the act of sexual assault itself and how it would make her feel personally, and she vocalized that race did not matter if she were ever to be a victim of sexual misconduct. In her response to the question, *Would the race of a perpetrator of sexual assault affect your likelihood to report?* Regina said,

No, because I still got raped. Somebody still dehumanized me, regardless of who it is. I was just dehumanized. I was just looked at as weak, and this person sought to take advantage, regardless of who the person is. To me, it doesn't matter. Maybe I'm saying that because I haven't been through that experience, but right now looking at it, it just doesn't matter.

She had not ever been the victim of sexual misconduct, but she maintained that if she were ever to be sexually assaulted, after telling her mother, she would take measures to ensure that the perpetrator was not allowed to remain at Dickinson, or she would leave herself. Regina made it clear that she could not remain in the same space as someone who assaulted or raped her, regardless of the race of that person. In her depiction of rape as an act in which the

victim is dehumanized, looked at as weak, and taken advantage of, she reinforced the radical feminist conception of rape that constructed it as a crime of power and domination, rather than a crime of sex (Simpson 1989). Ultimately, the act of rape carried severity to the point that she would feel brutalized and would in turn demand action by authorities.

Leslie expressed similar sentiments to those of Regina about how she would feel if she were sexually assaulted and how she would go about addressing it. Leslie had also never been a victim of sexual misconduct, but she remarked that the race of the perpetrator would absolutely not be considered in her decision to report. In her reasoning, she said, “If it is anybody, I’ll be like, no, because I respect myself and I wouldn’t let anybody get away with that, for doing that to me.” She went on to explain that if she ever felt like a victim of sexual misconduct, she would tell her mother about the incident first and then report it to authorities. In Leslie’s instance, reporting the act would serve as a means to both defend and reinforce her respect for herself. To her, it would be important that the perpetrators knows that and does not escape penalty for his crime.

Denise revealed to me that she had experienced sexual harassment while at Dickinson, and although she did not report it, she said that she would likely report an incident of sexual assault despite the race of the perpetrator. Being the self-assured woman that she was, Denise explained,

I’m gonna report regardless. I’m special, you shouldn’t be touching me in the first place, but like (laughs) also, I confide a lot in my friends and so, I want them to do the same. The person who sexually harassed me at the time, I didn’t say anything just because I didn’t know how to digest it, if that makes sense. I’m pretty sure, God forbid I’m raped or something, I’m pretty sure it’s gonna take me a while to actually digest it, to understand what happened to me before I can actually act upon it.

She described not being able to “digest” the experience of the sexual harassment she incurred and how that contributed to her not reporting it. It took her a while to acknowledge and

understand that it was an act of sexual misconduct, and she anticipated that she would experience those same feelings if she were ever to be raped. In her case, absorbing and understanding the experience of sexual assault had greater influence on her decision to report.

#### Other Factors affecting victims' likelihood to report

Olivia, a bubbly and enthusiastic woman, brought to light several factors other than race that would play into her decision to report an incident of sexual assault. Olivia was my friend, and from the onset of the interview, we enjoyed a laid-back and informal atmosphere. Throughout our interview, she did not mention any incidences in which she had been a victim of sexual misconduct, but she did disclose that she knew one sexual assault case that had happened at Dickinson. After responding that race would not affect her decision to report, Olivia asserted,

I feel like race wouldn't hold me back. It would probably be whether, you know, my life was in threat if I reported. There would be other factors that would hold me back, and I don't feel like race would be one of those factors.

I then asked her what the other factors would be that she referred to, and Olivia elaborated,

Well, I feel like support. If I don't have support, then I probably wouldn't because bringing to light what happened to me would just require a lot of support from others, and I feel like if I don't have that, then why go through that? ... Also, maybe where I am in my life. I mean I don't really know how I feel about if I had children and I was sexually assaulted by somebody. I don't know how I would feel about that. I'm not trying to think about just now but also in the future like how it would affect other people. Not just my friends but like my children. If knowing that will make them, I don't know, change them, I would probably, I don't know. (slight pause) Yeah.

She paused sporadically during her response to think of other circumstances that would inhibit her from reporting, and among them she cited feeling threatened, not having support, and taking into consideration the effect that the awareness of the sexual assault would have on her friends, family, or children. Her explanation is a reiteration of several reasons identified by sexual assault victims that would keep them from reporting. What stood out to



me the most was the impact that a support system would have on Olivia. In the context of a college that most of the women felt allowed a culture of silence and that did not provide spaces for women to openly discuss sexual misconduct, it remains important to examine how the institution may better serve students and provide more adequate support.

Tracee, a victim of sexual assault at Dickinson, remarked that it was not race that discouraged her from reporting, although her reasoning did concern characteristics of the perpetrator. When I asked her if the race of a perpetrator of sexual assault would affect her likelihood to report, she replied,

Maybe not race necessarily I mean it may play a factor subconsciously, but I don't think consciously it would. For me, it wouldn't. We don't know with people these days. I would say it would be more of a factor or like athlete status or well liked in the community. I mean that's, I think, another factor that held me back that he was well liked in the community, and I just felt like, "Well, he's well liked. They know he knows better. You really have nothing to go on."

Tracee feared that she would not be believed if she reported the assault because the offender was popular and well-liked in the community. If other students felt that it was not in his character to commit an act of sexual assault, then she felt that her story wouldn't be credible. It is crucial to analyze this rationale because it is a misconception that acts of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and rape are perpetrated by a certain type of individual or that productive, nice, and generally "good" people in society are incapable of committing an act of violence. Rape culture is prevalent in our patriarchal, hegemonic society because of the proliferation of unhealthy masculinity norms that reinforce and normalize the sexual victimization of women (Simpson 1989). All social agents living within this kind of society are susceptible to victimization, and the more that it is not addressed, the more it is maintained. Anyone can be a perpetrator and anyone can be a victim.

Sheryl did not think that the race of a sexual assault perpetrator would determine her choice to report, but she offered other influences. When I asked her what they were, she said,

Like religion, whether or not people would believe me or would other people just say, “Oh, she’s lying. She actually wanted it.” So, I feel like those factors would play a bigger role than whether or not the person is Black or White.

As someone who grew up with religion, it made sense that she mentioned it in her response, however I was not completely sure of what she meant. When I requested that she elaborate, she explained that her father was a religious man, and if she were ever sexually assaulted, he would blame her for it and, in a sense, disown her because the act of sex was viewed as something sacred. People believing her also played a role in her decision to report, which is a telling finding from a woman who occupies a social position that has been hypersexualized and characterized as primitive to the point that Black women were perceived as unlikely rape victims. Sheryl’s internalization of a culture that normalized victim blaming is also evident in her idea that others may think she “wanted” the assault, and therefore that would deter her from reporting.

Among all of the mentioned participants, there were diverse perspectives and experiences that shaped their responses on how, if at all, the race of a perpetrator of sexual assault would moderate their decision to report. Most of the women discussed factors that were external to them and that are inherent in rape culture. The findings are significant because they provide a window into the elements that prevent Black/African American women on Dickinson’s campus from reporting sexual assault, sexual harassment, and rape. As a group enclosed in a frame of silence, within their racial community, that strengthens the larger culture of silence that exists at Dickinson, their voices and concerns are embedded with multiple complexities, and this makes it particularly meaningful that they are heard and that their issues are addressed.

### *Promiscuity as Gendered*

The concept of promiscuity is highly subjective. However when it has been ascribed to the sexuality of Black women throughout the course of the history of the United States, it has denoted images of a woman with a lustful desire for sex with multiple partners, a primitive subhuman tainted by immoral and sexual nature, and a woman who is to blame for her sexual victimization because of her extreme seductiveness and lewdness (Ikard, 2013, pg. 6). While the concept of promiscuity can apply to both men and women, due to traditional gender roles within society, it has tended to highlight negative implications for women and positive meanings for men. When asked to define promiscuity, half of the women provided a response that was gendered and only provided the example of a woman. The other half either used gender neutral terms to define promiscuity or describe a promiscuous person, or they acknowledged that the concept is skewed to only apply to women and vocalized that they disagreed with that way of thinking. Some explicitly stated that they only thought of women when they thought of promiscuity, which is a crucial finding from persons occupying a social position that has long been plagued with stereotypes of lasciviousness and vulgarity. Within this theme, there is also a commonality among several of the participants that includes the internalization of negative stereotypes about Black women. Both patterns underscore the implicit reproduction of the double standards inherent in a patriarchal, misogynistic culture along with the misrepresentation of Black women's sexuality.

As Monica was explaining her definition of promiscuity, she began to paint a picture that aligned with her own appearance, therefore she included the role of one's behavior in the way in which one will be regarded by others. In her response, Monica stated,

Usually it's for girls because I can't think of a guy being promiscuous. When I think of promiscuity, when I first think of the word *promiscuity*, the image I get is of a girl whose wearing something that's unnecessarily short or showy of their legs or their butt or their boobs and things like that, but then at the same time, then I'm promiscuous (laughs) 'cause that's what we wear when we go out and things like that. But I guess furthermore, it's someone who puts themselves in situations where they're disrespecting themselves, I guess. For me, I think of one girl all over several guys at the same time.

Embedded in Monica's answer is the politics of respectability associated with a woman's sexuality and sexual behavior. Equating a woman who is promiscuous with a woman who is disrespecting herself, she invokes the use of language that both stigmatizes and marginalizes women with multiple sexual partners. Harris-Perry discussed the pressure on Black women to uphold identities that would combat the perpetual misrepresentations of their character and behavior (2011, pg. 61). What made a Black woman respectable was her ability to carry herself as either asexual or sexually conservative, and that reality made it impossible for her to assume agency over her own body and sexuality. Even now, the politics of respectability are at play among the young, African American women who have attached negative meaning to promiscuity and associated it only with women. When asked to define promiscuity, Amiyah also ascribed to a gendered definition, stating,

Promiscuity... I think promiscuity is a word that automatically connotes a loose girl or female. I definitely don't associate it with men. Yeah, just like someone who is actively seeking to be sexually active, I guess with someone (laughs) like I don't know. Just someone who is actively seeking, I guess within a given time frame, to have sex. Within our cultural... it kind of fits all the typical descriptions of what we look down on culturally, so if she's dressed inappropriately, or she probably has on a lot of makeup kind of thing.

According to Amiyah, a woman's promiscuity can be read through her appearance and clothing. The focus on how a woman looks may be attributed to a hyperawareness of how one's body is perceived, a tendency that is especially common among individuals of color

who are made hyper-visible in a predominantly White context. Admitting that promiscuity among women is looked down upon in “our” culture, she demonstrated the ways in which the caricatures of Black women over time have retained significant implications for the Black community within the broader system of patriarchy and misogyny.

Megan insisted that a person’s choice of who or how many people to sleep with was none of her concern and that she did not care nor did she judge people according to that choice. Her definition of promiscuity also appeared gendered, however it is difficult to ascertain whether she spoke in her own terms or if she was reiterating how the broader patriarchal society conceptualized promiscuity. When defining the term, Megan said,

...Officially, I guess, promiscuity is usually women having a lot of sex. A lot being more than 3 partners. If you’re really religious, more than your husband. And again, that’s assuming you have a husband because I think these stereotypes are very heteronormative.

Her words conformed to the dominant cultural narrative of promiscuity and the tendency of the notion to be applied to women and men in a restrictive, heteronormative culture.

Danielle, a soft-spoken and cheerful character, explained that she did not believe in the term promiscuity because she did not agree with the concept. From the way she grew up, Danielle admitted that she may have been sheltered from discussions on race, gender, and sexuality, however she told me that since coming to Dickinson, she has been exposed to and participated in dialogue surrounding those issues. Other Black women that she has befriended have also influenced her thinking and perspectives in meaningful ways. She went on to expand what she meant by her answer, saying,

Well, it has such a negative connotation. Usually, we assign it to women but we definitely assign it to men as well, maybe not with the same negative connotations that come along with it when we say girls are promiscuous. But, I guess the general definition that most people use is like they just have a lot of sex with a lot of people. That’s what I think when I think of promiscuity. But I don’t necessarily think that’s a bad thing. I think if it’s what you choose to do and you’re safe about it and don’t get hurt, then it’s not really my place to judge what you’re doing as long as you’re okay with it.

Danielle underscored that she was objective and gender-neutral in her definition and judgment of promiscuity, regardless of how it was conceived in the broader cultural and social context.

Regina was blunt and honest with all of her answers throughout our dialogue. When I asked her to define promiscuity in her own terms, she retorted,

Somebody that sleeps around with everybody frequently and with everybody... This is somebody who's like, "I'm fucking everybody. Everybody under the sun. That's who I'm fucking. You got a dick, you got a penis, you got this you got that, we fucking." That's what I describe as promiscuity.

While her conceptualization of promiscuity was not explicitly gendered, the lines that read, "You got a dick, you got a penis..." implicitly signify the description of a woman, if we were speaking heteronormatively. Her use of the term "everybody" also implied that she perceived the number of people a promiscuous person was sleeping with is large. The person that Regina described was indiscriminately engaged in sexual intercourse with others and did so often. I cannot say if Regina viewed promiscuity in a positive or negative light, but indicated in her response is that promiscuity is, in a sense, abnormal.

#### Internalization of Negative Stereotypes and Self-Policing

*We have that history of being sexual objects, of being separated, of segregation, of being something to mess with at night and not during the day. You're not proud of Black women. People are not proud to be with Black women.*

-Megan

The words that appear above encapsulate a reality for several of the Black/African American women that I interviewed. Most of the women were knowledgeable of negative stereotypes about Black women and their sexual nature. On Dickinson's campus specifically, several women made mention of the fact that White male students may have sex with Black women, but they will not acknowledge them the next day, or they will not them in high

enough regard to pursue a relationship with them or introduce them to their friends and family as a romantic interest. This belief was either developed through personal experience or adopted by older Black women on campus who warned them to avoid having sex with White male students unless they were prepared for that outcome. The internalization of negative stereotypes about Black women among some of the participants fueled a propensity toward self-policing, which I define as the regulation of certain behaviors that are susceptible to stigmatization because they reinforce stereotypes. This phenomenon restricts the agency of the women and refuses them the right to act freely since they must remain aware of their behavior, its consequences, and how they are being perceived.

Sheryl noted that the stereotypes about Black women have often made others think that she should be or act in a certain way. She also explained that she sometimes felt pressure to act in accordance with the stereotypes in order to merge into the social order. When I asked her what stereotypes, if any, she thought existed about Black women, she replied,

Yeah, that Black women are like sexual, that they are curvaceous, they have big butts, big boobs, that they're like sluts almost. I also think like they don't take school seriously... I also feel that people look at me as being kind of sexual like I do sexual things to people.

Most of the stereotypes that she mentioned were related to the sexualization of Black women. Although Sheryl insisted that she was not a particularly sexual person, she still felt as if other students perceived her that way. She described in detail one example in which a female friend of hers was online video chatting with another Black man. Once the Black man saw her on the computer screen, he began speaking to her in a way that made her feel uncomfortable. She said that he repeatedly asked if she would “suck his dick,” and she remarked that he did not speak to any other non-Black woman who was in room in the same way. While she said that she did not know if he was playing, she still found the encounter strange. She mentioned another example with White man who asked her inappropriate

questions about her sexual encounters with other man, and she expressed feeling perplexed as to why she was regarded as an “overtly sexual” person because she was Black. I went on to inquire if she ever internalized any of the stereotypes she mentioned, to which she responded,

Mhm. Sometimes, I feel that I have to play this kind of role like I don't care about my schoolwork just because of how people perceive me. I actually feel in my classes, there's this kind of separation almost, so I feel that I have to just play out this “I don't really care about my classes” attitude. I kind of also internalize the idea that I have to be sexual, but I try to not do that because that's not something I'm comfortable with.

Sheryl disclosed that she felt pressured to act outside of her character in order to fit the mold that others constructed for her based on her identity. She discussed times when she acted like she did not care about her schoolwork or when she acted in a manner that was more sexual than what was normal for her, and afterwards she felt bad about it. When I asked her how she negotiated feeling obligated to act in a certain way that she knew was not representative of who she was, she said,

Just talking to my friends about it, telling them how I feel. Also, just trying to have a clean mindset when I go out like not trying to go over the limit of what I drink. Just trying to stay as sober as I can so I don't lose that idea of who I am.

While maintaining control of how drunk she got at parties could have been a mechanism to remain healthy and safe, it may also represent a form of self-policing. Nested in her language was a conscious obligation to regulate how much she drank so that she didn't not step out of character and subsequently fulfill a negative stereotype. The misconceptions of Black women that she dealt with were constricting, and they exemplified the politics of objectivity described by Fanon (1952). Sheryl was not allowed to be herself in a context that racialized and gendered her body, and despite her true character, her identity as a Black woman preceded all her other characteristics when she was being perceived by others.

Monica affirmed her knowledge of the negative stereotypes about Black female sexuality, but she also vocalized her belief that Black men on campus are hypersexualized to



a greater degree than Black women because of the obsession with and exoticization of the Black penis. I asked Monica if she ever internalized the negative stereotypes about Black women, and she said,

Probably, yeah. I think that's the reason why, and maybe that's just me, but when I'm in male-female situations, I try to be very cautious, just in depending on how drunk I am, of how I handle myself because I don't want to end up in a situation where one person thinks one thing and I'm not on that same page. I think because women are hyper-sexualized, any little thing can be like, "Oh, she want it," you know or, "Oh, she's down." That's not the case. So, I think that's one major thing. I also feel like the way I dress like I have to think about that more because I feel like a White girl could walk around campus in short-shorts and while people might look down on it, she's not gonna get the same words that I would get if I was walking around in short-shorts or any other Black woman would get if they were walking around in things like that. So yeah, I can't be too revealing, I can't be too friendly because I can come off as flirtatious or too excited for like sex and shit like that. What else can't I do? (chuckles) There's just a lot of shit that I can't do. I think about things a lot more than other people would have to in those interactions.

Monica also participated in a form of self-policing, and she acknowledged that it was due to her hypersexualization as a woman. It was a burden to Monica to have to be aware of herself and how her actions and body were being read because they might evoke reactions that she did not intend or welcome. She differentiated her experience from that of a White woman in her example of wearing "short-shorts" around campus. On a predominantly White college campus such as Dickinson, a Black woman wearing "revealing" clothing would provoke a different response than a White woman who did the same thing, and in Monica's eyes, that fact created a situation in which Black women were restricted from doing certain things by others and through their own self-policing.

The vignettes provided by Sheryl and Monica exemplify the ways in which the stereotypes embedded in the intersection of race and gender play into how the participants of my research are perceived on campus and how they react to those misconceptions. Their responses echo the shared responsibility taken on by Black women during and post- Civil Rights era to maintain either a "clean" sexuality or present asexuality in order to aid in the

advancement of the social agenda of the Black community to gain equality and succeed in the overarching goal to be humanized by White American society (Harris-Perry 2011). Both Sheryl and Monica understood the importance of presenting positive images of themselves, and at Dickinson, those objectives were often negotiated with who they really wanted to be.

## **Conclusion**

The ten Black/African American women who participated in my research shared diverse and complex perspectives concerning the ways in which their intersectional identity, and the way they are perceived, influence their perceptions and experiences of sexual misconduct. For many of the women, it was difficult to conceptualize a self outside of racial identity and membership in the Black community. That is especially significant to note when discussing intersectionality because while many of the women located the intersection of their race and gender and employed both in their discussions, there were also moments when race and gender were not talked about simultaneously. Therefore, the question remains if one can be Black and be a woman at the same time, all the time. In a time when racism has transformed and been institutionalized in a way that allows it to remain pervasive in an implicit sense, the voices and grievances of Black persons in the United States fall on deaf ears that have ascribed to the notion of a post-racial society. Also, within a White, patriarchal society fostering rape culture, women's bodies and their integrity remain vulnerable. I posit these women's voices at the foreground of race, gender, sex, and violence studies because all disciplines must merge in order to construct an approach to the study of sexual violence and its impact on Black women that will address the complexities embedded in their experiences

and take into the multiple dimensions of their identities that make the experience of sexual trauma a layered phenomenon.

The theme of positing different forms of sexual misconduct on a scale of severity is both problematic and counterproductive, in regards to how the victim of sexual misconduct may perceive and experience the incident. Situating different kinds of sexual assault on a continuum of severity is important in a discussion of the penalty that a perpetrator will face for the crime(s) committed. However, when the focus is on how severe the assault was, the minimization of certain forms of sexual misconduct occurs while other forms are taught to be perceived as more severe and therefore facilitate different reactions. Of all the women I interviewed, 70% of them had been a victim of sexual misconduct, sexual assault, sexual harassment (verbal or physical), or rape. None of the women ever reported their victimization, and it was common that if they felt violated by a Black/African American male or a Black/African American male friend, they would prefer to handle it directly with him before involving authorities. I do not aim to suggest how the women should handle incidences in which they feel victimized by forms of sexual misconduct, however I do encourage an approach to dialogue about sexual violence that is centered on the concept of consent. Every act of sexual misconduct in which valid consent was not given should be regarded as serious. When the women thought that an act of sexual misconduct committed against them was not serious compared to others, they were much more likely to not report it or not even address it. This type of complicity in hegemonic rape culture is dangerous because it allows for that type of culture to persist and it reinforces the subjugation of the women's voices, demanding their silence.

The structuring of a scale of severity for sexual misconduct that allowed for the minimization of certain forms of assault, the internalization of negative stereotypes about Black women and the burden of self-policing, and the sense of obligation to protect the Black community all were themes that fed into the larger phenomenon of a culture of silence surrounding sexual violence. They all speak to the sacrifices made the Black/African American women for the sake of respectability and solidarity with the Black/African American community. While a lot of the hesitancy, if there were was some for several of the respondents, has been internalized through the reproduction of certain notions embedded in rape culture, it remains important to note that the silence is also maintained by the women who have grown complicit within it.

The fact that several of the Black women felt that reporting their sexual violation by Black men may not happen without first considering how it would affect the image of the community as a whole and the life of the sexual assault perpetrator exemplifies a compelling and thought-provoking finding, especially in the context of a predominantly White college campus. The women who underscored fear or hesitancy to report sexual misconduct because of the pervasiveness of victim-blaming tactics within a rape culture reiterated the struggles faced by many sexual assault victims and women in general. It remains important for Dickinson as an institution to pay great attention to the ways in which it may passively allow for the perpetuation of a culture of silence and rape culture, and how that is affecting the student body. The persistence of such an environment forces one to question to what extent the school is a safe space for all students, especially women. It is for this reason that dialogue on the meanings of consent must continue to occur at Dickinson on a regular basis throughout the course of students' four years. These interviews also underscore the

importance of providing open and accessible spaces where women on Dickinson's campus can speak of sexual violence, its implications, and their own perceptions of experiences.

My research has demonstrated that there is a need for the incorporation of race in dialogues about sexual assault and misconduct, more consistent, school-wide discussions on sexual assault that occur every year and reach out to all class years, greater transparency between the Dickinson administration and the student body. It is also necessary that Dickinson invest in resource geared toward women of color and spaces where they can talk about race, gender, class, and issues affecting them. From my findings, it is apparent that there is a lack of understanding of boundaries between the women and the men who victimized them, therefore spaces must be created where people of color on Dickinson's campus, as well as the student body as a whole, can discuss what consent means for them. Several of the women allowed me access to intimate spaces that speak to their experiences, and tapping into that sensitive and emotional arena should be made possible outside of my research.

As Black women who are always Black and always women, the humanization of Black bodies in the broader frame of the United States and the deconstruction of hegemonic, White, patriarchal rape culture continues to lie at the root of what will allow my participants to take up all the space in their skin unapologetically, reclaim the autonomy to act and think freely, and realize a world in which they can dispose of a mentality that has taught them from birth how to tuck away their sexuality like they do their hips for fear of awakening the beast of masculinity. This research is a step forward in the direction of guiltless womanhood and the reclamation of Black female bodies and sexuality. It is also an excavation of Black female

voices from the graveyard of overshadowed narratives. Ultimately, there is no power in silence, and silence does not protect. It is for this reason that I write and will keep on writing.

## Appendix A: Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) Wellness Center Data

### *Quantitative Data*

Demographic Distribution for Students Using CAPS.

	2009-2010		2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Class Year	383		438		448		398	
<b>First-Year</b>	79	20.6	121	27.6	131	29.3	101	25.4
<b>Sophomore</b>	136	35.5	105	24.0	128	28.6	130	32.7
<b>Junior</b>	71	18.5	85	19.4	70	15.7	68	17.1
<b>Senior</b>	97	25.3	122	27.9	114	25.5	95	23.9
<b>Other</b>			5	1.1	4	0.9	4	1.0
Gender	388		434		447		396	
<b>Female</b>	228	58.8	267	61.5	278	62.2	266	67.2
<b>Male</b>	160	41.2	167	38.5	165	36.9	129	32.6
<b>Transgender</b>			0	0	4	0.9	1	0.2
Ethnicity/Race	385		426		441		396	
<b>African American/Black</b>	7	1.8	13	3.1	18	4.1	16	4.0
<b>Anglo American/White</b>	319	82.9	327	76.8	353	80.0	308	77.8
<b>Asian American/Pacific Islander</b>	27	7.0	24	5.6	23	5.2	31	7.8
<b>Hispanic</b>	25	6.5	25	5.9	21	4.8	17	4.3
<b>Middle Eastern</b>	4	1.0	4	0.9	3	0.7	4	1.0
<b>Native American</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0.2	0	0
<b>Bi-/Multi-racial</b>			20	4.7	14	3.2	14	3.5
<b>Other</b>	3	0.8	13	3.1	8	1.8	6	1.5

Source: CAPS Data, Dickinson College Wellness Center

### Sexual Assault

Among students seen in CAPS for individual therapy in the 2012-2013 academic year, staff clinicians reported that 46 (17.3%; a marked increase over the last two years of 11.1% and 6.8%) students discussed sexual assault as a survivor at some point in the past, some of whom experienced multiple. This number does not include the number of friends or other concerned parties who also used individual therapy services. In looking at these incidents in more detail, 16 of the incidents occurred in the 2012-2013 academic year and 10 of these occurred on campus.

## **Appendix B- Dickinson College Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Policy (pgs. 15-17)**

### **A. Overview**

The College recognizes that sexual harassment, misconduct, and intimate partner violence encompass a broad spectrum of conduct and responds accordingly, considering both the severity of the violation and the threat it poses to the Complainant or our community. The following conduct is prohibited under this policy:

- Sexual Harassment
- Sexual Assault
- Sexual Exploitation
- Stalking
- Harm to Others
- Retaliation
- Complicity
- Harassing Conduct

### **B. Sexual Harassment**

All prohibited conduct under this policy falls under the broader definition of sexual harassment.

#### **1. Definition of Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct or communication of a sexual nature WHEN:

1. Submission to such conduct is an explicit or implicit condition of employment or academic success; or
2. Submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for an employment or academic decision; or
3. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of
  - a) Interfering with an individual's work or academic performance; or
  - b) Creating an intimidating or hostile working or academic environment.

#### **2. Sexual Misconduct or Violence**

Sexual harassment includes acts of sexual misconduct and sexual violence, described in greater detail below under Prohibited Conduct. In general, sexual violence refers to physical sexual acts perpetrated against a person's will or where a person is incapable of giving consent due to incapacitation. A single or isolated incident of sexual harassment may create a hostile environment if the incident is sufficiently severe. The more severe the conduct, the less need there is to show a repetitive series of incidents to provide a hostile environment, particularly if the harassment is



physical.

### 3. Forms of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment can take many forms:

- It can occur between equals (e.g., student to student, staff to staff, faculty member to faculty member, visitor/contractor to staff) or between persons of unequal power status (e.g. supervisor to subordinate, faculty member to student, coach to student-athlete).
- It can be committed by an individual or may be a result of the actions of an organization or group.
- It can be committed against an individual, an organization or a group.
- It can be committed by an acquaintance, a stranger, or someone with whom the Complainant has an intimate or sexual relationship.
- It can occur by or against an individual of any sex, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation.

Sexual harassment may include:

**\*\*Verbal harassment:** sexual innuendo and other suggestive comments, humor and jokes about sex or gender-specific traits, offensive notes, sexual propositions, insults and threats that an individual communicates are unwanted and unwelcome.

**\*\*Nonverbal harassment:** Unwanted and unwelcome physical contact or suggestive body language.

### 4. Gender-Based Harassment

The College also prohibits gender-based harassment, which may include acts of verbal, nonverbal, or physical aggression, intimidation, or hostility based on sex or sex-stereotyping, even if those acts do not involve conduct of a sexual nature.

### C. Prohibited Conduct

The following behaviors fall under the broad definition of sexual or gender-based harassment and are prohibited as a violation of Community Standards for students or potential grounds for discipline for employees:

- **Sexual Assault:**

**Related to Sexual Intercourse:** Having or attempting to have non-consensual sexual intercourse with another individual. Sexual intercourse includes an act of oral, vaginal, or anal penetration, however slight, with an object or body part by any person upon another person. This includes intercourse by force or threat of force, where an individual is unable to

consent because of incapacitation, and where an individual does not consent to the sexual act.

**Related to All Other Forms of Sexual Contact:** Having or attempting to have nonconsensual, non-accidental contact of a sexual nature with another person. Sexual contact can include, but is not limited to kissing or other physical contact, including touching the intimate parts of another, or causing the other to touch the harasser's intimate parts. This includes sexual contact by force or threat of force, where an individual is unable to consent because of incapacitation, and where an individual does not consent to the sexual act.

**Sexual Exploitation:** An act or acts attempted or committed by a person for sexual gratification, financial gain, or advancement through the abuse or exploitation of another person's sexuality. *Examples include observing individuals without consent, non-consensual audio- or videotaping of sexual activity, unauthorized presentation of recordings of a sexual nature, prostituting another person, allowing others to observe a personal consensual sexual act without the knowledge or consent of all involved parties, and knowingly exposing an individual to a sexually transmittable infection or virus without his or her knowledge.*

• **Stalking:** A course (more than once) of unwelcome conduct directed toward another person that could be reasonably regarded as likely to alarm, harass, or cause reasonable fear of harm or injury to that person, or to a third party, such as a roommate or friend. The feared harm or injury may be physical, emotional, or psychological, to the personal safety, property, education, or employment of that individual. Stalking includes the concept of cyber-stalking, a particular form of stalking in which electronic media such as the internet, social networks, blogs, cell phones, texts, or other similar devices or forms of contact are used to pursue, harass, or to make unwelcome contact with another person in an unsolicited fashion. Stalking and cyber-stalking may involve persons who are known to one another or have an intimate or sexual relationship, or may involve persons not known to one another. *Examples of stalking include unwelcome and repeated visual or physical proximity to a person, repeated oral or written threats, extortion of money or valuables, implicitly threatening physical conduct or any combination of these behaviors directed toward an individual person. Examples of cyber-stalking include unwelcome/unsolicited emails, instant messages, and messages on on-line bulletin boards,*

*unwelcome/unsolicited communications about a person, their family, friends, or co-workers, or sending/posting unwelcome/unsolicited messages with another username.*

- **Harm to Others:** Physical, verbal or psychological abuse, harassment, intimidation or other harmful conduct that threatens, endangers, or has the potential to endanger the health, wellbeing or safety of another individual. It can include but is not limited to threats, intimidation, assaulting another person, and/or purposefully injuring another individual. This behavior is typically treated as a violation of our Community Standards. Acts which constitute harm to others that are a form of intimate partner violence, or behavior based on sex or gender, will be resolved under the Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Policy.
- **Retaliation:** Acts or attempts to retaliate or seek retribution against anyone involved in or connected to an allegation and/or resolution of sexual misconduct.
- **Complicity:** Assisting, facilitating, or encouraging the commission of a violation of the Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Policy.
- **Harassing Conduct:** The College recognizes that there are many forms of misconduct that could constitute sexual and gender-based harassment, and that it may not be possible to anticipate the specific forms such conduct could encompass. Although harassing conduct may take one of the forms already described under prohibited conduct, a student may also be found responsible for additional forms of harassing conduct. Harassing conduct may occur in a single egregious instance or may be the cumulative result of a series of incidents. Harassing conduct may include conduct typically thought of as bullying or hazing in nature, whether or not the complainant consents to participate in the conduct. It may also include verbal or physical conduct which intentionally targets an individual or group based on the individual or group's sex, sexual orientation, or sexual identity, even if those acts do not involve conduct of a sexual nature. Harassing conduct may be charged in addition to one or more of the prohibited acts outlined above, or it may be charged as a stand-alone violation. If a Respondent is found responsible for both the more specific violation and harassing conduct based on the same incident or series of incidents, however, no additional sanction

## **Appendix C- Interview Recruitment Email**

Hello,

My name is Michele St. Julien and I am a senior student, Sociology major, and Posse scholar. As a part of my senior thesis, I will be conducting a research study about African American women's experiences at a predominantly White institution such as Dickinson College as it relates to their perceptions of sexual assault on campus and their notions of sexuality. I feel that it is valuable to resituate Black women's voices and experiences at the center of discourse about an important topic such as sexual assault, therefore your participation would be greatly appreciated and truly meaningful.

I am emailing to request the participation of any Dickinson college student who is at least 18 years of age and who identifies as a female AND as Black/African American. You will be asked to participate in an in-person interview for a period that should not exceed 1 hour.

If you are interested, you can reach me at [stjuliem@dickinson.edu](mailto:stjuliem@dickinson.edu).

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michele St. Julien

# Dickinson

## Appendix D- Written Consent Form

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Michele St. Julien, a student in the Department of Sociology at Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA T. This faculty supervisor for this study is Professor Daniel Schubert, a professor in the Department of Sociology at Dickinson College.

#### **WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:**

The purpose of this research study is to gather information about African American women's experiences at a predominantly White institution such as Dickinson College as it relates to their perceptions of sexual violence on campus and their notions of sexuality.

#### **WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:**

**You will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview in which you will be asked a series of questions relating to your perceptions of sexual assault on your campus and the ways in which you negotiate notions of sexuality and sexual conduct. The interview will be recorded using an audio device. You will be required to sign an Informed Consent form prior to your participation. If you do not wish to sign the consent form for any reason, you will be asked to give recorded verbal consent.**

#### **DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:**

Your participation in this study will involve one session that will last approximately 40 minutes to an hour.

The study will take place at Bosler, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, theater room, or another location on campus where you feel most comfortable and that is private and quiet.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:**

**The research procedures described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: The issue of sexual violence is sensitive and discussing it as it relates to your own thoughts and/or experiences involves psychological and emotional risk and discomfort. If you wish, you may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty.**

**BENEFITS:**

You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study; however, the possible benefits to others include contributing to the placement of Black women's experiences at the center of discourse and providing knowledge of the ways in which sexual violence on college campuses affects a historically vulnerable and marginalized population. Your responses can also serve as motivation for others to speak of their attitudes and thoughts toward the issue of sexual assault at institutions of higher learning.

**PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report we publish, we will not include information that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. Specifically, I will not keep any record of your class year, occupation, or any other attribute that will serve as an identifier, besides your gender and race. Your name will appear on the consent form, however it will be kept in a drawer in a locked room. Your responses to the interview questions will be recorded on an audio device rented from the Media Center. At the conclusion of the interview, your recording will be immediately transferred to my laptop and then deleted from the recording device. It will be kept in a password-protected zip folder. Once the interview is transcribed, the recording will be deleted. Your real name will not be used in any transcription of the interview. Only I will have access to all of the data collected. My faculty supervisor will have access to the transcription of the interviews.

**COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:**

There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:**

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time. Nonparticipation or withdrawal from the study will not affect your grade, employment status, or treatment.

**OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:**

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Michele St. Julien at ((347) 650-0345) or ([stjuliem@dickinson.edu](mailto:stjuliem@dickinson.edu)). If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Dickinson College Institutional Review Board at (717) 245-1309. Additional contact information is available at: <http://www.dickinson.edu/academics/resources/institutional-review-board/>

**I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.**

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*PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE*

*DATE*

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO NOTE:**

**Support and Mental Health Resources at Dickinson College**

**Wellness Center: (717) 245-1663**

- Hours: Monday - Friday (8am-5pm) please call or visit the Wellness Center immediately if you have an emergency.
- Note: Extended hours are offered on Monday & Wednesday (until 7pm)
- After business hours, call DPS (717) 245-1111 to access the college's on-call team of counseling professionals.

- 

DPS Emergency: (717) 245-1111

DPS Non-Emergency: (717) 245-1349

Rape Crisis Hotline (YWCA): (888) 727 2877

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800) 273-8255

Women's Center: (717) 245-1931

- Location: 101 S. College St., Landis House

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