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"SHE JUST WANTED TO GET WITH AN ATHLETE"^{OSC}: THE EFFECTS OF RACE AND STATUS ON THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION OF GUILT IN SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES

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“SHE JUST WANTED TO GET WITH AN ATHLETE”: THE EFFECTS OF RACE
AND STATUS ON THE PUBLIC’S PERCEPTION OF GUILT IN SEXUAL
ASSAULT CASES

A Thesis
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the Graduate School of
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explored the effects of race and athlete status on the public's perceptions of guilt in sexual assault cases. It investigated how race and athlete status of a man accused of sexually assaulting a woman affected the perceived believability of the accuser and the perceived severity of the crime. It also explored the correlation between perceived guilt and rape myth acceptance. The results of this thesis did not directly support the hypotheses but hypothesis 4 was significant in suggesting that participants who gave any of the accused a lower guilt rating had higher levels of rape myth acceptance. The thesis also revealed trends in participant hesitance to rate any of the accused as guilty or not, with most benefit of the doubt going toward the accused and not the accuser. Reasons for the non-significant results such as media coverage and athletic department involvement were explored.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all victims of sexual assault. My hope is that one day, the default “benefit of the doubt” won’t be automatically given to the offender, but to the victim.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Donny, my parents, and Joe: I hope you all know how much you mean to me. I could never have gotten through graduate school or finished this thesis without the support from each of you. Donny: thank you for being my rock, keeping me grounded, and reminding me that my work is important. Without your love and reassurance I would have given up a long time ago. Mom and Dad: I could not have survived graduate school without your psychological (and monetary) support, thank you for knowing how important this Master's is to me! And thank you for being the best parents in the world, in general. Joe, thank you for talking me off a ledge in your office my first week of graduate school, thank you for helping me realize my love for research that I would not have known existed otherwise, and thank you for understanding my working style and adapting to it but also holding me to a higher standard. All: without the help from the four of you I would not be the person I am today.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It has become a pattern in popular American sports that well-known athletes who have been accused of sexual assault are alleviated of those charges with no consequence (Sibor, 2013; Weir & Brady, 2003). From 2013-2014, there were 34 reported cases accusing college football players of rape in the United States (Luther, 2014a). Of the 34 accusations, 19 cases were dropped or did not yield enough evidence to proceed, 10 cases are in progress, one man was indicted and has a trial in progress, two were charged with sexual battery (a lesser charge than sexual assault), and only two were found guilty – one of whom was a recruit, not a roster player (Luther, 2014a).

Before recently, if a National Football League player was accused of domestic battery or assault, their suspension and punishment was less severe than a player's first offense marijuana possession based on the NFL's drug policies (McCann, 2014). Recently, video evidence surfaced of (now former) Baltimore Ravens running back, Ray Rice, punching his then-fiancé in the head and knocking her unconscious in an elevator in February 2014 (Martin & Almasy, 2014). The Ravens terminated Rice's contract immediately after the video surfaced in September 2014 and Roger Goodell, commissioner of the NFL, suspended Rice indefinitely (Martin & Almasy, 2014). However, on November 28, 2014, Rice won an appeal of his indefinite suspension, allowing him to be reinstated to the NFL; however, he has not yet been signed by a new team (van Natta, Brandt, & Schefter, 2014).

Freshman Jameis Winston was the 2013 starting quarterback for the Florida State University football team (ESPN.com, 2014). Winston was called many things during his

career: a prodigy, charismatic, talented, and “Famous” (Hale, 2013; Hutchins, 2013; Smits, 2013). In January 2014 Winston led the FSU Seminoles to a 34-31 win over the Auburn Tigers in the National Championship game and in that same year he was awarded the Heisman Trophy (ESPN.com, 2014). In November 2013, prior to his National Championship and Heisman win, reports surfaced that Winston was accused of rape (Wolken, 2013). An investigation followed and charges were never filed.

The investigation into the allegation against Winston was in response to a sexual assault reported to the Tallahassee Police Department (TPD) in December 2012 (Wolken, 2013). The complaint was investigated by TPD and classified as open then inactive all in February 2013, only three months after the accusation (*USA Today Sports*, 2013). In December of 2013, the State of Florida Attorney Willie Meggs announced the completion of the investigation stating that no charges would be filed although Winston’s DNA was found after a rape kit was obtained from the accuser the night of the incident (*USA Today Sports*, 2013).

After the announcement that the case would officially be closed, accusations of police misconduct surfaced from multiple parties (Bogdanich, 2014; Vaughan, 2014a). *The New York Times* reported in May of 2014 that there were abnormalities in Winston’s rape investigation by both the TPD and the FSU Police Department. Some of these abnormalities include but are not limited to: a second women reportedly seeking counseling after a sexual encounter with Winston, a video of the alleged assault being deleted by a witness/fellow teammate after Winston’s attorney requested it be destroyed, and a local bar ‘not being able to locate’ surveillance footage of Winston and the alleged victim’s interactions on the night of the incident (Bogdanich, 2014). *Fox Sports* went on

to report later in October of the same year that multiple university officials were alerted of the charges before they were officially handed over to the State of Florida for investigation (Vaughan, 2014a). *Fox Sports* also alleged that the same officials – as well as Florida State football staff – mishandled official documents by allowing attorneys to prepare Winston and other witnesses before the allegations went public (Vaughan, 2014a). Winston was never formally charged with sexual assault by any entity, and was later cleared in a FSU code of conduct hearing investigating whether Winston was guilty of “sexual misconduct or endangerment under FSU’s student code of conduct” (Vaughan, 2014b).

The outcome of this case is not singular among college athletes; the present study examines similar cases where leniencies were given to other collegiate athletes faced with sexual assault accusations. According to *Mother Jones*, a nonprofit news organization that specializes in investigative, political, and social justice reporting, “the case of FSU’s Jameis Winston highlights a long and ugly history of universities dropping the ball on rape allegations” (Murphy, 2013). PACT5: Athletes and Sexual Assault (2015), a national organization to prevent sexual assaults on college campuses, add to Murphy’s claim stating “over the past 20 years it has become evident that a disproportionate number of sexual assaults on campus are committed by college football players, often in situations involving gang rape.” Murphy (2013) outlines a history of top football schools that “have too often shielded players accused of rape—even going so far as to smear and punish victims who speak out.”

Murphy (2013) and Lavigne’s (2015) timelines start as early as 1974 but in the past 15 years (2000-2015), multiple similar cases have been observed, many at the same

institution and most of the cases included more than one accusation of sexual assault. And still, only two of the cases resulted in charges against the alleged perpetrators. In 2004, Arizona State University freshman football player Darnel Henderson was accused of sexually assaulting multiple women in his dorm and exposing himself to female staffers; he was later accused of rape again in a year. ASU officials destroyed incriminating evidence against Henderson and the county district attorney declined to pursue the case (Murphy, 2013). The same year at Brigham Young University “four players were indicted and two players sent to trial in the gang rape of a fellow student. Although a teammate testified against them at the trial, the players were acquitted” (Murphy, 2013). In 2010, multiple incidents occurred at the University of Montana in which administrators sought to cover up separate rape allegations and the university President tried to have one of the accusers punished under the school’s code of conduct. None of the five football players were charged in their cases (Murphy, 2013). In 2010, St. Mary’s College student, Lizzy Seeburg, took her life after receiving a text from a friend of the football player who she accused of raping her stating “messing with Notre Dame football is a bad idea” (Murphy, 2013). Another Notre Dame student was taken to the hospital that same year for a rape exam but “declined to file a complaint after receiving threatening texts from Notre Dame players” (Murphy, 2013).

Empirical evidence supports the preferential treatment given to athletes in sexual assault cases. Crosset, Benedict, and McDonald (1995) found that a male athlete commits one in three college sexual assaults. They also found that the general population has a sexual assault conviction rate of 80% while the conviction rate of an athlete is only 38%. Benedict and Klien (1997) found that out of 217 athletes accused of sexual assault, only

10 were actually found guilty while 45 had no formal action taken against them, 55 were declined for prosecution, eight had charges against them dropped, 43 reached a plea agreement, 50 were acquitted, and six reached a hung jury in trial.

Attribution Theory

Is there a reason athletes tend to garner more leniency when it comes to sexual assault allegations than the general public? Little research exists related to the public's perception of an athlete's versus a non-athlete's probability of guilt in sexual assault cases. However, attribution theory could help explain this phenomenon. Linvill and Mazer (2013) described attribution as "processes by which individuals comprehend the causes of others' behavior and events" (p. 49). As social humans we look for explanations in our lives such as "why something happens or why people behave the way they do" (Miller, 2005, p. 89).

The study of attribution began with social psychology theorists such as Fritz Heider who proposed that humans take on a scientist role and search for causal explanations to observed behaviors (Miller, 2005). Heider (1958) defined attribution theory as the way

individuals understand the causes of new events, arguing these events must be attributed to one or the other of the contents of the environment. For instance, our subjective environment contains the self and another person and a new event occurs: one of the persons will be held responsible for it. (p. 296)

Miller (2005) states "the most basic distinction made in attribution theory is between internal attribution for behavior and an external attribution for behavior" (p. 89). Internal attribution assigns the cause of a behavior to be within a person while external

attribution believes the cause is in the situation (Miller, 2005, p. 89). In regard to these attributions for behavior, Ross (1977) conjectured the fundamental attribution hypothesis also known as the fundamental attribution error or correspondence bias. This error describes “the propensity for individuals to overvalue the consideration of dispositional, personality-based factors when explaining the behavior of others while simultaneously undervaluing the consideration of situational explanations for those same behaviors” (Linville & Mazer, 2013, p. 50).

Weiner (1986) argued that the causes of behavior cannot simply be explained by internal and external factors but that there are two additional dimensions: stability and controllability. Attribution stability considers whether the cause of an event is stable or unstable, with the former stating the cause of an event is always present and the latter assuming the cause varies over time and context (Miller, 2005). Controllability of a situation is controllable when “the actor can affect the cause that influences an event with little effort” and uncontrollable when “the causes of an event are beyond the actor’s influence” (Miller, 2005, p. 90).

All things considered, at times humans still attribute behavioral issues to dispositional factors rather than situational ones (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). In order to make a “proper” attribution, one that takes into account situational factors, four steps must be followed (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). Gilbert and Malone (1995) explained that a person considering a situation “must first recognize the situation in which the actor is functioning” (*a star athlete has been accused of sexual assault/a black male was accused of sexual assault*). Next, “observers bring to this recognition a general set of beliefs about how people typically behave in such situations” (*women typically like having sex with an*

athlete, but feel embarrassed when people find out/black men are sexual); these beliefs make up the behavior expectations of a certain actor in the situation (*the accuser will probably lie about being raped/black men are violent* —Gilbert & Malone, 1995). The perceiver will then analyze the actor's behavior (*the woman accused the athlete of rape/the black man was accused of rape*) and finally, “the observer must determine whether the actor's behavior violates the expectations that the observer's knowledge of the situation has engendered,” in this case: *the woman lied about being raped because she was embarrassed about having sex with an athlete/the black man definitely raped a woman because he is sexual and violent and prone to crime* (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). If the behavior does not violate expectations such as in the example above, the observer will not draw dispositional inferences about the actor. If the behavior does violate expectations, the observer will assume dispositional factors played a role: *women want money from athletes or want 15 minutes of fame, and it still isn't the athletes' fault/a black man probably lost control*, thus illustrating the fundamental attribution error (Gilbert & Malone, 1995).

Gilbert and Malone (1995) further explained the four distinct causes of fundamental attribution error: “lack of awareness of situational constraints, unrealistic expectations of behavior, inflated categorizations of behavior, and incomplete corrections of dispositional inferences” (Linville & Mazer, 2013, p. 50). The first mechanism, lack of awareness of situational constraints, occurs when attributors are not aware of situational forces that play a role in the behavior at hand. Without knowledge of outside forces, it cannot play a role in an attribution (Linville & Mazer, 2013). The elitism athletes feel is an example of situational forces playing a role in behavior. Second, unrealistic expectations

of behavior occurs when “observers who are completely aware of the actor's situation may still have unrealistic expectations about how that situation should affect the actor's behaviors” (e.g., ‘An athlete would never do that because of his position and what is on the line’.) (Gilbert & Malone, 1995, p. 27). Thirdly, inflated categorizations of behavior “addresses the reality that while some behavior is easily categorized, other behavior is ambiguous and requires detailed knowledge of the context to fully understand” (Linville & Mazer, 2013, p. 50). For example, a witness could say the woman sexually assaulted was drunk, but does not know she was drugged. An individual’s preconceived expectancies of an action are important with inflated categorizations of behavior. The last mechanism, incomplete corrections of dispositional inferences “occur when individuals draw an initial dispositional inference regarding another individual’s behavior and then fail to correct these inferences based on situational information” (Linville & Mazer, 2013, p. 50).

Attribution theory has been applied to sports and athletes in many ways including beliefs about success and failures among female athletes (McHugh, Duquin, & Frieze, 1978), attribution following an unsuspected loss or success (Gernigon & Delloye, 2003), and skill level and learned helplessness among athletes (Fullin & Mills, 1995). It has also been applied to other sexual assault cases not involving athletes and has yielded similar results across studies: the victim is typically attributed blame for reasons such as being drunk, wearing sparse clothing, and not aligning with “traditional beliefs” (Jensen & Gutek, 1982; Richardson & Campbell, 1982; Workman & Freeburg, 1999). However, there are no studies that have observed the public’s attribution when a famous/not famous and/or African American/Caucasian athlete is accused of sexual assault. Will the color of a person’s skin and/or his athletic ability yield different levels of perceived guilt when an

audience judges based on a situation? Will attribution of guilt be based on rape ideals and the victim or the status of the accused?

Rape Culture

Rape culture is a term used to describe a culture in which rape and other sexual violence acts are normalized and perpetuated and could possibly be a reason the public would attribute rape charges brought against any person. The term was first used in a documentary film in 1975 entitled *Rape Culture* (Lazarus & Wunderlich, 1975).

Cambridge Documentary Films 2012 website explains the documentary:

"Rape Culture" was first produced in 1975 and then revised in 1983. It helped to shape consciousness about sexism and violence against women. The term Rape Culture is defined for the first time and the film has played a major role in the emerging movement to combat violence against women. ...The notion that rape is an isolated sexual perversion, the product of an individual's deranged mind, is dispelled in this film.

Burt (1980) adds that Americans live in a rape-supportive culture that fosters the “objectification of, and violent and sexual abuse of women through movies, television, (and) advertising” (p. 219). A rape culture tolerates emotional and physical terrorism against women as the norm and instances of rape culture practices include, but are not limited to victim blaming, the trivialization of rape, rape jokes, popular music about the ‘blurred lines’ of consent, politicians distinguishing what a ‘legitimate’ rape is, women being taught to take preventative measures to avoid rape, and cat-calling (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993; Burt 1980; Ridgway, 2014).

Rape myths play a large role in the maintenance of rape culture. Rape myths are “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists—in creating a climate hostile to rape victims” (Burt, 1980, p. 217). Rape myths common in the United States include “she was asking for it,” “women could resist rape if they *really* wanted to,” “she should have been wearing more to cover up,” and “she should not have been walking home alone,” among others. These myths only help disseminate rape culture ideals to which many outsiders jump to excuse rape. Many associations exist among rape myths such as attitudinal correlates (attitudes toward women, or sex role stereotyping), personality correlates (disposition), experiential correlates (knowing rape victims or assailants or having been victimized oneself), and background correlates (age, race, sex, marital status, and education—Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993; Burt, 1980; Ridgeway, 2014).

Victim blaming is the tendency to believe that the victim of a crime or wrongdoing is entirely responsible for their outcome. Literature showing the “attributions of rape victims by others...revealed that individuals who have become the victims of crime are often judged by outsiders as being responsible for their own fate” (Grubb & Tuner, 2012, p. 444). The practice of victim blaming manifests among rape cultures. Victim blaming has been “connected to the underreporting of rape...a victim who refrains from reporting avoids the potential ‘secondary victimization’ of being blamed by confidantes or authorities” (George & Martinez, 2002, p. 110).

Rape myths and victim blaming in sports. Sawyer et al. (2002) found there are higher rates of rape myth acceptance in male (collegiate) athletes, male freshmen/sophomore athletes, and male (collegiate) athletes who played a team-based

versus individual sport. In July 2003 it was reported that Los Angeles Laker basketball star, Kobe Bryant, had sexually assaulted a woman in Colorado (Franiuk et al., 2008). Bryant was formally charged with one count of felony sexual assault; the charges were later dropped in September 2003 (Franiuk et al., 2008). When 156 sources of news media about the Bryant case were examined, 65 of them mentioned at least one rape myth (Franiuk et al., 2008); the most prevalent of them being “she’s lying.” Similarly, study participants who were exposed to those articles containing rape myths were more likely to believe that the victim was lying than those who were shown articles containing no myths (Franiuk et al., 2008).

In 2006, it was reported that three Caucasian male lacrosse players from Duke University raped an African-American female at an off campus party (Barnett, 2008). The university went on the offensive launching a large public relations campaign to soften the negative effects of the charges by specifically framing themselves as the victim of unfair and untrue media reports (Barnett, 2008). The charges were also eventually dropped after the university did little to advocate against violence against women (Barnett, 2008). It seems that sports media and athletic departments could play a role in perpetuating rape myth acceptance among the sports community after cases like this warrant full investigation and result in universities getting away with doing nothing (Franiuk et al., 2008).

Athletic Status, Privilege, and Masculinity

Male athletes on college campuses experience excessive privilege and high status. When compared to non-athletes, collegiate level athletes have higher perceived levels of self-esteem and social connectedness (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009). These higher

levels of self-esteem and social connectedness could be a factor in collegiate athletes' leniencies in court cases as well as their intentions to commit a crime in the first place (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009).

There exists a "culture of entitlement for athletes [and] teams" on college campuses (Bernstein, 2011, par. 21). It has been argued that there are two types of people on college campuses: Athletes, and 'NARPs': Non-Athletic Regular People (Spathakis & Kass-Kaufman, 2013). For many predominantly Caucasian colleges with high-profile sports on their campus, African American students typically make up less than 5% of the collegiate population, but over 60% of each individual sports team (Waldron, 2015).

The culture of entitlement felt by collegiate athletes contributes to the alarming statistics surrounding athletes and rape (Abdul-Jabbar, 2015). Our culture has a need to elevate athletes to heroic statuses and there are subtle social cues present to reinforce these feelings (Abdul-Jabbar, 2015). Athletes on college campuses most often receive full scholarships and there will be

no shortage of attendants at [their] beck and call. [They] will have tutors and study tables. [They] will have coaches who assign managers to act as human alarm clocks, in the off chance [they] accidentally sleep late. In some places, [they] will be enrolled in classes designed to keep you eligible. [they] will have compliant and complicit professors, interested in the same thing. (Daugherty, 2012)

Do these privileges afforded to athletes contribute to their feelings of invincibility? Absolutely. And other socially constructed ideals in masculinity and power play a role, as well (McMahon, 2007).

Masculinity is prized in sport (Grossman & Brake, 2013). Sport has been used as a way to promise masculine qualities in little boys as well as a way to ‘cure’ homosexuality (Grossman & Brake, 2013). Sports main values are masculinity and the very nature of sports, as developed in schools and at other competitive levels, is associated with core tenets of masculinity—physicality, aggression, competition, and winning. The more a sport revolves around these features, the more masculine it is perceived to be. And the more it emphasizes violence, aggression, or brute strength over aesthetics, the more masculine it is perceived to be. (Grossman & Brake, 2013, par. 8)

High masculinity in sport is rewarded with more money, fan, and privilege. Conversely, it is also littered with stringencies in heterosexuality and “unfettered sexual access to women” (Grossman & Brake, 2013).

These men in highly masculinized and privileged sports live in a culture that welcomes and expects sex as a perk such that men feel entitled to behave in sexually aggressive or assaultive ways (Grossman & Brake, 2013). There is a status quo to be maintained in this culture, and that is masculine superiority (Barnes, 2015). This environment normalizes athlete sexual assaults against women and at times rewards it as a ‘manly’ venture.

Athletic culture fosters violence against women because of its stringencies in masculinity, aggression, dominance, and competitiveness (McMahon, 2007). Sport is highly sexist, homophobic, and misogynistic; it reproduces masculinity that produces considerable costs for women (Anderson, 2008). Sports like football are defined by their restrictions of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity refers to societal practices

in place to keep men at the dominant social position and women in the subordinate position; meaning men must uphold stringent masculine ideals to remain at their dominant status (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Sport is a social institution and for that reason its values are closely intertwined “with dominant social values, power relations, and conflicts” (Messner, 1992, p. 10). College sports serves to differentiate higher status men from lower status men (Messner, 1992). A ‘may the best man win’ Darwinian ideal emerges in sport (Messner, 1992). Male collegiate athletes are conditioned to believe they are the most powerful figures on a college campus. Through their sport participation they are conditioned to believe that losing, whether in the arena or in the courtroom, is not an option.

Male collegiate athletes have also been more likely to agree with rape-supportive claims than other male non-athletes by more than 45% (Boeringer, 1999). They are also more likely to believe rape myths such as women are asking for rape or brought it upon themselves (McMahon, 2010) and some collegiate athletic team members are more likely to commit sexual assault than males in the general student population (Humphrey & Kahn, 2000). The National Institute of Mental Health found that “athletes participated in approximately one-third of 862 sexual attacks on college campuses in 1990” (Melnik, 1992, p. 32). Additionally, involvement in athletic teams correlated with higher levels of sexual aggression than that of non-athletes (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007).

All of these findings note the likelihood of student-athletes to commit a sexual assault, but does this likelihood vary based on the athlete’s status on their respective team? Will audiences think a student-athlete is more likely to commit a sexual assault if he is a starter on his team or if he is a third-string in his position? There is little empirical

evidence that would predict this outcome but this thesis assumes that people would believe a star athlete is less likely to commit the crime because of his elite status and the sensationalizing of his character (Melnick, 1992). A star athlete should be considered a starter for the team, a first string player. Like player status, race could affect a person's perception of guilt in a sexual assault case.

Sexual Assault and Race

The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network explains the exact definition of “sexual assault/abuse” or “rape” differs by state (Sexual Assault, 2015). For the purpose of this thesis, “sexual assault” will be defined in the same way that the present university defines it as:

any attempted or actual act of nonconsensual sexual intercourse, cunnilingus, fellatio, anal intercourse or any intrusion, however slight, of any part of a person's body or of any other object into the oral, genital or anal openings of another person's body. This includes forcible or non-forcible sex offenses under the uniform crime reporting system of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. (Sexual Assault, Dating Violence, Domestic Violence and Stalking Policy Statement, 2015, par. 4)

This definition includes rape, fondling, non-forcible incest, non-forcible sexual intercourse with persons under the age of legal consent (Sexual Assault, Dating Violence, Domestic Violence and Stalking Policy Statement, 2015).

Ferber (2007) considered “the gender and racial dynamics [in sport]... hard to ignore” (p. 11). In 1995, 56% of arrestees for rape in the United States were Caucasian and 42% were African American. Currently, African Americans are incarcerated at

nearly six times the rate of Caucasians (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997; NAACP.org). Media coverage increases when African American men are accused of the crime (Ferber, 2007). In the United States, where African Americans and other dark-skinned ethnic minorities are three times more likely to be poor than Caucasians, have one tenth the net wealth of Caucasians, and earn 40% less than Caucasians, African American men are depicted in the media as hypersexual, animalistic, savage, inherently violent, and “a threat to white-womanhood if not controlled” (Ferber, 2007, pp. 13-14). Additionally, in the United States, African Americans constitute approximately one million of the total population of 2.3 million incarcerated people (NAACP.org). African American men are also more likely to have their cases filed as felonies, receive executed sentences, and be incarcerated in a state penitentiary (LaFree, 1980, p. 842). Additionally, the media constructs the African American community as violence prone (Feber, 2007, p. 14).

Why is it that African American men receive harsher punishments than Caucasian men when there are more Caucasian men arrested for sexual assault than African American men? Many myths pervade American society today that can possibly explain this. The first of them being

the myth of the sexually aggressive black man. This myth allows for the indictment of black male offenders more so than white; and rape allegations made by white women against black men receive more media attention than those made by white women against white men. (Change Happens: The SAFER, 2009, par. 16)

Secondly, African American women are mythicized as the “jezebel” or “wild, sexual, lascivious black woman (who ‘deserve’ or elicit rape)” (Change Happens: The SAFER,

2009, par. 16). This myth prevents many African American women from reporting their rapes (Change Happens: The SAFER, 2009). Another myth is most sexual assaults are committed by African American men (Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, 2015). As noted above, this is not always true, and, additionally, “almost all sexual assaults occur between members of the same race” (Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, 2015).

The pattern of African American men receiving tougher penalties when sexually assaulting a woman and continues to be seen recently (Ferber, 2007; Spohn & Spears, 1996; Willis, 1992). However, Spohn and Spears (1996) also argue that previous suggestions need be adjusted to consider other factors than just “the racial composition of the offender/victim pair” such as athletic status (p. 649). Where do these myths originate and how are they perpetuated?

Representations of women and men in sports media may likely be cause for discrepancies between race and gender in sexual assault cases. Lee and Meyer (2010) explain that normative narratives embed stories into a culture and are commonly understood across a culture. Normative narratives can also create the symbolic annihilation of groups; the absence or underrepresentation of some groups by the media that marginalize some people while keeping others in power (Gross, 2001, p. 117).

Bandura’s social cognitive theory also helps “explain how exposure to sports media may influence individuals’ who attend to it” (Hust et al., 2013, p. 767). Social cognitive theory is based on the idea that people learn by observation of others including media figures (Bandura, 1983). In 1999, Bussey and Bandura expanded Bandura’s original theory to their social cognitive theory of gender development (Hust et al., 2013,

p. 767). This theory suggests that the media influence the gender socialization process, or, “the media helps to define what is considered acceptable masculine and feminine behaviors” (Hust et al., 2013, p. 767).

Gender. Women have been underrepresented and received less attention than men in the media. ESPN is advertised as the worldwide leader in sports and is now aired in 98 million households (Hust et al., 2013). Turner (2014) found that from 1999 to 2009 “women’s sports [continued] to be almost wholly absent from” ESPN’s flagship program, the influential *Sports Center* (p. 303). Women were also “no more likely to be depicted as show hosts, reporters, or coaches in 2009 than 1999” (Turner, 2014, p. 303). Gender bias is identifiable on *Sports Center* and the program consistently only allows between 2% and 10% of its time for women’s sports (Eastman & Billings, 2000). Turner’s (2014) research revealed that, overall, there was an invisibility of women on ESPN *Sports Center*.

Many scholars argue the invisibility of female media personalities and athletes in sports media contributes to the symbolic annihilation of women (Bishop, 2003; Hust et al., 2013). Tuchman (1978) argued the media portray individuals in acceptable roles based on societal values, and the absence of women in the media indicates they have few acceptable, note-worthy roles that contribute to society. As a result, viewers may see the absence of women as indicative that women are not capable or worthy of participating in sports (Hust et al., 2013).

Furthermore, when women are portrayed in sports media they are typically shown as sexual objects or the focus of sexualized humor (Messner et al., 2000). Sports commentators also comment on women’s physical appearance and their relationships to

men like mothers, wives, or girlfriends (Hust et al., 2013). Kinkema and Harris (1998) argue that “that the marginalization and sexualization of women in sports media coverage are the primary means by which current societal patterns of patriarchy in sports are reproduced” (p. 768).

Few studies have examined associations between sports media consumption and sexual aggression. However, Sabo et al. (2000) spoke to women who were physically abused by their male partners shortly after viewing sporting events and found that sports media functioned as a “carrier of psychosocial meanings and cultural practices that are linked to men’s collective domination and control of women” (p. 208). Additionally, Brown et al. (2002) found that people who reported higher levels of viewing contact sports also reported higher level of aggression towards women.

Race. The normative narratives of African American athletes are prevalent in sports media and stereotypes are commonly perpetuated (Mocarski & Billings, 2013). “Blackness” and African American athletes are commonly portrayed as lazy, selfish, cheating, violent, and drug users (Grano, 2010, p. 255). And, because of “commodity racism” – media within a culture “where the only use of Black images on products [are] demeaning—oftentimes ‘servile and anonymous,’” an audience has less ability to identify with African American athletes in advertisements on a personal level (Mocarski & Billings, 2013, p. 6).

Anderson and McCormack (2010) continue to explain that African American male athletes are associated with strength, speed, and muscularity and argue that this helps uphold masculine ideals. For this reason, African American male athletes “are perceived as thugs, masculinized by their sports space and primarily sweat, fuck, and

fight” (Anderson & McCormack, 2010, p. 145). In fact, MocarSKI and Billings (2013) argue that distancing LeBron James from this stereotype, downplaying his “blackness,” and aligning him with Caucasian ideals was the only way that mainstream audiences accepted James’ brand.

The issue of race representation in sports is not limited to just media. There are racial discrepancies when it comes to coaching positions as well. In 2012, “of the 124 Division 1-A college football schools, only 15 had African-American coaches in the 2012 season” (Lynch, 2013, par. 3). It should also be noted “only 312 of 1,018 of college football assistant coaches are African American, and only 31 of 255 of offensive and defensive coordinators are African-American” meaning African American football coaches and support staff only equate to 5% of NCAA Division 1 programs (Lynch, 2013, par. 4).

There have been instances in the National Football League to combat this hiring trend, however. In 2009, the NFL implemented the “Rooney Rule” which states that when hiring a new head coach, teams must interview at least one minority candidate (Sanderson, 2010). This rule seems to be a step in the right direction, however, “some teams willingly circumvent the rule and accept fines issued by the league for bypassing this process, or by merely granting ‘token’ interviews to minority candidates who are not seriously being considered for the coaching vacancy” (Sanderson, 2010, p. 303). While there have been some measures taken to level the playing field for all coaches racially in the NFL, National Basketball Association, and Major League Baseball, as stated above, the NCAA has not followed suit and it is unclear “how this disparity continues to remain unquestioned by the general public” (Sanderson, 2010, p. 303). Sanderson (2010) argues

that fans are conditioned to believe sports is a “racial utopia” in which race is not an issue.

Guilt

Multiple variables have been examined to realize how different factors influence perceptions of guilt in court cases or accusations (Russell et al., 2011; Salekin et al., 1995; Schvey et al., 2013; Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). Race was studied in the courtroom comparing the judgments of Caucasian and African American mock jury members in interracial simulated court cases. When racial issues are salient in a courtroom case, Caucasians were motivated to seem nonprejudiced, however, when racial issues were not salient Caucasians continuously rated African American as more aggressive, violent, and guilty than the Caucasian defendant (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). In the same study, African American mock jurors continuously demonstrated same-race leniency in any version of the trial, ranking Caucasian defendants more guilty (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000).

When gender was studied in the courtroom in terms of guilt, women gave harsher punishments to aggressors but were given leniency when accused of a sexual assault (Russell et al., 2011). In sexual assault cases, females continuously rated the defendant as more guilty than males (Russell et al., 2011). Similarly, when the gender of the defendant was changed, female aggressors were ranked as less guilty than male aggressors (Russell et al., 2011). How will race and status of the offender affect perceptions of guilt in sexual assault cases?

Summary of Research Objectives

Male athletes commit one in three college sexual assaults (Crosset, Benedict, & McDonald, 1995). College athletes only have a sexual assault conviction rate of 38% while the general population has conviction rate of 80% (Crosset, Benedict, & McDonald, 1995). With that, Caucasian males are more likely to be arrested for sexual assault than African American males with rates of 56% and 42% respectively (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997). However, when their representation in the population is accounted for, African Americans are more likely to be arrested than Caucasian men (NAACP, 2015). When people are given situations in which Caucasian or African American athletes or non-athletes are accused of sexual assault, what will they attribute it to?

Statistics do not always align with the commonly held, yet possibly unknown beliefs of the American people. The media create and perpetuate stereotypes of women and African Americans. Bandura's (1983) social cognitive theory states that people learn by observation of others including the media. Bandura also suggested that "the media helps to define what is considered acceptable masculine and feminine behaviors" (Hust et al., 2013, p. 767). Sports media not only lack portrayals of women's sports and female anchors and play-by-play analysts, women are usually depicted as objects who are only used as sexual conquests (Messner et al., 2000; Turner, 2014). Rape culture and rape myths coalesce with media portrayals perpetuating ideas that women could prevent rape or were asking for it in some manner (Burt, 1980).

Similarly, "blackness" and African American athletes are commonly portrayed as lazy, selfish, cheating, violent, and drug users by sports media outlets (Grano, 2010, p. 255). Because of how the media portrays them, African American male athletes "are

perceived as thugs, masculinized by their sports space and primarily sweat, fuck, and fight” (Anderson & McCormack, 2010, p. 145).

In sum, when some combination of a Caucasian or African American star athlete, a third-string athlete, or a male non-athlete is accused of rape, what will the general public attribute this behavior to?

RQ: How will student-athlete status and race interact to influence perceptions of guilt in a sexual assault situation?

H₁: Participants will perceive a Caucasian, star athlete as significantly less guilty than an African American non-athlete.

H₂: Participants will perceive the severity of the sexual assault to be greater when the accused is African American than when he is Caucasian.

H₃: Participants will perceive the believability of the victim to be higher when the accused offender is African American than when he is Caucasian.

H₄: Participants who perceive an offender as lower in guilt will also report higher rates of rape myth acceptance.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

Participants

Participants consisted of 298 undergraduate students enrolled in a basic communication course at a large southeastern university. The average age of participants was 20-years-old. The sample polled students from all class levels and contained 61% freshman, 26% sophomores, 8% juniors, 4% seniors, and 1% unlisted. The sample contained 63% females and 36% males; 1% of participants preferred not to list biological sex. The sample also polled race/ethnicity with 84% Caucasian participants, 2% African American participants, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 1 American Indian participant, 5% “other.” 1% of participants did not report their race.

Participants played an average of four sports in their lifetime for an average of 13 years. 6% of participants have played collegiate level sports for an average of 1.5 years and a mode of one year. The collegiate level sports included football, equestrian, rowing, and men and women’s soccer. 36% of participants said they strongly agreed with being an avid football fan: 31% agreed, 19% were neutral, 8% disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed.

Manipulation

The independent variables for this study were race and status of the alleged perpetrator. The independent variables were combined to create six different scenarios: Caucasian/star athlete, African American/star athlete, Caucasian/third-string athlete, African American/third-string athlete, Caucasian/non-athlete, and African American/non-athlete. The variables were manipulated in six different narratives presented to

participants. Each of the actors described in the narratives were accused of the same sexual assault crime. The narratives were presented in the form of an Associated Press news release. All stories were the same except for the manipulation of the independent variables. The message in the narratives was taken from a 2014 ESPN.com report detailing the allegations of rape against two University of Tennessee football players (Low, 2014). Narratives are located in Appendix A.

Procedures

All procedures were performed following approval from the university's Institutional Review Board. All surveys were intermixed in a stack and respondents were randomly assigned to one of six conditions about the sexual assault allegations. Before beginning the survey, they were asked to read the news story and answer the succeeding questions (see Appendix A for narratives and Appendix B for survey questions). The respondents were guaranteed anonymity; no identifying information was on the survey (see Appendix C for informed consent). Debriefing forms were provided for participants after completion of the survey (see Appendix D).

Measurement

The dependent variable being measured is guilt as it relates to the sexual assault allegations.

Guilt. The dependent variable was guilt as it relates to the sexual assault allegations. To measure each participant's belief of the likelihood that either the star athlete, third-string athlete, or student worker was guilty of sexual assault, a semantic differential scale was utilized. The seven-point semantic differential scale ranked from 1: "not at all guilty" to 7: "very guilty." Semantic differential scales were adapted from

Russell et al. (2011), Salekin et al. (1995), Schvey et al. (2013), and Sommers and Ellsworth (2000). Other synonyms for guilt were provided in separate semantic differential scales to provide certainty; synonyms such as ‘at fault,’ ‘liable,’ and ‘in the wrong’ were used. These scales were inverted to reduce participant response bias. This study yielded an alpha reliability of .88.

Severity and Believability. After reading the narrative, participants were asked how “severe” they believed the accused crime was as well as how “believable” the female accuser was. These variables were measured with two seven-point semantic differential scales; the first ranking 1: “very severe” to 7 “not severe” and second ranking 1: “not believable” to 7: “very believable.” The scales were inverted to reduce participant response bias.

Rape Myth Acceptance. Rape myth acceptance items were adapted from McMahon and Farmer (2011). Rape myth acceptance refers to the likelihood of people to believe common rape myths such as a if a girl is drunk, it’s her fault that she got raped, or, if a girl was behaving seductively, she was asking for it (McMahon & Farmer, 2011). The higher a participant’s score on McMahon and Farmer’s (2011) scale, the lower their rape myth acceptance. This study yielded an alpha reliability of .87.

Open-Ended Questions. In addition to quantitative measures, two open-ended questions were included in the surveys. The questions were asked after the participant responded to the guilt measure: Why did you give the accused person the ranking above? The second question asked: What are your opinions in situations like these when a female accuses a male of sexual assault?

Manipulation Checks. The survey contained manipulation check items adapted from Mazer et al. (2013) to assess participants' perceptions of athlete/non-athlete status. Participants were asked to rate the person accused of sexual assault's level of contribution to the university's athletics on two seven-point bipolar scales using the following anchors: *the person is a vital contribution to the team/the person is not a vital contribution to the team*, and *the person is a vital contribution to the university's athletics/the person is not a vital contribution to the university's athletics*.

Data Analysis

Quantitative. A 2 (Caucasian vs. African American) x 3 (star athlete, third-string athlete, student worker) factorial ANOVA was conducted to explore possible main and interaction effects. Alpha was set at .05. Rape myth acceptance items were also analyzed using a factorial ANOVA. Alpha was set at .05.

Qualitative. Qualitative data was analyzed utilizing grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as well as a thematic analysis outlined in Sanderson (2014). Grounded theory is the methodological construction of theory through analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory allows for the data collected to be read and analyzed for consistent emergent themes. Sanderson analyzed tweets from the NFL Player's Association @NFLLockout twitter to see how it was being used. 528 tweets were extracted from the account and were read to gain a sense of how they were being used. They were then "micro-analyzed and classified into emergent categories based on these usage functions" (Sanderson, 2014, p. 45). The qualitative data in this thesis was organized and analyzed in the same fashion.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to explore if athletes are given more leniencies in sexual assault cases when the only difference between two males accused was status; one being a star athlete and the other being a non-athlete. In the study, it was predicted that participants who were presented with the news story about a star athlete being accused of sexual assault in a scenario would be less likely to believe the athlete was guilty of the crime than participants who were presented with a news story about a non-athlete being accused of sexual assault. An independent samples *t*-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the likelihood of the athlete being guilty and the likelihood of the student being guilty, $t(86) = -5.993, p < .001, d = -1.29$. Participants exposed to the athlete scenario ($M = 3.07, SD = .695$) reported significantly lower possible guilt levels than participants exposed to the regular student scenario ($M = 3.88, SD = .550$). Participants exposed to the athlete scenario also consistently blamed the victim in their qualitative responses.

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

This chapter provides results for this thesis. The results examine how varying status and race levels affect perceptions of guilt of the accused. A 2 (Caucasian vs. African American) x 3 (star athlete, third-string athlete, non-athlete) factorial ANOVA was conducted to explore possible main and interaction effects.

Manipulation Checks

This thesis explored the effects of race and status on perceptions of guilt in a sexual assault case. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess differences between groups. The Omnibus F was significant, $F = 136.129 (2, 290), p < .05$, indicating that significant differences exist between groups. A Tukey post hoc test was performed to explore differences between groups. The results indicate that participants believed the star-athlete to be the most important contributor to the football team and athletic department, with the non-athlete and back-up athlete coming in second and third, respectively. Participants exposed to star athletes ($M = 12.06; SD = 2.58$) reported significantly higher perceived importance to the team than those exposed to back-up players ($M = 5.36; SD = 2.95$) or non-athletes ($M = 8.24; SD = 3.06$). Therefore, the independent variable manipulation was successful.

Primary Quantitative Analysis

Prior to analysis, potential confounding effects of participant gender on the outcome variables were tested. These results showed no differences in guilt, severity, or believability rankings. Similarly, potential confounding effects of participant fandom on

the outcome variables were tested prior to analysis. No differences were found in guilty, severity, or believability rankings.

The research question queried how student-athlete status and race would interact to influence perceptions of guilt in a sexual assault situation. The results of the factorial ANOVA revealed a non-significant interaction effect, $F = .160 (2, 284), p > .05$. Both scenarios indicate that despite combinations of race: Caucasian ($M = 18.84, SD = .41$), African American ($M = 19.16, SD = .42$) or status: star athlete ($M = 19.50, SD = .51$), back-up athlete ($M = 18.60, SD = .50$), non-athlete ($M = 18.90, SD = .51$), none of the accused were perceived as more or less guilty than the other.

Hypothesis one predicted that participants would perceive a Caucasian, star athlete as significantly less guilty than an African American non-athlete. The results of a factorial ANOVA indicated the data did not support this hypothesis (Table 1). Analysis of main effects revealed non-significant effects for race and status. Specifically, the results of a factorial ANOVA failed to reveal race affecting perceptions of guilt, $F = .298 (1, 284), p > .05$. The factorial ANOVA also failed to reveal status affecting perceptions of guilt, $F = .837 (2, 284), p > .05$.

Table 1

Effects of Race and Status on Guilt Perceptions

		Race of Subject	
		Caucasian	African American
Star athlete	<i>M</i>	19.28	19.72
	<i>SE</i>	4.63	5.23
Back-up	<i>M</i>	18.65	18.52
	<i>SE</i>	4.46	4.45
Non-athlete			

<i>M</i>	18.60	4.76
<i>SE</i>	19.24	5.83

$F = .298 (1, 284), p > .05, F = .837 (2, 284), p > .05.$

While the results of hypothesis one were not significant based on the p value, the responses trended in the direction of greater guilt (see Table 2). The answer in response to all of the guilt items had a mode of four; participants recorded a score of four 473 times, indicating that most participants gave a “neutral” rating on all guilt items. However, ratings over four (frequency: 543) appeared more than ratings under four (frequency: 127) on all guilt scale items.

Table 2.

Frequency Statistics for Guilt Items

	Guilt1	Guilt2	Guilt3	Guilt4
<i>N</i>	285	287	285	286
Mode	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Range	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00

Hypothesis two predicted participants would perceive the severity of the sexual assault to be greater when the accused is African American ($M = 6.30, SD = .10$) than when he is Caucasian ($M = 6.20, SD = .09$). The data did not support this hypothesis (Table 3). The results of an independent samples t -test failed to reveal a statistically significant difference in severity scores ($t = -.595, df = 293, p > .05$) for participants.

Hypothesis three expected participants will perceive the believability of the victim to be higher when the accused offender is African American ($M = 4.70, SD = .11$) than when he is Caucasian ($M = 4.80, SD = .11$). The data did not support the hypothesis

(Table 3). The results of an independent samples *t*-test failed to reveal a statistically significant difference in believability scores ($t = .289, df = 290, p > .05$) for participants.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Severity and Believability

	Caucasian (<i>n</i> = 150)	African American (<i>n</i> = 148)	<i>t</i> -statistic
Severity	6.20 (.09)	6.30 (.10)	-.595**
Believability	4.80 (.11)	4.70 (.11)	.289**

Note: Standard deviations in parentheses. ** $p > .01$

Hypothesis four predicted that participants who perceived an offender as lower in guilt will also report higher rates of rape myth acceptance. The hypothesis was supported by data (Table 4). A Pearson correlation revealed an inverse association between guilt and rape myth acceptance, $r = -.176, p < .05$. When a participant perceived an accused offender as lower in guilt, the participant reported a high degree of rape myth acceptance. This finding suggests that participants who perceive offenders as lower in guilt are also generally more likely to believe common rape myths.

Table 4.

Correlations for Total Guilt and Rape Myth Acceptance

		<i>Total Guilt</i>	<i>Total Rape Myth Acceptance</i>
Total Guilt	<i>r</i>	1	-.176
	<i>p</i>		.003
	N	284	276
Total Rape Myth	<i>r</i>	-.176	1
	<i>p</i>	.003	
	N	276	284

Supplementary Qualitative Data Analysis

To further explore guilt perceptions of the offender, participants were asked one main open-ended question after rating the accused on different levels of guilt. The question was: Why did you give the accused person the ranking above? (see Appendix C). Answers were examined and main themes emerged. Participants consistently reported that the term “guilty” was too severe and they did not feel comfortable having the power to rate someone as guilty or not, that it is the job of the court to do so, and cited the term “innocent until proven guilty.” Of the 292 surveys that contained written answers to the follow-up guilt question, 195 cited some form of these answers for their guilt reasoning. Participants also reported that they felt there was not enough information for them to even be able to rate the accused as guilty or not.

Surveys were separated by condition and qualitative answers were examined. At least two respondents of each of the six groups directly quoted “innocent until proven guilty” for the accused when they explained their guilt rankings. There was interesting variation between the groups in terms of qualitative responses when explaining why they gave the accused the score they did. There was no variation based on race except for in the non-athlete scenario. All qualitative data was organized regardless of responses to the four semantic differential scales as analysis and comparisons of the two revealed no significant association.

Very surprisingly, the back-up long-snappers were given the most benefit of the doubt when it came to qualitative responses. Thirty-seven out of 50 respondents with the Caucasian long-snapper narrative noted some issue with giving him a guilty rating while respondents to the African American long-snapper similarly had 37 out of 49 participants

feeling the same internal struggle. That is, 75% of long-snapper participants cited some sort of hesitance when responding to the guilt scale. One participant said, “because a female just screams ‘rape’ and the guy is automatically guilty? That’s not fair, acting like the guy is always wrong + gets kicked off the team without any evidence.” Another noted, “Accusations aren’t always true, and these kind of cases come up all the time for athletes. You never know if it is just a money grab.” The long-snapper was also only referred to as an “athlete” twice.

The next group that was given more qualitative leniency in terms of guilt was the star-athlete. Exactly 30 out of 49 participants with the Caucasian star athlete narrative cited issues with such a severe guilty rating, while participants with the African American long-snapper also had 30 out of 49 participants having the issue. So, 61% of star athlete participants cited concerns when responding to the guilt scale.

It is important to note that compared to the long-snapper and non-athlete respondents, respondents to both star athlete narratives consistently referred to the accused in terms of his “athlete” status. They also gave more detailed reasons as to why the athlete could not be guilty; they typically used all five lines to detail these reasons. The female accuser was also considered here as more likely to lie because the man is an athlete. One participant wrote in his response: “Well since there is no evidence provided, and he is a person in a high position, I do not feel that I could pass any judgment based on what one girl said. Another stated: “Because we have no way of knowing. False rape accusations are very common, especially against those with money. An NFL career was taken away from Brian Banks when he was falsely accused, and he spent 10 years in jail before he hired a PI to record the accuser admitting she lied for money.” This same

participant detailed an unprompted story about his/her football-player friend who was almost accused of rape and expelled until the “girl admitted she was embarrassed for having sex with [their] friend at a party.”

Participants in the non-athlete group reported the highest variation of leniency among qualitative results. Thirty-three out of 47, or 70%, of participants who received the Caucasian, non-athlete had notes reflecting reasons to not rank the person guilty. These responses were higher than either star athlete condition. However, the African American non-athlete had the lowest level of pardon at 28 out of 48 respondents, or 58%.

Responses to these conditions were more heavily based on there not being enough evidence where as the other four conditions had references to status. These respondents only used a couple lines of the response area and the rebuttals were not as strong as the other two groups. One respondent simply stated, “You are innocent until proven guilty. The investigation has not been completed yet.” Another, “Because there is no evidence.”

When considering fan identity and responses to the last question of the survey, “I am an avid college football fan” only two groups had qualitative responses with significant levels of fan identification. None of the 61% respondents giving the star athletes leniency responded with “disagree” or “strongly disagree” when asked if they’re an avid college football fan. This means that every one of the participants who wrote out reasons the athletes could not be guilty responded with “strongly agree,” “agree,” or “neutral.”

Participants always gave each group more than 50% leniency qualitatively, an interesting statistic when compared to the quantitative results of the survey. This means at least 50% of the time, qualitatively, benefit of the doubt was given to the accused and not

the accuser, regardless of quantitative scores on the 4 guilt scales. The star-athletes had the longest responses and often cited examples or specific athletic-based rape myths as their reasoning and justification behind their responses.

This chapter reported the results of this thesis. The next chapter outlines the implications of research findings, suggests limitations of the study, and explores future research possibilities.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

The principal purpose of this study was to explore the effects race and status have on perception of guilt in sexual assault cases. The findings suggested that neither race nor status nor any combination of the two had any sort of significant effect on participant perception of guilt of the accused. Furthermore a participant's lower perception of guilt also did not indicate a higher level of rape myth acceptance. The results of this study do not align with previous research that examined race and guilt and does not follow the expected pattern of previous rape myth acceptance research (George & Martinez, 2002; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000).

Theoretical Implications

Attribution theory is used to help people explain other's behaviors or events (Linvill & Mazer, 2013). This thesis attempted to explain why people might believe a Caucasian star athlete is less guilty than an African American student when both are accused of the same sexual assault. For the Caucasian star athlete, it was expected that participants would attribute blame to the victim and blame the accused in the African American student's case. Contrary to the expectations of this study, participants did not attribute a person's guilt to the believability of the accuser; there were also no differences in guilt ratings between race, status, or a combination of the two. Rather, the participants seemed to feel there was not enough information to make an informed judgment and also felt uncomfortable with rating a person guilty or not. Results were not entirely consistent with attribution theory in that participants did not attribute blame or guilt to any particular

party; however, they felt a heavy burden judging anyone as guilty without more information.

A few participants made the fundamental attribution error of blaming the woman in the situation because of possible situational factors and not dispositional factors of the accused (Ross, 1977). The pilot study showed many participants blamed the victim for typical reasons such as regretting having sex with an athlete, being drunk, or not wearing enough clothing. Participants made the same allegations here, but only in terms of the star athlete. Still, the rankings on guilt scales did not always match with their qualitative responses. If the narrative is changed and participants feel comfortable issuing guilt rankings, it will be interesting to see what or whom they attribute guilt to. Further research is clearly warranted to explore this phenomenon.

Although no research was found that looked specifically at race and status as a prediction of guilt in sexual assault cases, other factors have been used to study presumed guilt in sexual assault cases such as race, obesity, and emotion (Russell et al., 2011; Salekin et al., 1995; Schvey et al., 2013; Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). When racial issues were not salient Caucasians continuously rated African Americans as guiltier than a Caucasian defendant (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). Similarly, statistics show that African American men account for more incarcerations and guilty verdicts than Caucasian men and that athletes are given leniency in sexual assault cases (Crosset, Benedict, & McDonald, 1995; NAACP.org, 2015). It was expected that the African American non-athlete would be seen as guiltier than any of the other accused and that the Caucasian star athlete would be seen as least guilty among the group. However, the

findings from this thesis did not align with previous research in these areas as no combination or singular factor of race and status indicated a higher guilt ranking.

It was also assumed that participants who believed any of the accused to be less guilty would report higher levels of rape myth acceptance (Grubb & Turner, 2012; McMahon, 2007; McMahon & Farmer, 2011). Hypothesis 4 was supported in this thesis. This means that most of the participants who gave any of the men a lower guilt ranking (in essence more leniency) also reported higher levels of rape myth acceptance. This aligns with past rape culture literature that would expect such to be true (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993; Burt, 1980; Ridgeway, 2014). Many of the participants who gave less guilty responses also recorded qualitative responses similar to their rape myth acceptance scale items. One survey respondent who reported low guilt scores for an athlete and also had high rape myth acceptance scores said: “No information was provided about the girl being drunk, until we know that we cannot say who is at fault.” Another participant questioned: “Why is it always the guys (sic) fault when he is accused of rape? Does no one wonder if the girl just regrets it?”

This has important implications for future research and societal values. In essence, these results reflect a vicious cycle: people who have high levels of rape myth acceptance will give the benefit of the doubt to the accused. This is a fault of the culture we live in and only major societal changes can eradicate these problematic feelings. The myths in our society today surrounding rape are pervasive and institutions such as the media, our school systems, and family members must change in order for these beliefs to change along with them. One blatant issue is further discussed below but warrants mention here: the media and how it reports these cases. Sports media consistently refers

to cases in terms of the effects on the athlete/perpetrator and not the victim. Effects such as playing time, suspension time, and future consequences (awards, play-off berth, etc.) are considered as well as accomplishments that may be tarnished by rape accusations. Effects on the victim are never considered and the cases are usually dropped from coverage once the case is closed, even if it was closed prematurely or under unlikely circumstances. There is hardly any investigative journalism past case close, and when there is, it is seldom reported unless to again discuss effects on the accused athlete (Luther, 2014b).

Much can be understood from the qualitative data gathered here. The quantitative data indicated a level of ambivalence from participants in that no one group was given more leniency than any other group, but participants' qualitative responses consistently gave over half of each group more leniency than their scale responses. Similar responses occurred when Division One Sport Information Directors (SIDs) were asked about their support of Title IX. SIDs questioned typically agreed or strongly agreed in equal funding for women's sports (Hardin, Whiteside, & Ash, 2012). However, hardly any of these same questioned agreed that women's sports deserved more funding (Hardin et al., 2012). They also answered with similar ambivalence to other questions, supporting progressive views or sexuality but also opting to keep athletes in the closet (Hardin, Whiteside, & Ash, 2012).

The results from this thesis mirror the ambivalence shown by SIDs. The students here showed mixed emotions in that quantitatively, they did not feel one man was guiltier than another. But, their qualitative results always kept the fair of the accused in mind, and not the victim. The realm of college sports could be to blame for this ambivalence, as so

much money is involved and the climate behind the scenes is typically to cover things up rather than shed light on issues. That coupled with the media they consume always portraying effects on the athlete and cases never being shown when an athlete is actually *proven* guilty in the court of law. Like the SIDs, the halo effect could have played a role here in that the participants could have given a desirable answer in their quantitative results, which is common when social issues are being discussed (Hardin, Whiteside, & Ash, 2012).

What is most concerning here is the fact that their qualitative answers always faired so much in terms of the man. I expected to find more leniencies given to the athlete because of his understood status, however, overall more leniencies were given to the back-up long-snapper and non-athlete. It is understandable that a participant would want to be thoughtful before accusing the man of doing something that has major criminal implications, but the fact that more consideration was not also given to the women is concerning, especially when the quantitative results leaned more in the guilty direction. There are equally as disturbing psychological implications on the woman if she was raped but these are obviously not as visible as the effects on the man. This could also be a reason for their ambivalence: the effects on a man wrongfully accused seem greater than those of a woman who was actually raped.

Practical Implications

The findings of this thesis have significant implications for collegiate athletic departments. The findings of this project suggest that the public's perceptions of guilt in a sexual assault case are consistent when it comes to race and/or status of a collegiate football player. However, prior research suggests that collegiate football players are

typically given a great amount of leniency when it comes to sexual assault charges (Luther, 2014a). One factor that was withheld from the narrative information was the affiliation of the athlete or student and this could have changed the outcome of the results.

The notion of fan identity suggests there is a psychological connection that fans have for a sports team or athlete (Wann et al., 2001). Fans who highly identify with their team are likely to display group-based self-esteem, display a high level of support in winning or losing seasons, and also more likely to display antisocial behavior at a sporting event (Smith & Smith, 2012). This suggests that fans who are highly invested in a team may be more likely to see one of their favorite or most important players as less guilty as fans who want the team to remain in good moral (or official poll) standings. A highly identified fan is likely to feverishly defend their favorite team and/or athlete; however, if the accused player is not a significant influence on the well-being of the team or even a student worker, it would seem likely that that fan would not be as lenient with them. This factor was considered in terms of asking if a person is an avid football fan, but no affiliation was given to the football player or non-athlete accused.

Athletic departments are also to blame. They have an economic element to protect when their athletes are accused of any crime. Sports teams are the main business of many major universities meaning the revenue they bring in is in the millions. Programs build stadiums that cost \$200-300 million dollars and construct athletic facilities that can cost that much as well (Benedict & Keteyian, 2013). These teams have multi-billion dollar television contracts. When that level of money is involved there is an enormous investment in a student-athlete who can make all of it worthwhile (Benedict & Keteyian,

2013). It can be understood that a student-athlete becomes a huge stake in the economic game on these campuses. Having a student-athlete accused or even prosecuted of sexual assault could mean a multi-million dollar loss for a program.

ESPN's *Outside the Lines* conducted an investigation into the trend of collegiate athletes receiving leniency in court; this investigation could also offer insight into the findings from this thesis (Lavigne, 2015). After an investigation into eight schools with major, power five football programs, investigators found fan identification as a large factor in the outcome of sexual assault cases brought against collegiate athletes. Multiple athletic departments suggested a collegiate athlete's status makes him more prone to being falsely accused. *OTL* found the contrary: athletes' fame deters victims and witnesses for coming forward for fear of being harassed by highly identified fans (Lavigne, 2015).

Jameis Winston's accuser felt the painful effects of Florida State fans after her name was released to the public as his accuser. Her tires were slashed at her sorority house and fans threatened to burn it down; fans sent her and her brother explicit and aggressive tweets (Ganim, 2015). Even an official investigator in the Winston case warned the accuser that she should think "long and hard" before deciding to pursue a case in such a large football town like Tallahassee (Ganim, 2015). Lizzy Seeburg faced a similar backlash when she accused a Notre Dame football player of raping her, receiving text messages advising her not to mess with the football team before committing suicide (Murphy, 2013). There are still websites dedicated to Penn State fans harassing victims and witnesses of Jerry Sandusky's child rape; Sandusky was found guilty of all counts of child rape and sentenced to life in prison (Ganim, 2015).

This begs the question: would accused athlete identification or affiliation make a difference in participants' perceptions of guilt in sexual assault cases? For example, if the imaginary player listed in the narrative was noted as a team member of the participant's university, would the participant be more likely to think the player is innocent, especially if that player is a star? Concurrently, would participants be more likely to think the accused is more guilty if he comes from a rival university? Research and empirical data would suggest this to be true (Ganim, 2015; Lavigne, 2015; Murphy, 2013; Smith & Smith, 2012; Wann et al., 2001).

The findings from this and fan identification research leave a significant responsibility open to athletic departments. Many collegiate athletes accused of sexual assault benefited not only from the intimidation and fear from fans on their accusers, but a confluence of other benefits from athletic departments such as counsel, independent investigations, or early intervention with police (Lavigne, 2015). However, with growing coverage and de-stigmatization of these types of cases and other campus sexual assault cases, athletic departments could be forced to reconsider their approach and concern of sexual assault allegations brought against their players (Sexual Assault Statistics, 2015; Lavigne, 2015).

A majority of respondents to the survey reported some level of discomfort in giving any of the accused men a guilty rating. The null results suggest there may be larger factors influencing participants' hesitance. Sixty-six percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed to some level of avid college football fandom which assumes they are sports media consumers. Sports media has an uneven pattern of reporting when it comes to coverage of athlete sexual assault accusations. Sports media coverage of sexual assault

allegations consistently centers on the athlete and effects it may have on them, and not the victim (Luther, 2014b). Examples can be seen in any sports related sexual assault coverage: the alleged victim's names are not spoken unless it is to shame them. Such was seen with coverage of Steeler's star quarterback Ben Roethlisberger's accused sexual assaults when *Bleacher Report* posted an article on their website titled "Ben Roethlisberger's victims not so sweet, not so innocent" (n/d). The article was removed and not to be viewed again.

Simultaneously, the media tend to come to an end of coverage of allegations once there is a legal end to them (Luther, 2014b). The pattern in sports media has become when cases like this – athletes accused of committing violent crimes against women come to their legal end – we hear a lot about the need to move on, and a lot of speculation about what the case will mean for the player, his team, his school, his league. (Luther, 2014b, par. 3)

Most notably in Jameis Winston's case in 2013 after Florida state attorney Willie Meggs announced the state would not press charges against Winston, Gregg Doyel of CBS Sports published an article titled "After state declined chance to judge Winston, time for us to follow suit" (Doyel, 2013). Again in 2014 after University of Florida's freshman quarterback, Treon Harris', alleged sexual assault victim dropped charges, Gatorsports.com wrote that "UF quarterback Harris ready to get back on field" displaying a picture of Harris with a thumbs up (Abolverdi, 2014). A quick search of *The Tennessean's* website for articles about Van Pearson, University of Tennessee's star wide receiver accused of rape in 2015, show a progression of articles titled: "UT's Pearson named rape suspect, suspended indefinitely," "(Butch) Jones: Rape case 'not an

illustration of our football program',” “[Volunteers’] WR Van Pearson suspended from school,” “Vols WR Van Pearson won’t face rape charges,” “Vols WR Van Pearson will return to practice Saturday,” to “Von Pearson resembles old self in football practice” (The Tennessean, 2015).

While the perceived believability of the accused victims in this thesis were typically high, the way the media frames sexual assault allegations around the alleged perpetrators and how the accusations affect them is troubling for victims. It also may explain why participants had a difficult time giving any of the accused athletes a guilty rating.

Limitations

This thesis was not without limitations. An obvious limitation was the design of the study. After inputting survey results it was obvious that respondents found it difficult to give an objective and concrete guilt rating. The researcher adapted the guilt-ranking scale from previous studies (Russell et al., 2011; Salekin et al., 1995; Schvey et al., 2013; Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000) but after having read the results one edit could have been made by adding some form of disclaimer to the semantic differential guilt scale that participants’ rating is *solely* opinion based and in no way definitive.

Social desirability bias could have played a role in the non-significant quantitative results. Social desirability describes the impulse for survey participants to answer questions in a way they feel will be received well by researchers (Nederhof, 1985). It is easy to understand how, especially with current news stories surrounding sexual assault on college campuses and other race relations in the United States, participants might have preferred to answer in a politically correct way. The author of this thesis is also a woman

who distributed the survey. The presence of a woman in general and as the researcher could have skewed participant results since the narrative was about a woman being sexually assaulted.

Another limitation to the study was the way the narrative was written in largely ambiguous terms as it was based on an actual news article (Low, 2014). The absence of following action steps taken by the alleged victim could have also affected the results. If the researcher added information about the victim obtaining a rape kit or formally pressing charges the results could have been different in that it could have added another level of credibility to the case. Maybe participants would give more credit to the victim if it was reported that she immediately obtained a rape kit or planned on pressing charges.

The independent variable manipulation in this thesis was significant and accurate; however, it was expected that the organization of perceived importance of each of the accused would be star athlete as most important, back-up, long-snapper as second, and the non-athlete as third most important. The results revealed that participants perceived the star athlete as most important to a team and athletic department, as expected, but perceived the non-athlete as second most important over the back-up long-snapper. In terms of privilege, the researcher expected the back-up athlete's status as an athlete, regardless of status within the team, would afford them higher perceived importance than the non-athlete.

The sample of this study could have affected the results of this thesis. The majority of participants were Caucasian, college-aged women contained in a convenience sample. If this study had been conducted with a different age group other than college or in a different location entirely could have dramatically changed the results. The

university where this study was conducted has a majority of Caucasian students. If this thesis had been conducted at a historically African American college or university, it would be expected that the results would not be the same as the findings garnered with this sample. The same can be said about location; this research was conducted in a southern college town with a small population that is heavily influenced by the football culture. If this study had been conducted in another state at a school that is not immersed in a strong college football culture, the results may have been different.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although there were limitations to this study, there are significant areas for future research. First, altering the news article to include a stock photo of the alleged perpetrator could offer more intense results than this thesis found. It could offer the participants of the survey a visual point of reference for the accused offender. It could offer more definitive results in terms of racial bias in sexual assault cases. We know there is obvious racial bias in the criminal justice system so adding a photo would highlight the race factor to see if it affects results (NAACP, 2015).

Another idea for future research is adding affiliations to the athletes portrayed in the narratives. Based on fan identification research, it would be expected that a football player from the survey participants' rival schools would be seen as more guilty than a football player at their own school (Wann et al., 2001). Another way to expand research would be to continue the work done by *Outside the Lines* and observe and research other top programs' management of sexual assault accusations (Lavigne, 2015). Including this research in a narrative or survey could yield interesting results, as well. Further scholarly

research into the way media handles accusations and relief of sexual assault accusations would also be beneficial to the field.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to understand how athletic status and race of the accused in a sexual assault case may affect perceptions of guilt. This study was important with the rise of sexual assault cases not only in college athletics, but at colleges and universities in general. With growing visibility of these cases in the media, trends of lenient punishments for athletes, and always-rising growth of African American prosecution, this study was necessary (Sexual assault statistics, 2015; Sibor, 2013; NAACP.org, 2015; Weir & Brady, 2003). Attribution theory was used to offer insight into why people may give leniencies to athletes and/or Caucasian people over non-athletes and/or African American people. Rape myths and societal patterns were applied and this study predicted Caucasian/star athletes would be seen as less guilty than African American/non-athletes, severity of the sexual assault would be considered worse when the accused is an African American student, believability of the victim will be greater when the offender is an African American, and that participants who score any offender as less guilty will have higher rates of rape myth acceptance. While the quantitative results were non-significant, the qualitative results revealed participants consistently felt the guilt ranking was “too severe” and most felt uncomfortable with the power to label anyone guilty without more information. Upon consideration of this, further research was suggested to include a disclaimer about the guilty rating and to add pictures or athlete affiliation to yield more interesting results. It is also recommended that athletic departments reevaluate their

treatment of sexual assault accusations with the rising visibility of cases on college and university campuses.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Narratives

Caucasian, star athlete.

November 18, 2014

The star wide receiver at a Division 1 university in the South is accused of sexually assaulting a female student at the same university, according to a report released Tuesday by the city police department.

The 19-year-old woman, who is a student at the same school, told police that the football player sexually assaulted her early Sunday morning at an off-campus apartment and that the sexual assault lasted about 45 minutes. Police are continuing to investigate and no charges have been filed.

On Monday afternoon, the university announced that the accused 20-year-old, white wide receiver had been suspended from all team activities.

"I am aware of the alleged incident that occurred over this weekend," the head football coach said at his Monday news conference. "Right now we are in the process of gathering all the information. Once we have that appropriate information we will act in a very decisive manner, which we have proven over time to do here at the university."

The head coach said at that time he wanted to be "right rather than fast" when making his decision. The university did not say what had changed or new information had been gathered between the coach's news conference and the player's suspension about four hours later.

Once city police complete their investigation, they will turn over their findings to the county district attorney, who will decide if charges will be filed.

The woman contacted police around 3 a.m. Sunday and then met with investigators. Police conducted a search of the apartment where the alleged assaults occurred.

The wide receiver in question was a first-team all-conference selection last season and ranks first all time on university's career yards list. He is likely to be a top-10 NFL draft pick.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

African American, star athlete.

November 18, 2014

The star wide receiver at a Division 1 university in the South is accused of sexually assaulting a female student at the same university, according to a report released Tuesday by the city police department.

The 19-year-old woman, who is a student at the same school, told police that the football player sexually assaulted her early Sunday morning at an off-campus apartment and that the sexual assault lasted about 45 minutes. Police are continuing to investigate and no charges have been filed.

On Monday afternoon, the university announced that the 20-year-old, African American wide receiver had been suspended from all team activities.

"I am aware of the alleged incident that occurred over this weekend," the head football coach said at his Monday news conference. "Right now we are in the process of gathering all the information. Once we have that appropriate information we will act in a very decisive manner, which we have proven over time to do here at the university."

The head coach said at that time he wanted to be "right rather than fast" when making his decision. The university did not say what had changed or new information had been gathered between the coach's news conference and the player's suspension about four hours later.

Once city police complete their investigation, they will turn over their findings to the county district attorney, who will decide if charges will be filed.

The woman contacted police around 3 a.m. Sunday and then met with investigators. Police conducted a search of the apartment where the alleged assaults occurred.

The wide receiver in question was a first-team all-conference selection last season and ranks first all time on university's career yards list. He is likely to be a top-10 NFL draft pick.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Caucasian, back-up athlete.

November 18, 2014

A back-up long snapper at a Division 1 university in the South is accused of sexually assaulting a female student at the same university, according to a report released Tuesday by the city police department.

The 19-year-old woman, who is a student at the same school, told police that the football player sexually assaulted her early Sunday morning at an off-campus apartment and that the sexual assault lasted about 45 minutes. Police are continuing to investigate and no charges have been filed.

On Monday afternoon, the university announced that the 20-year-old, white long-snapper had been suspended from all team activities.

"I am aware of the alleged incident that occurred over this weekend," the head football coach said at his Monday news conference. "Right now we are in the process of gathering all the information. Once we have that appropriate information we will act in a very decisive manner, which we have proven over time to do here at the university."

The head coach said at that time he wanted to be "right rather than fast" when making his decision. The university did not say what had changed or new information had been gathered between the coach's news conference and the player's suspension about four hours later.

Once city police complete their investigation, they will turn over their findings to the county district attorney, who will decide if charges will be filed.

The woman contacted police around 3 a.m. Sunday and then met with investigators. Police conducted a search of the apartment where the alleged assaults occurred.

The long-snapper in question has played in one game during his three years on the team and is listed as a walk-on player on the team roster.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

African American, back-up athlete.

November 18, 2014

A back-up long-snapper at a Division 1 university in the South is accused of sexually assaulting a female student at the same university, according to a report released Tuesday by the city police department.

The 19-year-old woman, who is a student at the same school, told police that the football player sexually assaulted her early Sunday morning at an off-campus apartment and that the sexual assault lasted about 45 minutes. Police are continuing to investigate and no charges have been filed.

On Monday afternoon, the university announced that the 20-year-old, African American long-snapper had been suspended from all team activities.

"I am aware of the alleged incident that occurred over this weekend," the head football coach said at his Monday news conference. "Right now we are in the process of gathering all the information. Once we have that appropriate information we will act in a very decisive manner, which we have proven over time to do here at the university."

The head coach said at that time he wanted to be "right rather than fast" when making his decision. The university did not say what had changed or new information had been gathered between the coach's news conference and the player's suspension about four hours later.

Once city police complete their investigation, they will turn over their findings to the county district attorney, who will decide if charges will be filed.

The woman contacted police around 3 a.m. Sunday and then met with investigators. Police conducted a search of the apartment where the alleged assaults occurred.

The long-snapper in question has played in one game during his three years on the team and is listed as a walk-on player on the team roster.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Caucasian, student worker.

November 18, 2014

A male student worker for the football team at a Division 1 university in the South is accused of sexually assaulting a female student at the same university, according to a report released Tuesday by the city police department.

The 19-year-old woman, who is a student at the same school, told police that the male sexually assaulted her early Sunday morning at an off-campus apartment and that the sexual assault lasted about 45 minutes. Police are continuing to investigate and no charges have been filed.

On Monday afternoon, the university announced that the 20-year-old, white accused man had been suspended.

"I am aware of the alleged incident that occurred over this weekend," the university Athletic Director said at a Monday news conference. "Right now we are in the process of gathering all the information. Once we have that appropriate information we will act in a very decisive manner, which we have proven over time to do here at the university."

The university indicated at that time it wanted to be "right rather than fast" when making his decision. The university did not say what had changed or if new information had been gathered between its news conference and the male student's suspension about four hours later.

Once city police complete their investigation, they will turn over their findings to the county district attorney, who will decide if charges will be filed.

The woman contacted police around 3 a.m. Sunday and then met with investigators. Police conducted a search of the apartment where the alleged assaults occurred.

The student in question is a business major and has worked in the athletic department for all three years he has attended the university.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

African American, student worker.

November 18, 2014

A male student worker for the football team at a Division 1 university in the South is accused of sexually assaulting a female student at the same university, according to a report released Tuesday by the city police department.

The 19-year-old woman, who is a student at the same school, told police that the male sexually assaulted her early Sunday morning at an off-campus apartment and that the sexual assault lasted about 45 minutes. Police are continuing to investigate and no charges have been filed.

On Monday afternoon, the university announced that the 20-year-old, African American man had been suspended.

"I am aware of the alleged incident that occurred over this weekend," the university Athletic Director said at a Monday news conference. "Right now we are in the process of gathering all the information. Once we have that appropriate information we will act in a very decisive manner, which we have proven over time to do here at the university."

The university indicated at that time it wanted to be "right rather than fast" when making his decision. The university did not say what had changed or if new information had been gathered between its news conference and the male student's suspension about four hours later.

Once city police complete their investigation, they will turn over their findings to the county district attorney, who will decide if charges will be filed.

The woman contacted police around 3 a.m. Sunday and then met with investigators. Police conducted a search of the apartment where the alleged assaults occurred.

The student in question is a business major and has worked in the athletic department for all three years he has attended the university.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Please answer the following questions about the above news article:

1. The person accused in the article is:

Not Guilty	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Very Guilty
At Fault	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Not at Fault
Not Liable	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Liable
In the Wrong	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Not in the Wrong

2. Why did you give the accused person the ranking above?

3. How severe do you believe the aforementioned accusation is?

Very Severe _____ Not Severe

4. How believable do you think the accuser is?

Not Believable _____ Very Believable

5. How would you rate this accused’s contributions to the university’s athletics program?

This person is a vital contribution to the team	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	This person is not a vital contribution to the team
---	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	---

This person is not a vital contribution to the university's athletics program

This person is a vital contribution to the university's athletics program

6. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

7. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

8. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

9. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

10. When girls get raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

11. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

12. When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

13. Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

14. Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

15. If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

16. It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realize what he was doing.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

17. If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

18. If a girl doesn't physically resist sex – even if protesting verbally – it can't be considered rape.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

19. If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

20. A rape probably doesn't happen if a girl doesn't have any bruises or marks.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

21. If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a particular weapon, you really can't call it rape.

Strongly Agree 1 Agree 2 Neutral 3 Disagree 4 Strongly Disagree 5

22. If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.

Strongly Agree 1 Agree 2 Neutral 3 Disagree 4 Strongly Disagree 5

23. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.

Strongly Agree 1 Agree 2 Neutral 3 Disagree 4 Strongly Disagree 5

24. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.

Strongly Agree 1 Agree 2 Neutral 3 Disagree 4 Strongly Disagree 5

25. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.

Strongly Agree 1 Agree 2 Neutral 3 Disagree 4 Strongly Disagree 5

26. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped have emotional problems.

Strongly Agree 1 Agree 2 Neutral 3 Disagree 4 Strongly Disagree 5

27. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim it was rape.

Strongly Agree 1 Agree 2 Neutral 3 Disagree 4 Strongly Disagree 5

Finally, we would like to get some information about you. Your answers to the questions will help us better understand the opinions you express in other sections of the questionnaire. Please answer the following questions about yourself.

What is your age? _____

What is your biological sex?

Male _____

Female _____

Would rather not say _____

What is your ethnic background/race?

- African American/Non-Hispanic
- Caucasian/Non-Hispanic
- Hispanic
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Other (Please specify: _____)

What is your major? _____

What is your year in school?

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

How many different sports have you played? _____

What sports?

How many years have you participated in sports, overall? _____ years

Have you played collegiate level sports?

Yes _____

No _____

How many years have you participated in collegiate level sports? _____ years

If you have played collegiate level sports, which have you played/are you currently playing?

I am a avid college football fan.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Description of the Research and Your Participation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Katie Barnes and Dr. Joseph Mazer of the Department of Communication Studies. The purpose of this research is to examine people's perceptions of sexual assault cases.

Your participation will involve completing a brief written survey. The amount of time required for your participation will be approximately 10 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts

This study heavily relies on perceptions of sexual assault. If at any time this study makes you feel uncomfortable, please do not hesitate to abandon participation.

Potential Benefits

You will receive no direct benefit from this study. The results of this research will help researchers to better understand perceptions of sexual assault. Consequently, we can help change and educate about sexual assault perceptions.

Incentives

We cannot offer an incentive for this study.

Protection of Confidentiality

Your identity will not be revealed in any publication that might result from this study.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Joseph Mazer at Clemson University at 864-656-5254. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

Appendix D: Debriefing Form

Thank you for your participation in our study. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Please note the content of this article was not real and was fabricated.

We realize that some of the content may have provoked strong emotional reactions. As researchers, we do not provide mental health services and we will not be following up with you after the study. However, we want to provide every participant in this study with a comprehensive and accurate list of clinical resources that are available, should you decide you need assistance at any time. Please see information pertaining to local resources at the end of this form.

Useful Contact Information

For resources regarding victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and/or stalking please visit:

<http://www.clemson.edu/campus-life/campus-services/cupd/report/sexual-assault-resources.html>

Clemson University Title IX Coordinator: Jerry Knighton, 864-656-3181, knightl@clemson.edu

Clemson University Deputy Title IX Coordinator: Alesia Smith, 864-656-0510, alesias@clemson.edu

Counseling and Psychological Services Crisis Counseling: 864-656-2451; after-hours on-call counselor: 864-656-2222

Clemson University Police Department Victim Assistance: 864-656-2222

Pickens Rape Crisis Council: 864-442-5500.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Joseph Mazer at Clemson University at 864-656-5254. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

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