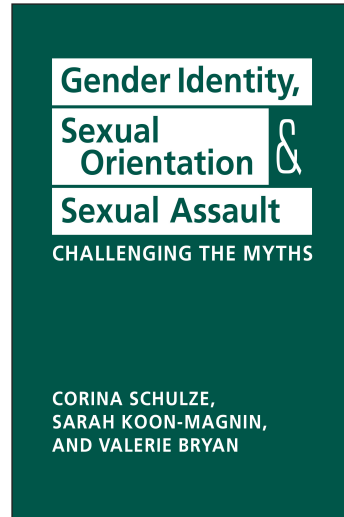# Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Sexual Assault: Challenging the Myths

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Understanding Sexual Violence: Challenging the Myths

The myth that rape doesn't happen, I think is probably the biggest thing that comes to mind I think, because there's this perception that rape only happens if there's a dude involved.

—Samar, research participant

No other violent crime is as saturated by gendered societal biases regarding victims and offenders as is sexual assault (Brownmiller, 1975). Due to the foundational works of Brownmiller (1975), Burt (1980), Butler (1990), Koss and Gidycz (1985), and numerous other scholars, the phenomenon of sexual assault in the United States is better understood and has risen to the top of the national agenda. Despite this progress, much work remains to be done, specifically in considering the social meanings attached to identity, sexual assault prevalence, and the treatment of victims and offenders socially and in the criminal justice system. The significance of gender has long been recognized insofar as explaining violence *by men* directed against *women*. While this may be the most common type of sexual assault, this understanding of gender's role in sexual violence is overly simplistic. Individuals who fall outside of this cultural narrative, such as male victims of sexual assault or victims of same-sex assault, are often overlooked. We argue that there is a powerful component of identity that has hitherto been ignored and is crucial in addressing sexual violence in all communities; both gender and sexual orientation must be examined in tandem and critically. Simply adding more categories to identity such as, for example, including male victims and same-sex assault victims, is insufficient. And while it adds to our understanding of sexual violence, it does not provide a full picture of the impact of sexual assault on the

victim. Our work combines a breadth of critical theory with empirical analysis to present a theoretical approach to sexual violence that is able to account for individual-level experiences and perceptions that are shaped and situated within a sociopolitical framework.

Sexual violence is arguably one of the most traumatic types of crime due to the personal nature of the assault and the long-lasting impacts and societal implications of the violation, a problem exacerbated by the frequent conflation of consensual sex with violence (Gavey, 2005). Societal recognition of a sexual assault as a "real" crime is predicated on a number of situational factors, such as alcohol consumption, but also the victim's gender and sexual identity (e.g., Grubb and Turner, 2012; Van der Bruggen and Grubb, 2014). Consistent with a culture that uses victim behavior and identity characteristics in determining guilt, recent studies have demonstrated that gender-variant and sexual minorities are much more likely to be victims of sexual violence than are heterosexual persons (e.g., Cantor et al., 2015; Ford and Soto-Marquez, 2016; Menning and Holtzman, 2014; Rothman, Exner, and Baughman, 2011; Walters, Chen, and Breiding, 2013). This justifies our analytical focus on the experiences of nonheterosexual women and other members of queer communities.

Heteronormativity, which describes the privileges of heterosexual people, and *oppositional sexism,* which describes the act of penalizing departures from the dominant ascribed gender binary, are two features of rape culture that are understudied (see Serano, 2007, for elucidation of these terms). Awareness of these social forces compels one to closely examine cultural values placed on identity, sexuality, and sexual violence, and how those identities and social behaviors are institutionalized and reproduced. The critical view that we take, the focus on dominant social norms and understandings, may be controversial. Indeed, some may even question the book's fundamental assumptions surrounding the contours and existence of rape culture. Still, we expect consensus in the belief that sexual violence is a deeply troubling, devastating, and serious problem. Here, we emphasize that our purpose is to help *all* victims of sexual assault.

Before outlining the chapters of this book, we need to point out that we have confined many of the discipline-specific or otherwise pertinent concepts to endnotes. This chapter is focused on the historical backdrop and the theories that have influenced our work; therefore, scholarly accounts of what we mean by "gender identity," for example, are left for the remaining analytical chapters. We elected not to provide

a glossary of terms as it would misrepresent our intent to treat identity as complex, context dependent, and ever changing.[1] By the very nature of our research, identity and sexual violence, and the language associated with these concepts, are subject to individual (micro-level) and societal (macro-level) interpretations. With that said, we use the terms *sexual violence* and *sexual assault* interchangeably in this chapter, reserving a more thorough treatment for the next chapter. "Rape" is used only when referring to existing research into rape culture and rape myths or when spoken by a participant.

Culture and sexuality are so tightly woven that any analysis of identity must be cognizant of cultural processes (e.g., Beauvoir, 1953; Butler, 1990) in addition to micro-level experiences. Feminist and Queer theories, discussed later in this chapter, provide much of the language used throughout this book with a special emphasis on social and institutional processes that reinforce, replicate, or create new modes of social control. In the ensuing discussion, we describe the theoretical scaffolding for this book whereas the subsequent chapters focus on the theoretical work providing the framework for the results of our analytical findings.

Key Features of the Book

There are five contributions of this book that we wish to highlight:

1. The emphasis on sexual orientation and gender identity. We illustrate the significance of identity in the assault and disclosure experience of victims. Our analyses demonstrate that the cultural myths about sexual violence not only are heavily steeped in heteronormative value judgments and oppositional sexism,[2] but also are two of the most important determinants of how victims will be treated.

2. The theoretical framework. Our approach privileges the experience of marginalized sexual and gender identities, which is vital to comprehending sexual violence in all communities. To be clear, our preferred terminology of *queer community* is consistent with Queer theory, fully described and explained in Chapter 2. We see *queer* as the more inclusive term that is not limited solely by gender and sexual minority status. We value the "outsider-within" perspective (Collins, 1990), which purports that those existing at the margins of society possess the opportunity to see social structures and inequities all the

while recognizing multiple and intersecting identities and oppressions. This provides the underpinning for theoretical approaches like those of Queer criminology (e.g., Ball, 2014a, 2014b; Lenning and Buist, 2015; Woods, 2014) and Black feminist thought (e.g., Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989) and elevates the perspectives of people who have been "othered."[3] Queer theory, a challenge to traditional academic theories and methods, emphasizes the diversity in personal experiences of the world over rigid adherence to socially constructed categories. Our choice of qualitative methodology, which required years of preparation, was made because we are dedicated to giving a voice to and representing a community that has been disproportionately affected by sexual violence (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Writing of the wide range of applicability found in Black feminism, Collins (1990) explains that it "constitutes one part of a much larger social justice project that goes far beyond the experiences of African-American women" (p. 19). Scholars of US criminal law and in many of the social sciences have noted the "intersectionality" of class, race, sexual orientation, and gender in the legal system (Crenshaw, 1989; Ritchie, 2012).[4] In the United States, feminist criminologists, sociologists, and social workers have written about the intersectionality of gender (women) and sexuality (mostly of lesbian-identified women) as exacerbating, delegitimizing characteristics of people involved in the criminal justice system (e.g., Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006; Girshick, 2002). We understand sexual violence to be one of the most important mechanisms of enforcing hegemonic masculinity, "the culturally idealized form of masculine character" (Collins, 1990, p. 83). As Collins writes of broader processes and institutions, "domination operates by seducing, pressuring, or forcing African-American women, members of subordinated groups, and all individuals to replace individual and cultural ways of knowing with the dominant group's specialized thought—hegemonic ideologies that in turn justify practices of other domains of power" (1990, p. 287). To miss the oppositional sexism and queerphobia[5] inherent in sexual violence is to miss the opportunity to understand how and why such violence persists.

3. The methodologies. We gathered and analyzed the data presented in this book using, arguably, the most rigorous qualitative method to date: consensual qualitative research (CQR; Spangler, Liu, and Hill, 2012). Due to the method's strength and pedagogical sophistication, this book should appeal to scholars and educators as an exemplar of how CQR can be applied in the social sciences. Ball

(2014a, 2014b) and other Queer theorists have critiqued the not uncommon notion of "the bigger the *n* the better." While the focus of this book is not to present an argument for the utility of CQR, we illustrate how theory and methodology are complementary and how qualitative research is, indeed, the most appropriate choice to address certain research questions. Our use of this empirical scientific qualitative methodology is important because it utilizes a technique that overcomes the weaknesses of some of its predecessors (e.g., those that rely on individual coders with no validity checks or that simply reproduce interview transcripts).[6]

4. The Identity Inclusive Sexual Assault Myth Scale (IISAMS). Though this book is primarily qualitative, we also present analyses from a larger quantitative survey of university students that allowed for the verification of what we hope will be a widely used survey instrument. We constructed IISAMS using the qualitative data from the interviews and tested for reliability and validity via quantitative methods. This instrument, in its breadth and inclusivity, is the first of its kind and offers a significant contribution to existing scholarship on rape culture and rape myths. Prior work has demonstrated that victims of sexual assault are perceived differently based on the gender of the victim (Davies, 2002; Davies and Rogers, 2006; Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson, 1992) and the gender of the perpetrator (Koon-Magnin and Ruback, 2012; Schneider, Ee, and Aronson, 1994). But the larger context of those judgments relating to attitudes and biases regarding sexual orientation and gender identity have not yet been fully accounted for. The IISAMS is expected to be influential on a larger national scale, as it can be used for assessment and policy development purposes. This book provides its first manifestation, which we hope will inform, for example, government research and university climate surveys, in addition to future scholarship in this area.

5. Policy and program implications. Central to this work was our intent to help improve responses to sexual assault victims (e.g., when they disclose to a friend or family member, or seek mental or physical health services). Practical recommendations are provided in the hope that this will help inform policymakers and first responders. An important component of these policy and programmatic suggestions is the recognition of sexual violence as situated within rape culture. The following discussion provides an overview of how sexual violence has been defined by social movements and within academia, and how it consequently shaped our research approach.

Sexuality and Social Movements

To combat the occurrence of sexual assault in the United States, Congress has passed legislation, including the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). This act calls for a multipronged approach to sexual violence, including legal protections for victims, training for criminal justice professionals, and funding for research about program efficacy as well as research geared toward better understanding of the problem. In 2014, the Barack Obama administration launched one of the most expensive comprehensive initiatives to date for addressing sexual violence on campuses. Exemplary of the political nature of sexual assault and the queer community, it was not until 2012 that VAWA was updated to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) sexual assault victims from discrimination. This version did not pass without a fight, precisely due to the inclusion of queer and other previously unprotected minority groups (e.g., immigrants and Native Americans).

At the grassroots level, there is an identifiable anti–sexual violence or sexual violence awareness social movement as materialized through subsidiary social movements such as SlutWalk and the more recent #MeToo movement.[7] It is the known pervasiveness of sexual violence combined with the inadequacy of the official crime incidence and arrest statistics that serves as the impetus for many of these initiatives (Tuerkheimer, 2014). While the underlying messages of these movements are mostly positive in terms of advancing progress for victims, we argue that one of the stronger messages is heteronormative in the assumption that (presumably heterosexual) women are the victims of (presumably heterosexual) men. If men are victims of sexual assault, it is presumed that the victim is gay and/or not sufficiently masculine to ward off the attack (Davies, 2002).

Sexual violence in queer communities is generally understood in the context of hate crimes (Ball, 2014a, 2014b). Both gay rights and women's rights are arguably entangled with movements aimed at the prevention of sexual violence because they involve contested identities and anxieties about sexuality. Similarly, the strategies of sexual violence movements and gay rights movements involve dismantling cultural stereotypes about sex and emphasizing the role of power. In other words, these social movements are progressive, involve similar understandings about social control and rape culture, and work in tandem to challenge social and institutional structures.

Some scholars have framed sexual violence as a blight on humanity, but one that is natural and, therefore, unavoidable.[8] It was not until the rise of radical feminists in the 1960s and 1970s that sexual violence was identified as a *systemic* problem. Yet this still is a relatively misunderstood concept. Activists today attempt to politicize sexual violence by dispelling false beliefs about rape and (hetero)sexuality. Another hotly contested term, *rape culture,* first coined by 1960s feminist activists (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975), describes a patriarchal misogynistic society that allows and, whether implicitly or explicitly, encourages violence against women.

Despite the rhetoric and efforts to educate the public about sexual violence being a product of culture, sexual violence tends to be viewed at the micro level. Many perceive sexual assault/rape as a serious crime eclipsed only by homicide,[9] but the contextual or situational factors preceding and following a sexual assault significantly impact the likelihood that an assault will be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted (Spohn and Tellis, 2012). Thus, conversations about sexual assault revolve around the salience of these types of questions: *who* the victim is, *what* the victim did, *how* the assault took place, *where* the assault took place, and *when*. These questions, while important for law enforcement, tend to reinforce the mythical "real rape" or "legitimate rape." Unfortunately, the public tends to fixate on the victim while past sexual behavior of the perpetrator is rarely considered.

The legitimate rape scenario is one in which the victim is a white middle- to upper-class female and is overpowered by a male stranger (Wilcox, Jordan, and Pritchard, 2006). Assaults involving physical injury and assaults perpetrated by strangers are most likely to be reported (Clay-Warner and McMahon-Howard, 2009) and processed through the criminal justice system (Spohn and Tellis, 2012), but are statistically uncommon (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000). As a result, many victims of sexual assault who did not experience physical injury or were not assaulted by strangers may themselves question whether their assaults were valid or if they somehow brought the attack on themselves.

Rape is the ultimate expression of violence and power, as well as a reflection of societal beliefs about sexuality, identity, and gender roles. It follows that the modern backlash against feminism[10] is overtly concentrated on the activities of activists and scholarly endeavors on behalf of sexual violence victims as one of the primary challenges to patriarchy (Gotell and Dutton, 2016). Thus, rape culture is viewed as a

manifestation of political correctness gone mad, and evidence of feminist efforts to oppress men. Victimization survey estimates of sexual assault are attacked as being fabrications, or at least exaggerations, which ironically is consistent with scholarly definitions of rape culture (Gotell and Dutton, 2016). Indeed, false allegations of rape are one of the most dominant themes emanating from the antifeminist activist groups (Gotell and Dutton, 2016). It is precisely this kind of climate that leads to the underreporting of rape as institutional processes serve to discourage victims from reporting.[11]

Studies have found that people exhibiting high levels of sexism tend to exhibit high levels of heterosexism, homophobia, and racism, and also are more likely to hold false beliefs about rape (Aosved and Long, 2006; Suarez and Gadalla, 2010). Victims of sexual assault who are raised in the same culture also exhibit adherence to rape myths (Davies, 2002; Hammond, Berry, and Rodriguez, 2011). While antifeminists may see themselves as the true victims and vulnerable to a type of reverse gender discrimination, their fears concerning feminism operate within a system of queerphobia, sexism, and racism. No amount of social science research or statistics can combat institutionalized racism or oppositional sexism if core cultural misperceptions about identity are not addressed.

To emphasize sexual orientation or suggest that researchers should examine sexual violence from a Queer(ed) perspective is not a threat to the scholarly contributions of those whose focus is on the gender dynamics of rape, nor should this approach be interpreted as a need to overemphasize the role of sexual orientation. We simply cannot envision studying sexual violence from any other vantage point than one that acknowledges the complexities and social meaning of sexual violence beyond gender. Sexual violence is about power, but if the frame is heteronormative and women centered, involving oppositional sexism, we overlook the mechanism of power. When sexual orientation was accounted for in our Identity Inclusive Sexual Assault Myth Scale (Chapter 5), we found that it predicted higher levels and a much wider breadth of rape myth acceptance than the traditional rape myth scale (which presumes an opposite-sex encounter in which the man is the offender and the woman is the victim). In other words, cultural ideas about identity and sexuality are present in conversation about sexual violence, either implicitly or explicitly.

Queer theory, then, can involve the study of the aforementioned identities but is not exclusively limited to sexual orientation and gender

and, especially, not limited to the micro level of analysis. Institutions can be gendered and/or queered, thus resulting in gendered/queered outcomes.[12] The study of sexual violence, like the study of gender, can be focused on the micro or the macro level as long as it is situated in an analysis that respects the fluidity and influence of social structures that are visible at both levels. Finally, and in the spirit of West and Zimmerman's (1987) depiction of gender as an active verb and an adjective ("doing gender" and something "being gendered"), we continue the tradition of viewing sexual orientation as not just a descriptor of who someone *is* but also what someone *does* (for an excellent example, see Halperin's *How to Be Gay* [2012], examining the ways in which culture shapes sexual expression via existing norms and understandings of identity). For the purposes of this book, we contend that sexual assault services are not identity neutral and tend to be heteronormative in construction and in practice.

Why Queer Theories of Power?

Feminist and critical theorists' emphasis on power in rape culture is as relevant today as ever. Take for instance the case of Brock Turner, a Stanford University swimmer who, in 2016, received a 6-month jail sentence for raping an unconscious woman. Grimly suggestive of a bygone era, the victim was questioned about her sexual history, her manner of dress, and her behavior that night (as taken from the victim impact statement). She was treated with suspicion because the crime was rape and because of her gender, because of her sexual expression, and because cultural perceptions of gender and sexuality dictate that these were responsible for her rape. Despite the national uproar, the largely sympathetic response from the public and the media, a prosecutor who expressed that he had never read a more "eloquent victim impact statement," and the father of the rapist being widely criticized for his statement "that [his son's sentence] is a steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action out of his 20 plus years of life," the victim's rape was not treated as a serious crime by the judge.[13] This case demonstrates that feminist concerns with dispelling myths centered on gender and rape not only are still relevant, but they may be as pressing as they were at the time of the second women's movement. Any longevity of societal rape myths was illustrated by the notable presence of puritanical gender role beliefs as well as the high social standing of the offender.[14]

As survivors' voices grow in strength and number, so do the voices of those who have much to gain from a system that relies on the silence of the oppressed. Collins (1990) describes this as the "politics of suppression" "because the seeming absence of dissent suggests that subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization" (p. 3). We argue that it is not enough to say that rape is about power because such a claim is too sterile and too simplistic. We must define *power* in this context and how it is wielded. Furthermore, we must recognize that the same processes that devalue women also devalue people of different genders and gender expressions, and sexual orientations.

Scholarly writing that focuses on the gender dynamic of rape without the recognition of gender as a social construct subconsciously reinforces binary stereotypes of gender and sexual orientation. As Harris (2000) argues, the criminal justice system and its workers are defined by a heteronormative masculinity and by valuing violence that renders certain acts against citizens acceptable (e.g., normalizing prison rape) as long as they conform to the dominant worldview. At this point we should emphasize that the criminal justice system, as well as some academics in the field, has long treated the queer community as criminals by virtue of their sexual orientation (Lenning and Buist, 2015; Munro, Hines, and Osborne, 2017). "Rape" contains many value-laden messages that are heavily steeped in beliefs about sexuality (Millet, 1969, p. 50). Rape in prison can act to feminize and emasculate and even cause the victim to question their own sexuality (Buchanan, 2010). Radical thinkers and feminist writers have challenged the notion that real rape only happens because of deranged or perhaps even confused individuals. This normalization of the criminal and, thus, the crime is a consequence of a rape culture in which (typically male) offenders are shrouded from responsibility.

Of Theory and Methods

A comprehensive treatise of this topic must be interdisciplinary but should not be confined solely to the social sciences. Simone de Beauvoir, who in 1949 presented the seminal treatise of how gender is socially constructed and feminine traits and characteristics are undervalued, was among the first to stress the outsider perspective and has influenced modern theorists from the 1960s to the present day. Outsider status does not immediately confer the ability to see reality, as it requires

the person or group to be self-aware, nor does it automatically make one critical of existing norms and power structures. As Beauvoir points out, a woman has the opportunity for enlightenment as she exists at the margins but is certainly not conferred this opportunity by gender status alone. Theoretical approaches such as Queer theory eschew traditional theories that offer the mode through which this can be accomplished.

Queer theory, with an intellectual background in postmodernism (i.e., Michel Foucault), posits that the world is socially constructed, in constant flux, and, therefore, understood as more of a dynamic process than a static reality as commonly treated in the social sciences (Spargo, 1999). Queer theorists question the gender binary and resist exclusive categorization by identity markers such as sexual orientation (e.g., Butler, 1990). Its originators come from a variety of disciplines, including poetry, literature, and film studies (Jagose, 1997; B. Rich, 1997; Sedgwick, 1990) and political philosophy (Butler, 1990), but have all been considered either feminist or feminist-influenced scholars. Queer theory had its roots in feminism and, for many scholars, Queer theory is a natural extension of feminist theories. However, this association or intellectual collusion and respect between feminist and queer thought have not been uniform across disciplines.

Queer criminologists have demonstrated the criminal justice system's proclivity to render queer persons and their actions as criminal and, paradoxically, that criminologists have also contributed to this type of queer erasure (Ball, 2014b; Lenning and Buist, 2015; Woods, 2014). While other disciplines bemoan the lack of sexual orientation in queer analyses (ironically in the area that can be said was its birthplace, composition and rhetoric studies; see Alexander and Wallace, 2009), criminology has, according to Love (2015), a long history of defining Queer studies as "deviance studies." Queer criminology has not shied away from sexual orientation, but perhaps due to the nascence of this field, much of the work has focused on queer communities as victims of hate crimes or victims of police violence. To this point, Queer researchers have not explored much beyond hate- and identity-based crimes. Feminist criminology, on the other hand, has yet to fully embrace Queer theory as a "new direction" or natural extension of feminist work in this area (Burgess-Proctor, 2006).

Queer criminology did not emerge in opposition to feminist criminology, but it certainly has created a space for critique of feminist women-centered analyses (Lenning and Buist, 2015). Both Queer and feminist criminologists have been influenced by critical criminology

and critical race as well as feminist theories outside the discipline. Though power and sexuality are closely aligned, they rarely are studied in tandem (Lenning and Buist, 2015). It follows, then, that discussions of sexual orientation and power should seamlessly fit into feminist scholarship, particularly given the disproportionately high risk of victimization in the queer community (Rothman, Exner, and Baughman, 2011; Stotzer, 2009; Walters, Chen, and Breiding, 2013).

Outline of the Book

In this book we consider all forms of sexual violence (e.g., penetrative and nonpenetrative; same-sex and opposite-sex; relational, acquaintance, and stranger), but our emphasis is on the victims' experiences, particularly in the disclosure process, as we believe this provides a more helpful depiction of the problem of sexual assault and how society can better address it. Therefore, in our discussion, the perpetrator is relatively unimportant. The chapters that follow demonstrate that sexual violence is a reflection of power dynamics in which both gender identity and sexual orientation are critical to understanding the experience from the victim's perspective.

People are more likely to support and follow laws that they believe in (Tyler and Darley, 2000). In a data-driven society, operational definitions are paramount to establishing a level of evidence sufficient to promote action. Though antifeminist movements tend to discount statistics (Gotell and Dutton, 2016), it is now common knowledge that women are disproportionately targeted and victimized by male-perpetrated sexual violence. Moreover, statistics are needed to underscore the importance of the problem. Lenning and Buist (2015) call for more quantitative research in Queer criminology, but before such research can be carried out, we need depth and insight that can be gained only from qualitative data (a point further discussed in Chapter 2). Qualitative interviews involving sexual minorities, whether they address the sexual activities of gay-identified men (Rao and Sarma, 2009) or lesbian women in violent relationships (Ristock, 2002, 2013), are relatively new. While both of the studies cited above are qualitative in the sense that interviews are the data, they arguably do not apply a qualitative methodology. In Chapter 2, we describe how we selected our interview respondents from a larger sample that participated in a quantitative study. Then, we describe the backgrounds and identities of the respondents whose perspectives and

experiences are featured in this book. Thus far, we have been deliberate in our use of the word "rape" and cautious in our use of "sexual assault," as their conceptual complexities and the implications of such ambiguity are one of the primary themes of this book. Chapter 2 illustrates the lack of clarity in definitions, even in legal codes. The specific acts that constitute rape and sexual assault vary by person, community, and context. The chapter presents results in answer to seemingly simple questions: How does one define rape? What is sexual assault? The answers provided by our respondents are informative in understanding the experience of sexual minorities but also are useful for a broader understanding of sexual assault.

The current heteronormative conceptualizations of sex, sexuality, and violence are inadequate in describing even the heterosexual victim's experience and often serve to undermine even the most seemingly "perfect" victim. As Girshick (2002) writes, "Sexual violence thrives on secrecy" (p. 8), and disclosing and sharing these experiences can be empowering. Queer communities are vulnerable given that their very existence is often threatened. Hence, queer-identified persons may remain purposefully closeted[15] in at least some contexts (e.g., at work or among certain family members), and thus their experiences often are not translatable in a heteronormative system of understanding. In Chapter 3, we turn to the experiences of sexual violence within our sample of interview participants. Queer-identified individuals disproportionately experience sexual assault, but in some jurisdictions their experiences are subject to dismissal by legal codes that do not recognize these experiences as assaults (Erni, 2013), suspicion by practitioners who do not believe their assault occurred (Seelman, 2015), a public that is mired in misconceptions about sexual assault (Verberg et al., 2000), and even the queer community itself (Coxell and King, 2010).

A pervasive, persistent, and problematic set of beliefs known as *rape myths* are a symptom and product of rape culture. They serve to undermine victim credibility and lessen offender culpability. Sexual orientation has received little empirical attention as a potential contributor to rape myth ideology. This oversight is surprising because researchers have, for decades, pointed out that sex and sexual assault are often conflated, a fact that promotes the perseverance of rape myths (Burt, 1980; Gavey, 2005). Our primary focus in Chapter 4 is on assessing, via our participants' perceptions, the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS; McMahon and Farmer, 2011), the most widely used rape myth instrument for assessing these beliefs. Participants were asked

how relevant these rape myths were to their community and to comment on their applicability to all communities.

After an in-depth discussion of the IRMAS, respondents were asked to identify rape myths that were not represented on the IRMAS instrument, especially myths that are perpetuated within or about Queer communities and their members. The insights gained from these interviews, outlined in Chapter 5, formed the basis of a new rape myth instrument that is more representative of the experiences of the Queer community than traditional measures. This new scale, the Identity Inclusive Sexual Assault Myth Scale, is presented in full in Chapter 5. This scale was tested on university students, who also completed the IRMAS, lesser-known rape myth questions, and a number of demographic questions to assess reliability and validity.

Each chapter of this book demonstrates that both gender and sexual orientation identity impact the way that an individual experiences the world as well as how the individual is perceived and treated. Chapter 6 identifies and discusses specific concerns related to sexual assault unique to each group within the queer community, and it contains suggestions for how to address these unique concerns and provide appropriate prevention and response services for all communities and for all victims of sexual assault.

Summary

Sexual violence is a deeply personal experience, but it should also be recognized as part of a larger system that is raced, classed, Queer(ed), and gendered. The cultural understanding of sexual violence is inseparable from how a culture understands and values sexuality, sexual orientation, and freedom of sexual expression, and how these are historically situated. That is precisely what rape culture does—it downplays, devalues, and renders sexual violence, and its concomitant institutional features, invisible despite the very real consequences of these acts for those who experience them.

This book is a departure from the existing research in its theoretical and methodological approach, but it would have been an impossible undertaking without feminist theories of rape and gender roles. This work has had many influences and would not have been possible if it were not for the different academic backgrounds of the authors that allowed for a broader range of work from which to draw. In short, this book is an example of interdisciplinary work at its finest as it joins a

variety of disciplines, theoretical approaches (i.e., Queer, Black feminist, feminist theory), and social scientific methods. Most importantly, it places the lived experiences of the individuals who shared their experiences and insights at its center.

Notes

1. We rely on Serano's (2007) *Whipping Girl* for many of our definitions (though note that her website offers some updates on terminology (see http:// www.juliaserano.com/whippinggirl.html). Notably, Serano's trans woman identity, her extensive background in genetics and developmental biology (a PhD in biochemistry and molecular biophysics), her artistic expression as a musician, and her activism on behalf of trans, queer, and feminist issues demonstrate the complementary confluence of identities rather than oppositional theoretical and political identities.

2. Queer criminologists Lenning and Buist (2015) define *heteronormativity* as being "formal and informal systems of cultural bias that favor heterosexuality" (p. xvii). *Heteronormative* can also be used to describe individual-level observations and/or actions. An example of this usage could be as follows: "some scholars' work is heteronormative in the sense that sexual orientation is not collected as a variable." This is akin to what occurred for decades in the field of criminology, where maleness was so presumed that the sex of survey participants was not even reported (Belknap, 1996). Our definition is closer to that of Queer scholars of rhetoric. Alexander and Wallace (2009) define *heteronormative* as "the umbrella concept that refers to the set of cultural values and practices that presumes that LGBT sexual identities are abnormal" (p. 306). Serano (2007) clarifies the preference for the term *oppositional sexism* (vs. heterosexism) writing that "the idea that women and men are 'opposite' sexes" creates a situation in which "assumptions and stereotypes . . . are differently applied to each sex" (p. 209).

3. We base our understanding of patriarchy on A. Johnson's (1997) conceptualization that describes such a society as male centered, male identified, and male dominated. Johnson distinguishes between biological sex and gender and also argues that the mere presence of women is not enough to change culture (e.g., police departments can be described as patriarchal despite the presence of female officers). See also Allen's (1990) discussion of how this institutionalization occurs via state processes. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we rely on Millet (1969), who provides arguably the most comprehensive understanding of patriarchy, particularly in the area of violence.

4. Crenshaw (1989) first utilized intersectionality to explain how race and gender are often treated as distinct identities in the legal system. Black women, for instance, might be omitted from decisions benefiting women or decisions benefiting Black men. Crenshaw demonstrates how the law has had difficulty recognizing that it is at this intersection that discrimination occurs. Someone might be discriminated against precisely because one is both Black and female. Since then, intersectionality has been used to include a number of other social identity markers, such as sexual orientation, in extralegal areas of discrimination. Decisions such as the one in *People v. Rodriguez* (64 Cal. Rptr. 253, 1967), which made "homosexual panic" a defense to assault and murder, can be viewed through an intersectional lens (e.g., straight men's fears of gay men's sexuality).

5. We occasionally utilize the term *queerphobia* instead of the more commonly used term *homophobia* as a matter of preference and in keeping with Serano's

(2007) differentiation between oppositional sexism and heterosexism. Our under-
standing of the term is in line with how some Queer theorists use the term *homo-
phobia*. Alexander and Wallace (2009) say that homophobia is "to refer to overt,
intended acts that directly challenge or threaten the existence of LBGT people and
practices" (p. 9). In other words, we recognize that homophobia can also be inclu-
sive of describing bi- and transphobia, for example.

    6. On the other hand, we do not think we are "shackled by scientific discourse"
(Ferguson, 2013, p. 1) and endeavor to retain a critical theoretical focus, as Fergu-
son argues, though we do not necessarily agree with the assertion that "Queer the-
ory and qualitative methodologies could very well be fused" (p. 5).

    7. Tuerkheimer (2014) identified SlutWalks as one of the more powerful critiques
of rape culture. As Schulze (2008) writes of social movements, "They are struggles
against the political status quo and are identifiable by the nature of their discontent
and their observable manifestation in a given society, which can be operationalized,
for example, by the form of protests or policy changes demanded" (pp. 78–79).

    8. It should be noted that some sociobiologists still espouse the "natural" origins
of rape as part of a socioevolutionary perspective that sees men's need to procreate
as an explanation. For an excellent discussion, see Lori Girshick's (2002) critique,
Woman-to-Woman Sexual Violence: Does She Call It Rape?, of Randy Thornhill and
Craig Palmer's (2000) *A Natural History of Rape*.

    9. It is widely accepted among feminist scholars that rape serves a broader, more
malevolent function than the attack of a few persons, but this is not widely understood
by the public. Take war, for example, in which rape can be an institutional or state-
sponsored mode of oppression. Popular accounts of war, while recognizing rapes were
serious and widespread, tend to overlook the systematic nature of wartime rapes.
Feminist writing has exposed the absurdity of seeing rape as simply a casualty of war:
accidental but inevitable, unfortunate but forgettable (e.g., Enloe, 2000; Muscio,
2002). Rape is not something that just happens in wartime and is executed in myriad
ways, whether it is used as a form of torture or as a method of colonization.

    10. Scholarly work on antifeminist men's rights activism is limited, but see
Gotell and Dutton's (2016) qualitative study of men's rights activism on the Internet.

    11. Take, for example, what occurred under the Obama administration's effort to
combat sexual violence. Reports of sexual assault have actually gone down (as low
as an annual 0 in many universities). Importantly, this is a system designed to serve
(heterosexual) female victims.

    12. Collins (1990) writes of the "matrix of domination," which elaborates on
how intersecting identities are institutionalized (p. 18).

    13. This case has been widely reported. See, for instance, the CNN report on his
case and the public's response (Fantz, 2016).

    14. Repo's (2016) *The Biopolitics of Gender* traces the history of the scientific
study of gender and demonstrates how feminists of the 1970s, and consequently
governmental policies, came to conflate gender with "female." Repo's exposition of
gender studies as being rooted in studies of intersex and transsexual persons is par-
ticularly illuminating.

    15. As Knopp (1994) writes, "Closeting is the construction of these experiences
as private and the marking out, by those experiencing them [queer desire], of them-
selves (and the spaces they inhabit) as alien" (p. 655). As some have long said (e.g.,
Goltmakor, 1992), the decision to remain in the closet can, however, confer a cer-
tain amount of power and be used strategically on the part of the individual.