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# Uncovering oppression within the anti-rape movement : the role of race in the reporting experiences of adult Black female rape survivors

Amy Rebecca Hochberg

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Amy Rebecca Hochberg  
Uncovering Oppression within  
the Anti-Rape Movement:  
The Role of Race in the  
Reporting Experiences of Adult  
Black Female Rape Survivors

### ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore how the oppressions of race and gender intersect within the experiences of Black female survivors in the anti-rape movement, specifically in the experience of reporting rape. The experiences of twelve helping professionals, who work with Black female survivors, were collected to determine the prevalence of discrimination within the anti-rape movement and to examine how anti-oppression training could improve services for survivors of sexual violence. The first-hand experience of one survivor further enhanced an understanding of how discrimination affects the reporting experiences of rape survivors.

Thirteen individual interviews were conducted with one survivor, seven helping professionals who work within the anti-rape movement, and five professionals who work at other agencies that provide services for survivors of sexual violence. The helping professionals were interviewed regarding their knowledge of the discrimination their clients had experienced while attempting to access services after experiencing rape. They were also questioned about whether they had received specific training regarding interventions with survivors with racial identities different from their own.

Study findings show that, within the anti-rape movement, resistance to acknowledging discrimination is pervasive and is strongest in agencies with few women of color on staff. Findings prove a correlation between awareness of intersecting systems of oppression, the experience of anti-oppression training, and agencies that were staffed and led primarily by women of color. This study points to the necessary adoption of an anti-oppression lens, in order to more effectively work with survivors of sexual violence, especially Black female rape survivors.

UNCOVERING OPPRESSION WITHIN THE ANTI-RAPE MOVEMENT:  
THE ROLE OF RACE IN THE REPORTING EXPERIENCES OF  
ADULT BLACK FEMALE RAPE SURVIVORS

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2007

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to the countless women in our world who have experienced sexual violence and whose courage and strength is a testament to the power of human resilience. May our children's children inherit a world where racism and sexual violence can only be found in history books.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“The oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those boundaries. Nor do the reservoirs of our ancient power know these boundaries, either. To deal with one without even alluding to the other is to distort our commonality as well as our difference.”

Audre Lorde

(written May 6, 1979 to Mary Daly, published 2002)

Race is a socially-created system of classification (Omi and Winant, 1994) by which our society characterizes individuals into either “us” or “other.” Omi and Winant (1994) explain that “[i]n many respects, race is gendered and gender is racialized” (p.68). Though race and gender, as two pervasive systems of oppression, are usually examined and challenged on separate ground, their intertwined presence is evidenced in the imposition of barriers and systematic discrimination of women of color. This is particularly clear when we examine the experiences of women of color who are also survivors of sexual violence.

Gender-based violence is a wide-spread phenomenon that affects women in all countries, of all classes and colors, ages and sexual orientations. Many survivors of sexual violence face social stigma and shame as a result of their assault and, because of socially-created stereotypes about rape, countless are blamed for the violence that was perpetrated upon them. For women of color who experience sexual violence, the stigmatization that is felt by many survivors of rape is compounded by the oppression and discrimination that is already imposed upon them as a result of their racial identity. As a consequence of the unique historical context that Black women exist in, in our society,



Black female rape survivors confront an especially complex intersection of racial and gender oppressions (Crenshaw, 1995). Despite this complex intersection of oppressions, Black female survivors are in a position of invisibility within the feminist movement because the movement focuses on gender oppression and neglects the oppressions of race and class (King, 1990).

The study that is the subject of this report focused on the intersection of race and gender, within the experiences of Black females in the anti-rape movement, through the following research question: what role does race play in the reporting experiences of Black female rape survivors? It explored the first-hand experience of one Black female survivor who chose to report her assault, as well as the experiences of female helping professionals who work with this population. Data were collected through the use of qualitative individual interviews which explored the experiences of Black female survivors and the discrimination they faced both within the anti-rape movement and on the part of other service-providing agencies. These interviews also explored the degree to which professionals receive training on effective interventions with survivors of a diversity of racial identifications. The experience and invaluable insights of one survivor, which were collected in a separate interview, enrich the findings of the study. The experience of this survivor, while not necessarily representative of all Black female survivors, brings an important perspective that corroborates many of the perspectives of the professional respondents.

This study sought to explore the actions and systems of discrimination and oppression of this very vulnerable population. It is my hope that the findings of this study will benefit individuals and organizations alike who purport to belong to the anti-

rape movement yet who continue to deny the pervasiveness of discrimination against survivors of color, particularly Black women.

It is also hoped that this study brings attention to the importance of anti-racism and anti-oppression training for service providers and points to the significant discrepancies between conceptual perspectives and real-world service provision.

Finally, even though small in scope, it is hoped that this study helps to give a voice to the countless survivors of color whose experiences of discrimination, by the very movement that claims to advocate for them, often silence them and hinder their journey of healing.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In embarking upon the present study, it was important to first examine the literature mapping the social context in which Black female rape survivors exist, what factors might influence their decisions to report rape, as well as their experiences of reporting sexual violence. First and foremost, it was necessary to examine the historically-raced social context in which Black women live. Through the literature, it was important to describe commonly held myths about rape in order to establish a framework in which to understand the complex network of beliefs that a survivor might encounter when reporting rape. Examining literature about the stereotypes of Black women and their sexuality can help to understand the particular historical and social context that Black women, and specifically Black female survivors of rape, must combat in their journey of healing. Individual women might be affected differently by myths and stereotypes, so it is important to consider the various ways in which these myths might affect a Black female survivor's experience and her decision to report or to remain silent. Statistics are provided from studies, illustrating that while rape and attempted rape is underreported across all populations, Black females in particular are less likely to report rape than are their white counterparts. Lastly, it was imperative to examine literature about how these myths and stereotypes permeate the social environment in which the survivor exists. This affects the helping professionals, law enforcement, friends, and

family, who she might turn to for support, and their internalization of these myths and stereotypes influence the disclosure experience.

*A Racialized State of Existence*

Omi and Winant (1994) propose the following definition: “race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (p.55). Thus, the authors reduce race to the appearance of human bodily characteristics which are assigned social preference and status through the course of “a social and historical process” (1994, p.55). This procedure, defined by Omi and Winant (1994) as “racial formation” is “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p.55). Race, then, is a sociological concept that has been created by humans to generate organization and power structures within society—and which has no biological basis beyond the cultural meaning which humans have assigned to it (Omi and Winant, 1994).

When Europeans first landed in the New World and encountered the indigenous Americans, their conceptualization of race enabled the Europeans to see indigenous Americans as “its ‘Others’”—putting in place a power dynamic which initiated the exploitation of, and Europeans’ superior control over, the indigenous Americans (Omi and Winant, 1994, p.62). Seizure and slavery of the indigenous Americans created a raced organization of society in which Europeans had the authority and power and felt they were entitled to the bodies, labor, and land of the indigenous Americans (Omi and Winant, 1994). Europeans were considered to be “children of God, full-fledged human beings”—distinguished from “Others” who were exploitable, expendable property (Omi and Winant, 1994, p.62). The Europeans’ conquering of the New World paved their path

to enslave, exploit, and exterminate people, considered to be “Others,” throughout the world—including Africans whose lineages would forever be changed by organized slave trade (Omi and Winant, 1994). With the advent of the dichotomized Europeans and “Others” came racism, which Omi and Winant (1994) define as a “combination of relationships—prejudice, discrimination, and institutional inequality” (p.69). When some humans, and the presumed characteristics associated with them, were preferred over other humans and their presumed characteristics, racism became the systemic organization that bestows preferential treatment, property, and rights upon the former group and denies such treatment, property, and rights to the later. Lindsey (1970) adds the following explanation: “Classification and categorizations of groups of people by other groups have always been for the benefit of the group who is doing the classifying and to the detriment of the classified group” (p.85).

Today race and racism continue to permeate the social constructs of our country. Race is an inextricable aspect of our individual identities and social relationships (Omi and Winant, 1994), influencing how individuals experience the world and interact with each other. Race is one of the initial characteristics by which we classify a person who is new to our world, and we utilize this elementary classification to organize our social environment and to give us information about who we expect this new individual to be (Omi and Winant, 1994). Similarly, we are conditioned to understand “some version, of the rules of racial classification” (Omi and Winant, 1994, p.60) and where we, as raced individuals, fit into the racialized social schema. We carry “preconceived notions of a racialized social structure” and we presuppose that people we encounter will act according to what we know and expect of their racial identity (Omi and Winant, 1994,

p.59). Stereotypes and mythic images, such as those of Black women which will be discussed below, are created to produce these preconceived notions, as well as to justify and perpetuate racist, sexist, and classist oppression (Collins, 2000). Race “is also an irreducible component of collective identities and social structures” (Omi and Winant, 1994, p.138). Race has so profoundly affected the creation, construction, and organization of our country, that it is historically connected to the social structuring of our country and all of the individuals who are members of that structure. Each individual possesses not only her own experience in our raced society, but bears the weight of the collective, racialized history of our culture.

### *The Intersection of Race and Gender*

As powerful a determinant of social structure is race, gender is equally as influential in creating social classifications and order in our society. Taken together, these two categories are not separate and fixed but interacting and intersecting in a multitude of ways (Hamer and Neville, 2001; King, 1990; Omi and Winant, 1994; West, 1999). Hamer and Neville (2001) note that these categories also intersect with “culture, sociohistorical context, and self-activity” (p.440) in shaping the experience of the individual. Taken not only as two systems of social classification, but also as two configurations of oppression, “[i]n many respects, race is gendered and gender is racialized” (Omi and Winant, 1994, p.68). The intersection of race and gender creates systems and structures of oppression that organize our society, including schools, prisons, law enforcement, and work and family roles, as well as the physical environment, created to separate people of different races, and men from women, and to prevent equal access and participation of oppressed peoples (Hamer and Neville, 2001). From which

categories of race, gender, and socioeconomic status an individual emerges determines where in these systems and structures she or he will be placed by society—women of color, especially poor, Black women, are particularly vulnerable to social and economic exploitation in these systems (Hamer and Neville, 2001). “It is the depth of degradation to be socially manipulated, physically raped, used to undermine your own household, and to be powerless to reverse this syndrome” (Beale, 1970, p.92).

The oppression of Black people and the oppression of women have been assumed to describe the experiences of Black women, when it is more accurate to assess that discussion of the oppression of Black people has focused upon Black men and that of the oppression of women has been focused upon white women (Crenshaw, 1995; King, 1990; Simmons, 2006). Assumptions of the experiences of Black women, based upon analysis of the experiences of Black men and white women, are another way in which Black women are oppressed—they are not seen in the unique context created by the intersection of race and gender (King, 1990). This is evidenced in the feminist movement which assumes the experiences of Black women to be the same as those of white women and, therefore, holds Black women in a position of invisibility because the movement focuses on the oppression of gender and denies the impact of race and class (King, 1990). It is apparent that Black women and white women are looked at differently and treated differently by individuals within their social context, particularly in terms of their sexuality: “Where the white woman is the wife, the Black woman is the mother on welfare and the bearer of future workers for the state; where the white woman is the call girl or mistress, the Black woman is the street prostitute...while white females are sexual objects, Black women are sexual laborers” (Lindsey, 1970, p.88). Crenshaw (1995)

asserts that while both Black and white women have had to contend with the good girl/bad girl dichotomy, a difference remains in that “Black women continue to be judged by who they are, not by what they do” (p.373). King (1990) proposes the term “multiple jeopardy” to explain that the oppressive demarcations of race, gender, and socioeconomic status are not additive, but, rather, “interdependent control systems,” (p.270) the collective effects of which are not the same as when each system stands alone. From a similar perspective, Crenshaw (1995) utilizes the term “intersectionality to describe the location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism” (p.367). Acts of violence, especially sexualized violence, “are the visible dimensions of a more generalized, routinized system of oppression” (Collins, 2000, p.146).

This multiple jeopardy is evident in understanding the experiences of Black female rape survivors who are attempting to process and make sense of their experiences within their socio-historical context. Collins (2000) explains how the sexuality of Black women is regulated and oppressed by each of the intersecting layers of oppression, conveying sexual meaning upon Black women’s bodies and explicating the acts and systems that violate Black women. More so than in other arenas of identity, this intersection of oppressions is especially evident in Black women’s sexuality because of the deep impact that gender expectations, racial identity, and classist oppression have upon sexuality in the social realm (Collins, 2000), as well as the simultaneous privacy and uniqueness that sexuality has to the individual. As Black women are believed to be sexually deviant (a social myth that will be discussed below), and stereotypes are used to classify what is “normal” and deviant, good and bad, Black women become



“prepackaged as bad women in cultural narratives” (Crenshaw, 1995, p.369). West (1999) explains that the stereotypes of Black people and of women (discussed below) compound each other within the Black woman and how the shame and self-blame felt by most survivors of abuse (also discussed below) work to reinforce these stereotypes within her psyche: “racialized self-blame assures women that their inherent inferiority legitimates their racial subjugation” (p.72). Bearing the weight of multiple systems of oppression, as well as the resistance and coping skills each individual develops to survive oppression, has a significant effect upon how a Black woman defines herself, how she relates to others (King, 1990), and how she copes with traumas like sexual violence.

The social expectations of a Black woman land her in a bind between the social expectations of women and the expectations of a member of the Black community (Crenshaw, 1995; West, 1999). As a Black woman she is expected, by her community, to be strong and unyielding regardless of the hurdles she might face and, many times, to put the interests of her family and community before her self-interests, even if this mandate means that she can not acknowledge abuse (Collins, 2000; West, 1999). For many Black women who are survivors of rape, even admitting the pain and suffering they have felt, as a result of the abuse, seems shameful to them and a disappointment to their community (West, 1999). West (1999) explains that for Black women who have experienced rape, a “distorting, subordinating blend of racial and gender assumptions may be embedded in her reactions” (p.85). That is, a sense of obligation to the Black community may initiate a self-silencing, and shame of an intimate assault may reinforce the bottling up of her own needs (West, 1999). If she is a Black woman who is also struggling financially then she must also face issues of her own, and her family’s, financial well-being which may

either be caused by or exacerbated by her assault (West, 1999). If she or her family is financially dependent upon her abuser, and she does not have the socioeconomic resources to end this relationship of control, she may be forced into silence to protect her and her family's financial security (McNair and Neville, 1996; West, 1999). Many Black women also receive messages from the community about tolerating abusive men if it means that they can hold together an honorable household, where the children have a father-figure and there is a male bread-winner (West, 1999).

### *Societal Rape Myths*

Though much work has been done in the field of sexual violence awareness and prevention, we are forced to examine what “makes it still so difficult to identify rape as a crime and perceive sexually assaulted women as innocent and traumatized victims” (Frese, Moya, and Megías, 2004, p.144). Our society has long circulated stereotypic ideas about whom and what is involved in a rape. Those rape myths include the victim being a white female who physically struggles to fight off her male attacker—a stranger who surprises the woman in a deserted but public location (DuMont, Miller, and Myhr, 2003). Other myths are that a woman could fight off a rapist if she wanted to, that a rape survivor had asked to be assaulted, that good girls do not get assaulted, and women who claim to have been raped are attempting to conceal a bad decision (Burt, 1980). The stereotypical perpetrator is a visibly strong man, with dark skin, whose uncontrollable sexual appetites leave him lusting after white women (Crenshaw, 1995; George and Martínez, 2002). The “rape of a Black woman does not fit into the image of real rape” (Evancic, Foley, Karnik, King, and Parks, 1995, p.9). Rape myths explain that the reliable victim is not sexually experienced and has had no prior sexual relationship with

the perpetrator. Though date rape or acquaintance rape is common, the stereotypes about what constitutes a “real rape” frequently make reports of date rape disbelieved (Evancic et al., 1995). Early laws regarding the prosecution of rape were created around the myth that bad girls are raped, forcing a survivor of rape to prove that she actively resisted the assault and, thus, putting the woman on trial to prove her own innocence (Crenshaw, 1995). While the perpetuation of rape myths creates a culture in which survivors, many times, struggle to be heard and believed about their experiences of violence, the historical and social context in which a Black female rape survivor exists is built upon historically-derived stereotypes about her identity as a sexual being, which impede her ability to thrive as a survivor.

#### *Historical Context of the Stereotypes of Black Women’s Sexuality*

Whether or not they experience sexual violence, Black women carry the burden of a long history of sexualized stereotypes which portray them as promiscuous, sensuous, and much more sexual than white women (Davis, 1981; George and Martínez, 2002). This mythic legacy can be traced to the objectification and sexual violence Black female slaves experienced in voyeuristic naked examinations on the auction block and in the rape and forced breeding that many faced when demands were made to replenish the slave population (Donovan and Williams, 2002; Lerner, 1972; McNair and Neville, 1996; Hamer and Neville, 2001; Omolade, 1995; West, 1999; West, 2006). Many of the captured African women endured rape on their voyage to the new world, before they had even been sold into slavery (West, 2006). Rape was an institutionalized aspect of slavery—as much a part of the social dynamics between an owner and his female slaves as was the whip and lash (Davis, 1981). Lerner (1972) notes that the exploitation of

female slaves' sexuality was a practice as old as the social organization of classes, that occurs in every culture, regardless of the racial composition of the people. Female slaves suffered and endured torture for rejecting the sexual advances of their owners and, if they did not resist, female slaves were brutally punished by white women out of jealousy and frustration (Omolade, 1995). Slave owners staked their claim to female slaves' bodies as "a direct expression of their presumed property rights over Black people as a whole" (Davis, 1981, p.175; Omolade, 1995). A white owner regarded the sensuality of his sexual property to be, "according to his own cultural definitions of sex, nudity, and blackness as base, foul, and bestial" (Omolade, 1995, p.362). Despite this widespread belief, "both [B]lack men and [B]lack women lived sexually conservative lives characterized by modesty and discretion" (p.370) to the extent that events of sexual violence were not discussed among the families of female slaves (Omolade, 1995). White men's unauthorized, unconstrained claim to Black female bodies directly stems from the limitless economic exploitation and authority that defined the racialized slavery in our country (Davis, 1981; Omolade, 1995). As race was defined by the purity of bloodlines, the control slave owners held over the bodies and sexuality of female slaves allowed white owners to maintain secure boundaries between races (Collins, 2000). White owners controlled all that was sacred in both their culture and that of their slaves: they controlled the bodies, sexuality, and motherhood of female slaves, and Black women were left with no jurisdiction over their own bodies (Lerner, 1972; Omolade, 1995). The white masters' utilization of rape, to oppress and socially control Black female slaves, was rationalized by the stigmatizing belief that the female slaves were highly

promiscuous and uninhibited (Hamer and Neville, 2001; McNair and Neville, 1996; Smith, 1990).

Post-slavery the prevalence of sexual abuse upon Black women continued. While the bodies of white women were protected by law, it was not recognized as a punishable crime for a white man to rape a Black woman (Evancic et al., 1995; Hamer and Neville, 2001; Lerner, 1972; West, 2006). Additionally, intra-racial rape of Black women was not legally recognized as a crime (West, 2006). “The relative invisibility of [B]lack women victims of rape also reflects the differential value of women’s bodies” (Smith, 1990, p.275; also Crenshaw, 1995) in both post-Civil War society and in our present-day culture. Documented group rape of Black women by the Ku Klux Klan was utilized as a blatant weapon of terrorism to obstruct the progress towards Black equality (Davis, 1981; Hamer and Neville, 2001; Lerner, 1972; Smith, 1990; West, 2006). Testimony of the Memphis Riot in 1865 tells of widespread acts of sexual violence against Black women and girls, perpetrated by white men, including policemen (Davis 1981; Lerner 1972). Although the oppression of slavery could have drawn Black men and women together in a union of equality, “maleness and femaleness continued to be defined by patriarchal structures” (Omolade, 1995, p.373) and Black men retained social power and sexual control over Black women. Written anonymously by a southern Black woman in 1912: “We poor colored women wage-earners in the South are fighting a terrible battle...we are assailed by white men, and, on the other hand, we are assailed by black men, who should be our natural protectors, whether in the cook kitchen, at the washtub...behind the baby carriage...we are but little more than pack horses, beasts of burden, slaves!” (Lerner, 1972, p. 157). Washington (2001) states that in the 1960s “Black women began to

experience sexual victimization from Black men more frequently than from any other group” (p.1256) of men. Black women, who resisted this control by choosing social and sexual independence over the slavery of marriage and motherhood, were seen as confirming the beliefs of white men that Black women were hypersexual (Omolade, 1995). Just as individuals bear the weight of the collective, racialized history of our culture, (Collins, 2000; West, 2006) in “this country, Black women have manifested a collective consciousness of their sexual victimization,” which continues to persist today (Davis, 1981, p.183).

Black women are still depicted to be “unrapeable” because of the myth of their highly immoral, chronic pursuit of sexual fulfillment (Davis, 1981; Donovan and Williams, 2002; George and Martínez, 2002). Mythic images, like that of the seductive, promiscuous Jezebel, portray Black women as over-sexualized creatures who entice the sexual appetites of men (Collins, 2000; Donovan and Williams, 2002; Hamer and Neville, 2001; West, 2006). In contemporary culture, this image is represented by the sexually aggressive, racialized, sexually deviant “hoochie” that permeates hip-hop lyrics and street jargon (Collins, 2000). The image of Jezebel was created to justify the sexual abuses towards Black women: “Rape became the specific act of sexual violence forced on Black women, with the myth of the Black prostitute as its ideological justification” (Collins, 2000, p.147). Collins (2000) explains that the perpetuation of these stereotypes of Black women is not only evidence of the control that people in power have over this oppressed group of women, but stands as “ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression” (p.70) that Black women bear.

Social myths and stereotypes objectify Black women by creating their history, reality, and identity in a manner that subordinates them to a place of powerlessness, rather than allowing Black women to create their own histories, realities, and identities (hooks, 1989). Stereotypes of poor Black women who embezzle the welfare system to support the children, of absentee fathers, portray these women as manipulative, partaking players in their situation, instead of acknowledging the victimization they may have experienced from the systemic violence around them (West, 1999). The purpose of these stereotypes of Black women is not to depict reality but “to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable” (Collins, 2000, p.69). White (1994) suggests that our society has created stereotypes and expectations of Black women that are simultaneously “super- and sub-human” (p.94): Black women are looked upon as ignorant but manipulative, over-bearing in strength yet under the control of men, sexually inviting but dirty and repulsive. These perpetual double standards leave Black women so constrained by social expectations that individuals may battle with how they choose to present themselves to the world and cope with trauma. Stereotypes of Black females’ sexuality create a social context of barriers that survivors must confront in their journeys toward healing after the experience of trauma.

#### *Affect of Myths and Stereotypes on Black Female Survivors*

Experienced within the aforementioned racialized historical and social context, it is comprehensible how Black women and white women are affected differently by the experience of rape. “Racial history and rape myths thus make African American women more vulnerable to forced sexual encounters while simultaneously making accusations of

rape more difficult for them” (Evancic et al. 1995, p.15). While some sources state that reports of rape indicate comparable rates of sexual violence against Black women and white women, (Gordon and Riger, 1981; Neville, Heppner, Oh, Spanierman, and Clark, 2004; Wyatt, 1992), and others that Black women are victimized at a higher rate than white women (Collins, 2000), these sources agree that Black women perceive a greater threat of possible rape than do white women (Collins, 2000; Gordon and Riger, 1981; Neville et al., 2004; Wyatt, 1992). Neville et al. (2004) explain that Black women attribute this perceived threat of rape as an effect of their living environment. This perception is not unfounded: White (1994) reports FBI statistics noting Black females to be at a greater risk of being raped than any other social group. Black women report that if they were raped they would be less likely, than white women, to report the crime to the police (George and Martínez, 2002; McNair and Neville, 1996). The findings of a study by Evancic et al. (1995) support the perception of many Black women who believe that they will not be treated as victims of a serious crime if they report a rape. Rickert, Wiemann, and Vaughan (2005) present findings of their study, of a group of adolescent and young adult females, the majority of whom were women of color, who had experienced rape and/or attempted rape: less than 1% of their sample of 86 women had reported their assault and/or attempted assault to authorities. This prevalent disinclination to report is partially attributed to the woman’s discernment that she would not readily receive social support (George and Martínez, 2002). This reluctance is also based upon the historically strained relationship between law enforcement agencies and the Black community (Feldman-Summers and Ashworth, 1981; Washington, 2001; Wyatt, 1992). If an individual has a negative history of working with helping services,



including the police, she may be less likely to report her rape or seek out services (Washington, 2001). Chayet and Kidd (1984) state that many victims of crime do not report their victimization to authorities because of the emotional fear and anxiety from the incident, feelings of powerlessness towards the perpetrator and the criminal justice system, as well as fear that reporting a crime may lead to further victimization.

Historically, when Black women do report, the case against their rapist is less likely to be convicted than is a perpetrator who rapes a white woman (Crenshaw, 1995; George and Martínez, 2002). Crenshaw (1995) adds that this is also true in cases of intraracial rape, of which cases involving white victims are regarded with more gravity than are cases involving Black victims. In addition, if a woman is assaulted by a family member or someone she defines as being part of her community, this woman may be forced to face the betrayal of those close to her and “being physically severed from the only source of trustworthy community available to them” (West, 1999, p.59; also Crenshaw, 1995).

West (1999) explains that there are multiple ways in which Black female survivors are silenced rather than reporting their assault: they may not be heard, or may be ignored due to the overt and covert dispersal of stereotypes of Black women. Many times when survivors of abuse reach out for help they are ignored or shamed by social institutions who “can forbid a woman to interrupt their established order by naming the torment she has endured” (West, 1999, p.12). If a woman is raped by a partner or acquaintance, it is likely that her story will not be accepted as truth and that, as a result, she will not be supported by her friends or community (Evancic et al., 1995). West (1999) writes that survivors of abuse can also be silenced by the conflicting ideas about how she should act and react, which are imposed upon her by her abuser, her community,

and even individuals trying to come to her aid: overwhelmed by contradicting mandates upon her behavior, she is silenced. West (1999) describes how Black women who are raped can be shamed into silence because of the dualistic oppressions that they bear, and the stereotypes associated with being female and Black, which denote that the court system will paint her as a whore and prevent the community from showing her true empathy. Washington (2001) adds that Black female survivors of sexual violence may be silenced because of “inadequate or inappropriate sexuality socialization...belief in a ‘strong’ Black woman and ‘weak’ White woman dichotomy... and White domination of the helping professions” (p.1265). In Washington’s (2001) study of Black women’s disclosures of sexual violence, several study subjects spoke of growing up in families in which young girls were warned about men and possible perpetrators, yet sexuality was not spoken of and women grew up unable to recognize or name abuse or sexual violence. The women in this study spoke of a common belief that, as Black women, they needed to deal with sexual violence on their own and that asking for help would be shameful in the similarity to the weakness of white women (Washington, 2001).

Simmons (2006) and Smith (1990) explain that at the same time that Black women are the population most susceptible to rape and sexual violence, the pervasive silencing just discussed lends to this same population being the most invisible group of survivors of sexual abuse. Crenshaw (1995) presents a clear example of this invisibility: in 1989, the week that a white woman, the now infamous Central Park jogger was raped, there were twenty-eight other cases of sexual assault or attempted rape in New York City. These other cases of rape received little, if any, media attention, yet some were incidents of gang rape, one was described as one of the most violent New York had seen in recent

history, and most of these invisible survivors were women of color (Crenshaw, 1995). Crenshaw (1995) explains another facet of the invisibility of Black female survivors: “Black women are considered victims of discrimination only to the extent that white men can rape them without fear of significant punishment. Rather than being viewed as victims of discrimination in their own right, they become merely the means by which discrimination against [B]lack men can be recognized” (p.372).

Neville et al. (2004) explain that many Black female survivors of rape internalize race and gender stereotypes as a means of identifying why they were raped and, consequently, they internalize self-blame for their rape. This prevalence of internalized self-blame may prevent many Black women from disclosing their rape and reaching out for support. Rickert et al. explains, “for a young woman to disclose a verbally forced sexual act, she must first perceive herself as a victim” (2005, p. 23), which a woman might struggle to do if she experiences self-blame. The shame that is prevalent among survivors of rape can mingle with internalized social myths of a woman’s gender and race—resulting in a profound attack on the survivor’s psyche (West, 1999). Many times a Black woman who is raped may avoid reporting her assault because she does not want to confirm the myths and stereotypes about Black women: she may stay in an abusive domestic situation to avoid being seen and treated as the stereotypical poor, single Black woman who needs welfare to support her children (West, 1999).

The capacity to see one’s self as a victim is influenced by the internalization of stereotypes of what constitutes a “real rape” and a “real victim” (Dumont et al., 2003; West, 1999). Women may feel they should have fought harder against the perpetrator, and their self-doubt, around their intentions, may be fueled by our culture’s dismissal of

victims “as ‘girls who asked for it’” (West, 1999, p.73). Messages like these enable survivors of abuse to continue to doubt the reliability of their self-perceptions regarding their assault (West, 1999). Survivors of date rape or acquaintance rape who internalize rape myths may struggle to define their experience as rape more than a woman who is assaulted by a stranger (Evancic et al., 1995; Washington, 2001). A woman may struggle further with these complications if she, in any way, feels she resembles the Jezebel image—that is, if she has a sexual history or was not dressed conservatively at the time of the assault (West, 2006). If a woman chooses not to disclose because she does not see herself as the victim of a violent crime, she might feel undeserving of support and services and, consequently, may never get the help and support she needs for recovery. In addition to the abovementioned variables that might affect a survivor’s decision to report her rape, it must also be acknowledged that the racial and personal identity of the perpetrator, as well as the influence that disclosure might have upon the survivor’s family, are also significant variables that might influence her choice to report rape.

### *Choosing Between Disclosure and Silence*

Black women who are raped by a Black man confront another layer of stereotypes and racism in choosing whether or not to report the crime to law enforcement or professional support systems. Historically, laws regarding rape were created to protect upper-class white men and their wives and daughters who might be potential victims (Davis, 1981). When rapists have been convicted and brought to justice, “the rape charge has been indiscriminately aimed at Black men, the guilty and innocent alike” (Davis, 1981, p.172; Lerner, 1972). This myth of the Black male rapist arose in the post-Civil

War era as a strategic explanation for the lynching of Black men (Davis, 1981). Lynching, along with the prevalent raping of Black women, (Crenshaw, 1995; West, 1999) became a popular “postwar strategy of racist terror” (Davis 1981, p.185). In addition there were several accounts of Black women who were raped and then lynched (Davis, 1981)—reflected today in the common practice of many people in our society who continue to blame and punish victims for their assaults. White men impressed two messages upon Black men: Black men would be punished for touching white women, as well as punished for protecting Black women, and all women became tools of manipulation to benefit those who held power in society (Lerner, 1972).

The myth of the Black male rapist is the companion to the myth of the hypersexualized Black woman (Collins, 2000)—created and perpetuated to rationalize and excuse the exploitation of both Black women and men (Davis, 1981; Washington, 2001). Once Black men were commonly seen as animal-like rapists of white women (Collins, 2000), “the entire race is invested with bestiality” (p.182), the myth of the Black female’s insatiable sex drive was supported (Davis, 1981). White men considered themselves to be the preferential race of men, and the myth of the ravenous sex drive of Black females convinced white men that Black women would openly accept their sexual advances (Davis, 1981).

Most reported rapes occur between members of the same race (Hamer and Neville, 2001; West, 2006). Women may struggle, with possibly contributing to stereotypes of Black men, if they choose to report their rape (George and Martínez, 2002; McNair and Neville, 1996; West, 1999; West, 2006). Simmons (2006) asserts that “many Black men and women think that exposing and addressing intra-racial sexual

violence against Black women divides the Black community, and that we should only work to expose and address racism since that is the “real” problem facing our community” (p.171). Crenshaw (1995) explains that statistics have shown “that [B]lack women are more likely to be raped than [B]lack men are to be falsely accused of it” (p.370). In addition to contributing to social perceptions, Black women may struggle with the reality of Black men receiving racially-biased, harsher consequences than their white cohorts (Landwehr, Bothwell, Jeanmard, Luque, Brown, and Breaux, 2002), especially in cases of rape (LaFree, 1980). Acknowledging the historical persecution and oppression of Black men, many Black women receive the message that if a Black man is abusing them it is due to that historical persecution and oppression and it is the woman’s duty to stay loyal to her abuser and support him through his struggle (West, 1999). Even in cases when the accused is guilty, the historical context of lynching and persecution leaves many Black women and men recognizing any accusation of rape, pointed at a Black man, as terrorism of innocent men (Smith, 1990). Compounding this message is the belief that to turn to white authorities, in reporting abuses committed by a Black man, would mean that a Black woman is betraying not only her perpetrator but also her community and her race (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1995; Washington, 2001; West, 1999; West, 2006). In challenging this reality, Davis (2000) states:

We must also learn how to oppose the racist fixation on people of color as the primary perpetrators of violence, including domestic and sexual violence, and at the same time to fiercely challenge the real violence that men of color inflict upon women. (¶8)

Although most rapes are reportedly intraracial, it is important to consider why Black women would be opposed to report a rape when assaulted by a white man. Davis (1981) points to the historical, collective experience of Black women in which systematic racism created an open call to victimize and exploit Black women. She compares the slave owner's economic power over Black women to the classist power held by upper and middle-class men in our capitalist society today, and how that power is still held, unchallenged, and seemingly "immune to prosecution" over the working class (Davis, 1981, p.199). Women of color, particularly Black women, make up a significant portion of the working class and their susceptibility to both sexual and economic exploitation makes them more vulnerable than their male counterparts (Davis, 1981). Today exploitation based upon race and gender has been additionally compounded by economic exploitation, and Black women continue to be pushed to the bottom of the vulnerability hierarchy. To lend support to this understanding of the influence of myths and stereotypes on the reporting of Black female rape survivors, it is invaluable to review statistics that prove the under-reporting of this population.

#### *Under-Reporting by Black Female Survivors*

Studies examining rape statistics have commonly held that there is a discrepancy between the number of rapes that are reported to authorities and the number that actually occur (Davis, 1981). The reluctance of women to report rape can be traced to the social rape myths examined above, which put blame on rape survivors and make their claims of sexual violence doubted by society (Evancic et al., 1995). A study by Feldman-Summers and Norris (1984) that examined what led some rape survivors to report and some to remain silent, reveals that a survivor is more likely to report if her family or friends

expect her to file a report, if the perpetrator was not of previous acquaintance, if she required medical attention as a result of the rape, and if the woman expected to be treated well and feel safer as a result of reporting. As discussed above, however, prior experiences with police and stereotypes about rape may prevent the aforementioned characteristics from being common to the individual circumstances surrounding sexual assaults upon Black women. Although Black women are reported to be victimized at a higher rate than are white women, “Black women are less likely to report their rapes, less likely to have their cases come to trial, less likely to have their trials result in convictions” (Collins, 2000, p.147). Feldman-Summers and Ashworth (1981) completed a study of a multiethnic group of women and their intentions to report a rape to various report recipients, including personal and professional resources. They found that in the surveyed group, the white women were more likely than the Black women to report a rape, and that the difference in likelihood to report was greatest in relation to both the police and rape crisis centers (Feldman-Summers and Ashworth, 1981). In a later study by Wyatt (1992), a mixed group of Black and white women was interviewed about their experiences of sexual assault, including the influence of the assault and the process of disclosing the experience. There was an insignificant difference between the percentage of Black women and the percentage of white women who had experienced rape or attempted rape (Wyatt, 1992). However, of the women who did not disclose their experience “until years later, 64% involved African American women as compared to 36% for White women...[o]nly 23% of incidents for Black women, as compared to 31% for White women, were reported to the police or a rape center” (Wyatt, 1992, p.83). The influence of rape myths and stereotypes of Black women’s sexuality have been discussed



in great length. In understanding a Black female survivor's decision to report rape it is also critical to examine how these myths and stereotypes influence the survivor's social environment.

### *Influence of Myths and Stereotypes on Social Environment*

The perpetuation of rape myths and stereotypes, of Black women and men, is evident in its influence upon all aspects of the world that a Black rape survivor must encounter. In writing about a domestic dispute she survived, bell hooks (1989) describes her encounter with a dentist after being hit in the mouth. She approached the appointment with awareness of the sex, class, and race dynamics between herself and the white, male dentist and writes about the demeaning comments he used, as if speaking to a fragile child (hooks, 1989). The author explains how many people in a patriarchal society will rationalize abuse and blame the victim by assuming that she is hysterical (hooks, 1989) and needs to be disciplined like a child. Her experience with this white, male dentist is an example of how our culture can look at all survivors, including Black females, as helpless victims who are not strong or able to rationally react to their experience and who do not need to have decisions made for them like children.

As explained above, the race and class dynamics in this scenario increase the degree to which Black female survivors might be blamed for their assault, as well as questioned about their ability to be strong and make rational choices following the rape. Through the process of reporting a sexual assault and reaching out for support, many survivors of rape put themselves in a vulnerable position to be revictimized by the power of the same institutions and agencies to which women turn for help (Campbell and Raja, 2005; Collins, 2000; George and Martínez, 2002; West, 1999; West, 2006). These

organizations possess institutional barriers, to people of color, women, and people in poverty, that prevent Black female survivors of rape, especially those struggling economically, from accessing services without being put under the microscope of social judgment (West, 1999). When survivors of sexual violence approach some institutions, particularly religious-based organizations, they may not receive impartial assistance if their race, sexual identity, lifestyle, or beliefs are not aligned with those of the church or religious institution (West, 1999). This is especially true for religious organizations whose beliefs include protecting the freedoms and rights of men, at the expense of the self-sacrifice of women, and institutions that do not consider violence against women to be a serious social epidemic (West, 1999). Women surveyed by Campbell and Raja (2005) reported that in reaching out to military and civilian social services, in response to experiencing sexual violence, women were discouraged from filing legal reports, told their experience was not very serious, their emotional needs were not addressed, and they were questioned about their style of dress and sexual history. The women in this study, 77% of whom were identified as African American, were made to feel self-blame and guilt by the personnel they dealt with and most women were reluctant to seek further help because of their negative, distressing experiences with either military or civilian police (Campbell and Raja, 2005). In a study by Ahrens, Barnes, Campbell, Sefl, and Wasco (2001), which examined the effects of social reactions upon the psychological and physical health of survivors, it was found that experiencing negative social reactions had much more of a lasting effect than did positive reactions or an absence of reaction. The researchers explain that such negative reactions include being belittled, told they were reckless or careless, told to get over the assault, or dealing with a professional who

attempted to control the survivor's decisions (Ahrens et al., 2001). Washington (2001) adds that in her study of Black women who disclosed sexual violence, those women who stated that they would report to police in the future would only do so to create a legal record of the incident, rather than out of the belief that they thought the police would be of some assistance. Foley et al. (1995) and LaFree (1980) add that the race of both the woman and the accused perpetrator will affect a jury's assessment of whether or not a reported incident was a "real rape."

Even agencies whose purpose is assisting, sheltering, or counseling survivors of abuse are not immune to these institutional barriers: staff in these organizations are not exempt from applying their own myths and stereotypes about poor women and Black women to their clients and may assume that clients are utilizing their services with ulterior motives (West, 1999). The application of racist beliefs permeates agencies operated by white staff in which Black female survivors are believed to be less affected by rape and abuse than their white counterparts and, therefore, Black survivors may not be offered adequate support or may be dismissed as unworthy or too difficult to work with (West, 1999). For some Black women who approach support services with more than emotional and physical needs, it may be difficult for counselors and staff to understand that "assistance in meeting basic needs, such as emergency housing, food, or employment may have to take precedence over dealing with the emotional impact of rape" (West, 2006, p.5). Koyama (2006) discusses that when she worked in domestic violence shelters she saw the faults of other counselors and directors and believed that, alone, she could become a different kind of shelter worker. She realized that "it is this self-indulgent feminist fantasy that we have about ourselves as feminists that often

individualizes obvious problems, invisibilizes more subtle ones, and minimizes the urgent need for institutional, rather than individual, remedies” (Koyama, 2006, p.213). In the study by Washington (2001), Black women who utilized crisis or shelter services reported that these resources were not bilingual, had no staff who were women of color, and did not address, or even show awareness of, the needs of a racially diverse population of women. One survivor, interviewed by Koyama (2006) about her experience in a shelter, stated: “the shelter staff showed overwhelming disdain for all the women there, treating us as if we were all ‘abuse addicts’ looking for our next fix, as if we craved the abuse we received” (p.212). Collins (2000) adds that, in addition to possibly being revictimized by helping institutions, survivors of sexual violence may also be revictimized by individuals in their family or community who might blame a woman for the rape she endured.

A study by Burt (1980) exposed that rape myths are held widely among Americans and belief in these myths is contingent upon a strong belief in stereotypes of gender roles and an “acceptance of interpersonal violence” (p.229). The degree to which an individual personally accepts prevalent rape myths (as were previously discussed), as well as the specific context in which the rape occurs, determines the degree to which the individual blames the victim for her rape (Frese, Moya, and Megías, 2004). In a study carried out by Matsuo, McIntyre, Morrison, and Nagel (2005), regarding the factors that influence an individual’s perceptions of rape survivors, researchers discovered that people with a higher educational background and a higher socioeconomic standing held a more compassionate stance towards rape survivors. A study conducted by Evancic et al. (1995) found that, among a group of college students surveyed, a reported rape was

considered more serious, and more worthy of reporting to authorities, when the woman involved was white. Even those individuals who denounce commonly-held rape myths are still influenced by compelling contextual variables (Frese, Moya, and Megías, 2004) (i.e. victim's prior sexual history, prior relationship with the perpetrator, and the presence of alcohol). Thus, it is apparent that in choosing to disclose, a rape survivor confronts the ceaseless cycle of attesting to her veracity, even to those people who might seem to be reliable allies.

*Suggestions by Previous Researchers that Point to the Study at Hand*

In discussing their conclusions and limitations, in the reviewed literature, researchers have pointed to vital areas of additional inquiry that would be important in illuminating a richer picture of the dynamics affecting Black female survivors of rape. Donovan and Williams note that “the relevance of oppressive images for individual Black women will be influenced by their racial identity, cultural affiliation, access to support, and comfort with traditional interventions” (2002, p.103). Therefore, the influence of oppressive images of Black women will be particular to the individual survivor's experience and must be explored with openness rather than assumed and imposed upon study participants. In particular, it will be important to examine how the internalization of these images has interacted with other variables in influencing the individual's experience (Donovan and Williams, 2002). Additionally, in completion of a quantitative study of the influence of rape myths on reporting practices, Du Mont, Miller, and Myhr (2003) suggest that the inferences made by quantitative research will be strengthened by qualitative interviews with survivors that further explore how race, age, ability, and class influence the woman's reporting practices.

### *Summary of Literature*

The previous section has reviewed literature detailing social myths regarding rape and the sexuality of Black women. The literature then described how these social myths affect Black female survivors of sexual violence and the choice these women must make when deciding to disclose their experience of violence. The impact of these myths and stereotypes was then explicated by literature concerning the underreporting of sexual assault by Black female survivors and influences upon this population's social environment. Lastly, suggestions for future study, laid out by previous researchers, are reviewed.

The literature examined in this chapter creates a historically and socially-created context in which the role of race, in the reporting of rape, can be explored. Understanding this context is important to the present study because both survivors of rape and the helping professionals, who work with survivors, have socially-constructed belief systems that shape their worldviews and influence their interactions within the social environment. It would not be possible to explore dynamics of race and racial identities without understanding the context in which those identities, and corresponding belief systems, were created. It is within the social and historical context, which the literature has elucidated, that the methodology for the current study will now be presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

As established in the reviewed literature, there is a need to expand our knowledge about the role that race plays in the experience of reporting rape. The present study examined this subject by seeking a greater understanding of the role that race plays in the reporting experiences of adult Black female survivors of rape. For the purposes of this study, the act of sexual violence fell into the Massachusetts' legal definition of rape as follows: "penetration of any orifice by any object; force or threat of force; against the will of the victim" (Jane Doe, Inc.).

In the qualitative study described in this report, I interviewed one Black female survivor regarding her personal process of choosing to report the rape, and the personal, social, familial, and cultural factors that may have played a part in that process. A qualitative approach, utilizing a semi-structured interview, gave this respondent the space to explain her experience in the manner and with the words she felt most accurately described her assault and the aftermath. She was asked about her overall experience of reporting her sexual assault to a counselor (see Appendix A).

I recognized early that the specific population of choice for this study might be difficult to locate and connect with, because it is so hidden from our larger society, and I determined that there might be a need for an alternative study approach. When a full sample (n=12) of Black female survivors was not obtained, I contacted professionals who work with this population in a counseling, treatment, or advocacy capacity (Sample B).

These professionals were interviewed about their experiences of working with this population and their insight into how race dynamics affect the reporting experiences of Black female survivors (see Appendix B). Obtaining these unique perspectives into the reporting experience enhanced an understanding of how race dynamics influence the experience of reporting rape.

### *Sampling Strategy*

The target population for this study was biological women who identify as Black, Black American, African American, Afro-Cuban, of African descent, of Caribbean descent, and all other women who identify as belonging to the African Diaspora. “The African Diaspora consists of peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality...” (2005, p.7), as was defined by the African Union. For the purposes of this study, I adopted Beverly Tatum’s (1997) explanation for utilizing the label “Black.” She rationalizes that the term Black “is more inclusive than *African American*” (Tatum, 1997, p.15) because the term can apply to other groups of people who have a similar appearance to that of African Americans and who experience the negative influence of racism, but who do not identify as African American. Such people may include Afro-Cubans, people of Caribbean descent and people of African descent, i.e., people who are immigrants or whose ancestors immigrated to the United States by choice.

The women in the primary study population also needed to identify as having experienced rape or sexual assault and may have either self-identified as a victim or as a survivor, or may have not identified with any label that connects her to her experience of rape. Eligible participants had to have reported their experience of rape to one or more



professional agencies that serve the needs of rape survivors. To ensure that participants were not in a state of crisis that may follow a traumatic experience, the experience of sexual assault had to have taken place at least six months prior to the interview.

I hoped to work with a sample size of 12 participants, creating the primary study population. The sampling strategy, for the primary study population, was to seek participants in a variety of settings in an effort to work with survivors, over the age of 18, with a range of backgrounds, socioeconomic standings, and education history. Recruitment of participants took place throughout the Western Massachusetts area, in accordance with a request by the Human Subjects Review Board that I conduct all interviews, with the primary population, in person. A non-probability, convenience sampling technique used directed outreach, through fliers (see Appendix F), in frequented community locations (i.e. universities, laundry mats, supermarkets, bus stops, community centers, and coffee shops) and at local events (i.e. feminist speakers and cultural events). Through these recruitment efforts, one survivor was interviewed for the primary study population. When the intended sample size for the primary study population was not attained after two months of persistent recruitment efforts, the alternative study approach was put into place.

This alternative study approach, utilizing the secondary study population of Sample B, consisted of female helping professionals who had experience working with adult Black female rape survivors. Such professionals included women who worked at counseling centers, advocacy agencies, shelters, or as doctors or nurses. This population was obtained by directed outreach to rape crisis agencies, counseling centers, women's organizations, hospitals, and clinics throughout the country. Initial contacts were made to

colleagues, with requests for suggestions for study participants, utilizing a snowball strategy. In an effort to collect a variety of informed perspectives, every effort was made to include professionals from a range of agencies and with as much experience as was available. Acknowledging that a respondent's racial identification may influence her perspective, every effort was made to include helping professionals who are women of color, in addition to white helping professionals. Recruitment was done with the recognition that many survivors of sexual assault later pursue opportunities to help other survivors. In the event that a study respondent of the secondary study population also identified herself as a survivor of rape, I requested that she participate in the study as a helping professional, acknowledging that her professional perspective may be informed by her personal experience. Utilizing the recruitment efforts described above, 12 helping professionals were contacted and interviewed for the secondary study population.

#### *Data Collection*

Before any interviews were completed, approval was received from the Human Subjects Review Board (see Appendix E). As each potential respondent contacted me, they were sent two copies of the appropriate informed consent (see Appendices C and D) via mail, email, or fax. Each potential respondent was asked to review the informed consent prior to scheduling an interview. Each was also asked to sign and return one copy of the informed consent to me and to keep the other copy for her personal records.

For the participant that was interviewed for the primary study population, data collection was based on a face-to-face interview. For three of the participants interviewed for the secondary study population, the data collection was also based upon a face-to-face interview. These interviews were scheduled at a neutral location that was

convenient to both the participant and myself. The selected interview location was free of distraction and allowed for tape recording integrity. The interview location allowed for the need to speak privately without disturbing others or compromising the confidentiality of the study participant. This created conditions for a situs in which the study participant was most likely to feel comfortable and safe. For the balance of the secondary study population, nine participants, phone interviews were conducted because the participants lived outside of an area that would be accessible to me by reasonable travel time. Interviews were approximately 15-30 minutes in length. Both in-person interviews and phone interviews were recorded and transcribed in full by myself. No recruitment was done, or interviews completed, until approval was received from the Human Subjects Review Board (see Appendix E).

As previously stated, a qualitative, semi-structured interview approach was utilized to allow study participants to describe their experience in a non-constricting manner, utilizing their own words to create the descriptive, inclusive picture that the survivor or helping professional chose to depict (see Appendices A and B). This method of data collection was employed with the intention of yielding the most useful information because it was aimed at the personal experience and interpretation of the individual survivor or helping professional. For example, rather than assuming to know what variables influenced the survivor's experience and how they played a role, I sought out these experiences through the illumination of her own words.

Content areas of the data collection process included general demographics, to create a profile for the respondent. For the primary study population (see Appendix A), this included age, racial identity, ability/disability status, and socioeconomic standing at

the time of the assault. The interview then explored some information related to the experience of sexual assault, including the age of the respondent when the rape occurred, her relationship (if any) with the perpetrator, and the racial identity of the perpetrator. The participant was then asked about personal and cultural factors related to her choice to report the sexual assault, to what type of agency the report was given, and what factors influenced her choice of agency or organization. The participant was then asked about the reporting experience itself, her reception by the agency, and how she feels that her racial identity influenced this experience. The participant was asked about what, if any, social myths/stereotypes she recognizes to have herself internalized, about her identity as a woman of color in our society. Lastly, the respondent was asked how she believes these myths/stereotypes influenced her experience of reporting rape.

Content areas for the secondary study population (see Appendix B) included the general demographics of professional title, amount of time spent in their chosen field, and racial/ethnic identification. I then explored an in-depth look at the respondents' experiences working with survivors. I inquired about the respondents' insight into how racial identity affected the reporting experiences of rape survivors, drawing upon their own professional experiences, those of their colleagues, and secondhand experiences that may have been relayed by clients. Last, respondents were asked about training, they may have had, regarding work with survivors of racial and ethnic backgrounds different from their own.

### *Data Analysis*

Transcriptions of recorded interviews were analyzed using content and theme analysis. The units of measure used to analyze the data were common words and phrases

across respondents. Analysis yielded categories and then common themes across participants. Extracting these common themes aided in generating a hypothesis as a result of this research. In addition, the data was analyzed for unique qualities and experiences that may not be common to several participants, but which might be useful to consider in the study findings. As only one respondent was interviewed for the primary study population, this collected data will be presented as a whole, separate from the data collected from the secondary study population.

The goal of data analysis was to produce an understanding about the role that race plays in Black female survivors' experiences of reporting rape and in this population's experiences within the anti-rape movement. Analysis of this information also illuminated specific aspects of the interactions between helping professionals, service agencies, and Black female survivors of rape that require further inquiry and understanding by the Social Work community, and specifically by service providers working with rape survivors.

The preceding section has laid out the methods by which information was sought out, collected, and analyzed. The following chapter will detail the results of this data analysis.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

As stated in the previous chapter, although the original intent of this study was to interview Black female rape survivors, one survivor was interviewed and the balance of the study's sample was composed of helping professionals. This chapter contains the findings from the one interview conducted with a Black female survivor and the 12 interviews conducted with helping professionals who have experience working with the primary population. The experience and insight of this survivor will be presented first, followed by the collective data gathered from the helping professionals. The information that will be presented, regarding the helping professionals, includes demographics and racial and ethnic diversity of clients, staff, and volunteers at participants' agencies. This will be followed by thematic analysis of discrimination of Black female rape survivors and agency trainings regarding work with this population. All interviewed individuals will be identified using pseudonyms.

#### *Words of a Survivor*

This survivor, named here as Reema, identified herself as of both African descent and as Native American. As a college student Reema was raped by her boyfriend, whom she identified as Biracial—of both African and European descent. Approximately six years after she was assaulted, Reema reported her experience to a counselor at a women's mental health clinic, where she had gone to deal with marital issues. Reema explained to me why she chose to not report, until several years after the rape in this way:

So I'm in college and I got a response to what was assumed to have happened. I got labeled as a slut based on what the other women at the college decided must have happened...If you had asked me, well, are you gonna report, or you're not gonna report so what's in your head, what are you thinking right then—there was no space to do that.

When asked whether she believed her racial identity played a role in her choice to report and to whom to report, Reema replied that she did believe it played a role in how she was treated by the counselor:

I believed that it played a, certainly played a part in the dialogue that ensued...this therapist, this first professional person that I talked to immediately jumped into "did I want to be violent against this person?"...I hadn't thought of it!..Yeh, but even that did not give us a means to talk about it, because when she talked about what her assumptions were, and she talked about, oh, and she gave me a lecture that I couldn't do that [be violent]. And so I'm sitting there being pummeled by her words and then I shut up. I just stopped. And that was that...it didn't really go anywhere in discussion or in therapy.

Reema elaborated upon how she felt her racial identity had played into her reporting experience:

I would've had, either then or much later, I would've had no reason to believe that I could go to the police or any other kind of professional reporting body. That whatever those professional bodies were, they weren't really there for me.

She explained that she had believed that those "professional bodies" were not accessible to anyone who had been sexually violated: "it isn't something that you talked about, so I couldn't make any assumptions beyond the blanket 'well we don't talk about sex, so we don't talk about sexual violence'..."

In the last part of the interview, I asked Reema if she recognized having internalized any the myths or stereotypes about being a woman of the African Diaspora. She shared the following experience:

A year after the sexual assault, I married a violent man and I stayed married to him for 16 years. And part of the way in which he kept me bound to him, well it had everything to do with those stereotypes that were playing in how I was enculturated as a woman, let alone as a woman of color. I'm very aware that those were threats he could work. Yeh, so I definitely did take in and hold and apply to myself what was possible through those stereotypes. It made it harder to get through college; it made it harder to look at my choices of a marriage mate. It affected my relationships with other women because those stereotypes keep us away from each other or that we only get so close to each other, but no closer.

Reema was also asked how she felt that these myths and stereotypes affected her reporting experience, either through what she may have personally internalized or what the counselor may have internalized:

My speculation about her was that she, this clinic...was a woman's clinic, it was part of the women's liberation movement, that first wave. And we were all trying to figure it out...she, I'm sure, was seeing me through her social filters and also through a filter, and this is where I wanted to speculate, is that she was seeing me through a filter of her own creation based on the women who had come through the clinic. Who had to have been almost all white women. And I'm absolutely certain that she had enough ego as a professional, right, that she'd seen so many women, right, that she, its sort of like "well I've got this down, about being a therapist and dealing with women, about women's issues and what women are going through," and so that's what I mean about the filter that she had made for herself. Right, it's a mosaic perhaps of myths and stereotypes, because we all get them poured into us. But also this-- she would have made a filter through what she believed was her professionalism.

Reema added what she believed should be happening within the therapeutic relationship, in terms of acknowledging culturally-constructed worldviews, in contrast with what her own experience had been:

The therapist and the client are both bringing their cultural stuff into the room, and into that relationship. So why don't we all acknowledge it. Why don't we all say "ok, this is how I was taught to look at things." Right, this is the way that what I know about my lens and kind of negotiate cultural matters to deal with whatever's on the table. And I'm saying the exact opposite of the woman that I talked to when I was 25. That she already had her stuff about women. Women. "We're all just



women and these are the women who I've been seeing. And this is how we women are being treated by the oppressor male out there" and this whole "we gotta deal. And we gotta think." And so through that lens she sort of saw me, but not much of me.

### *Demographic Data for Helping Professionals*

As previously noted, the secondary study sample consisted of 12 helping professionals who have experience working with Black female rape survivors. There was a range of professional titles that the study participants have held during their careers. The table below includes multiple titles that are currently held by individual participants, as well as titles that have been held over the course of participants' careers working with survivors. The average amount of time that participants have spent in their professional field of work is 8.25 years, ranging from 2 to 18 years.

Table 1

Titles Held by Interviewed Helping Professionals: Organized by Area of Concentration

Professional Titles	Number of Professionals Holding Title
Counselors/Therapists	6
Rape Crisis Counselor	1
Residential Therapist	1
Psychotherapist	1
Crisis Intervention Counselor	1
Latina Counselor	1
Social Worker	1
Advocate	4
Victim Advocate	1
Latina Advocate	1
On-call Medical Advocate	1
Registered Advocate	1
Administrator/Supervisor	3
Director of Counseling Services	1
Assistant Director Rape Crisis Services	1
Crisis Intervention Coordinator	1
Other Positions	4
Advanced Practice Reg. Psychiatric Nurse	1
Case Planner	1
Campus Educator	1
Licensed Social Work Assistant	1

Study participants were asked about their racial or ethnic identity. I felt it was important to not reclassify participants into more generalized racial and ethnic categories, but rather to allow the participants to define themselves by the words they chose. Therefore, participants were not given racial or ethnic categories to choose from, but were encouraged to provide their own defining terms. One participant identified as African American or Black, one participant identified as New African, two participants report that they identified as Latina, one participant identified as German, three

participants reported their identity as Jewish, and four participants reported their racial or ethnic identity to be white or Caucasian.

*Capacity of Work with Survivors*

The settings where participants have worked with Black female rape survivors varied according to their professional positions. These settings included rape crisis centers, residential homes, outpatient clinic, college counseling centers, hospitals, and domestic violence organizations. Seven participants reported that they worked at an agency whose mission and services were specifically geared towards the needs of rape survivors. The balance, five participants, worked in settings that provide services for rape survivors as well as other client populations. The manners in which participants have worked with the primary population were as varied as their professional titles. The table below includes the different capacities in which participants have worked with rape survivors.

Table 2

Mode of Work with Rape Survivors

Capacity of Work with Rape Survivors	Number of Participants with this Type of Experience
Individual/Group Counseling	9
Medical Advocacy	6
Court Accompaniment	5
Outreach Prevention Education	4
Rape Crisis or Support Hotline	3
Legal Advocacy	2
Information & Referral Services	2
Prescribing Medications	1
Safety Planning	1
Supervision of Volunteers (who identify as survivors)	1

### *Diversity of Staff and Clients*

Participants were asked about the racial and ethnic diversity of both the clientele and the staffing at their agencies. Collectively the 12 participants had experiences at sixteen different agencies during their careers of working with rape survivors. Of these 16 agencies, nine were described as serving a very racially diverse population of women. This diversity was most often described as consisting of Black women, Latinas, and white women. Three participants described working in agencies that serve a population of a wider range of racial and ethnic diversity, one of which offered services in 13 different languages. The remaining six agencies in which participants worked served populations described as mostly white, with some clients of African descent and some Latina clients. One participant, Pilar, explained why she believes the majority of her agency's clients are white women:

I think at this organization in particular most of the clients have been white, I mean it is a woman's organization but considering the demographics here and considering the people who are in positions of power who have been consecutively for many years—its all been white women. I think that's very apparent to a lot of women...

Participants were asked about the racial and ethnic diversity of the staffing at their agencies. Of the 16 agencies, five were described as having diverse staffing or staffing that consisted of more than 50% women of color. One participant, Ayanna, worked at one such agency, and commented that while the majority of counselors were African-American, the supervisor was a white woman. The remaining 11 agencies were described as having staffing that was predominantly white. Katherine explained that while one of the five case managers at her agency was African-American, all of the

psychotherapists were white. Madisyn, who described the diversity of her clientele as very diverse, shared the following when asked about staff diversity at her agency:

We have, I'm very proud to say, two bilingual-bicultural advocates. One in each of our two territories. They work with children and adults who identify themselves as Latina, and that would prefer a Latina, Spanish-speaking counselor...But as far as diversity...currently the majority of our staff is Caucasian, young women between the ages of 24 and 35.

#### *Diversity of Volunteers*

Though the original questionnaire did not address the diversity of agency volunteers, one of the first participants interviewed, Savannah, noted the importance of the racial diversity of volunteers:

A lot of times at these agencies, the people who end up interacting with clients are the volunteers, and I think that often volunteer staff is not counted in terms of what their racial and ethnic make-up is...I think that many times white middle-class or upper-middle class people have more time to volunteer, so that's an issue with some of the work.

Of the 10 participants asked about volunteer participation at their agency, six participants have worked in agencies with volunteers. Three participants stated that the volunteers of their agencies were predominantly white women. Lauren shared a perspective that was similar to that of Savannah:

The volunteers are mostly Caucasian...I think that is probably a cultural thing also because I don't think that in the city of --- a lot of African American people have the time or the means to give up. A lot of them are working and I don't think that they are able to come in and do trainings and dedicate that much time. They're just trying to survive, as well as everyone, pretty much everyone, of our survivors.

Pilar commented that she has been deliberately visiting area colleges in an effort to recruit more volunteers who were women of color and that, within her agency, she had been discussing the importance of having more volunteers on staff who were women of

color. The agency where Zuri worked boasted a very diverse volunteer pool, which she explained:

It's as diverse as the community that we serve. And that's our goals—to keep our volunteer pool as diverse as the community that we serve...I feel like historically the ability to volunteer, a lot of the times for a while I think the history of this organization saw a lot more white middle-class women being able to serve in that capacity. That feels like its changing, and we're also able to offer money stipends, incentives for folks that are bicultural, bilingual to be able to support their much needed participation in the organization.

### *Discrimination of Survivors*

Participants were asked if, in their professional experience, they have known of instances in which rape survivors were discriminated against because of their racial or ethnic identity. Examples of discrimination may have included circumstances that study participants personally observed or situations that were related by either clients or colleagues. Eight participants answered that they have known of racial discrimination against rape survivors. The remaining four study participants denied knowledge of examples of discrimination involving rape survivors. It should be noted that even those participants who did not acknowledge discrimination offered insights that contributed to an understanding of the racial discrimination faced by Black female rape survivors. The following sections detail both specific examples of racial discrimination and common themes that were extracted from transcribed interviews.

### *Specific Examples of Discrimination*

Zuri shared an example of one client she worked with:

I'm thinking of a youth survivor, African American young woman—very young. I think that her interaction with law enforcement, I think she was sort of profiled almost as being like a “child whore” in the way that they

took, or their lack of ability to take her case seriously enough to move forward and keep her protected.

Savannah related a similar example of her client:

One instance that comes to mind immediately was with a police officer in a hospital situation in which a young African American female survivor had been sexually assaulted and was self identifying as a student and a single mother and because of the circumstances surrounding the sexual assault, the police officer accused her of being a prostitute and made some comments that made it clear that that was partially racially-motivated...it was a blatant way of expressing it.

Naomi disclosed an example she of discrimination that she witnessed:

I was called to the hospital for a woman who had been raped. I got to the hospital and she was really out of it. I guess the story that I had been told by the nurses, the nurses were really actually kind and really good with her, but they told me that she had been gang-raped by four white men. She is an African American woman, and they said that she had been out for several days using crack, and that she was raped at the end of that period by four young white men who were presumably from a nearby town, and that's where they took her to rape her. And so everything was fine, not fine but like she was being treated appropriately and they were doing the rape kit and everything. She barely knew I was there—sometimes she did but sometimes—she'd been out for four days so she was kind of going in and out of sleep, she was just real exhausted. But the nurses were really good to make sure that she was awake when they were examining her. But then the --- police came and they were horrible. They basically didn't want to believe that it had happened, and really didn't take much of a statement from her. Yeh I mean they came in while, in the middle of them doing the rape kit. I mean they stopped but then the cops came in and they wanted to talk to her right away and she was in like no condition, so they just left. You know I just...sometimes its hard to quantify that, like just the looks on their faces. You know, an African American woman smoking crack, it didn't really seem like they were going to pursue very much.

Savannah shared one last example of a client she had worked with:

One client that I worked with...reported that she had been sexually assaulted by a stranger in a school bathroom. And after the police investigation, they determined that she had made up the story and that it wasn't true or that her mother had made up the story and that they were just doing it to try to get money out of victim-witness...I did work with

that girl for quite a while and definitely something had happened to her...her mother specifically said that she felt that she had been treated very poorly by the police because they were African American and the police were all white. I was in during the police interview and I was really appalled at the way that the girl was questioned. And I felt that there was more skepticism based on racial profiling.

Gisella talked about a situation that a client reported, involving another rape crisis agency:

I know of a woman who first went to a different rape crisis organization where the person treated the victim very disrespectfully and was very insensitive and the victim left the agency and she said that she believed she was treated like that because she was raped and she was an African American woman.

Pilar disclosed a similar experience with another sexual assault organization:

This past year, with another organization that does work around sexual assault, we actually had to have a meeting with them because I would refer women to them and some of the women were women of color and they were unable to—we're talking about them calling a hotline—unable to get someone. The phone calls, they weren't getting calls back. And one time I called on behalf of someone and I immediately said, "I'm with someone who's Latina" and they immediately said, "well we don't have someone who speaks Spanish" and I said, "I never said she spoke Spanish or only Spanish"...a lot of times when women are either sexually assaulted or there's domestic violence, they come once and if they see that they're not getting what they need, they're not going to come back.

Katherine added her perspective on the situation at her agency:

Some clients felt that they were treated with discrimination, even within our agency, because of their color. It would come up occasionally—we made decisions about housing or consequences for breaking rules and so sometimes people of color felt that they were being unfairly treated because of that. I hadn't felt it was justified, although it was something that we kept having to look at as a group.

### *Fear of Discrimination*

In addition to the specific examples presented in the previous section, five of the helping professionals interviewed commented about the fear their clients held,



specifically fear of discrimination. Of these participants, two answered that they had never known of instances of discrimination. These individuals explained that the fear was not based upon the survivor's racial or ethnic identity, but, rather, was based upon her or his status as a survivor. Lauren explained:

Every survivor feels like, when they go for an interview with a detective, that they're being treated badly because of the questions that they ask and they're in a very, not so stable part...but never based on the color of their skin or their ethnic background, no. All survivors usually feel like they're being treated equally.

Gisella is not included in the above category because she does acknowledge that her clients have suffered racial discrimination. She added this about their interactions with law enforcement:

With law enforcement, definitely women feel that they are treated not too respectfully. When a woman is raped, she feels like no one is going to treat her with respect because they feel the loss of power. They feel like from now on they wear a sign that says that they were raped and people have the right to treat her with the disrespect she feels inside...Definitely the majority of rape victims feel the anger and feel the difference in the law enforcement...she feels like if the police don't pay attention, or the lawyer or defendant or the prosecutor, she feels like its because she was raped and that no one is going to understand and treat her with respect...out of every 10 maybe 6 or 7 would feel like that. They feel like men are treating them like trash...its not that its happening—but the victim feels like it is. I mean, when you're on the outside you can see the truth, but when it's the victim, they don't see what we see.

The remaining two helping professionals, who spoke of the fear their clients held, connected this fear of discrimination to their clients' racial identities. Pilar spoke about many of her clients who are immigrants and who fear that they will be deported if they report abuse or rape to the police. She explained that, in most cases, the agency is unable to obtain protection from deportation, from the police, until the abuse has gone on for too long and, even at that point, there is usually no documentation of the abuses

that have occurred. Madisyn added another perspective on this issue, connecting some fear to issues of race and some to gender:

I think there's been a fear that they will be treated differently just because of racial issues...I have to be honest, I think that there's a lot of officers that are really sensitive...to survivors, regardless. There's also a ton of other systems that go to work for different clients that aren't as sensitive. I think honestly that goes—*that's related to women in general. That's not necessarily a racial issue* [italics added]. But there's definitely an underlying fear among survivors, that they'll be judged or treated differently.

### *Access to Services*

Of the helping professionals interviewed, three remarked that they have known of clients who were discriminated against by way of their limited access to services. Pilar explained:

Women are unable to access different resources due to their skin color. I mean here in --- we've had a heck of a time trying to get women in our shelter housing, because they have darker skin or they don't know the language. And thank god we've done the research because so many women are coming from different countries so that their birth certificates or any identifying stuff is in a different language and it costs money to get it translated and so they don't have access to all the stuff and there's no apology...there's nothing helping these women out. Women don't qualify for English classes if they have no documents. They can't further their education, they can't get a job, they have no social security, they can't obtain housing...It puts them at risk for losing their children, their credibility is already shot.

While Savannah has witnessed several examples of overt racial discrimination against survivors she has worked with, she explained that she had seen mostly covert examples of discrimination, such as through limited access:

The rest of it I'd say was not offering services, being slower to move a case along, not taking things to the D.A.'s office, not treating people as professionally or not taking as much time with someone or taking their case as seriously whether it was a social worker or the Department of

Social Services or the other states' equivalents of DSS or, I just think giving people the level of compassion and care they deserve.

Madisyn also spoke of limited access to services through a different lens:

Maybe just not as thorough providers in place—because there's just not the access to the proper means and the appropriate means for having cases prosecuted or being treated thoroughly...I have a client that I can think of right now who is of a different background than myself. She's definitely expressed the "not having the means, not having the access, not having the same services in place" as, say, someone who was maybe upper-middle class. And I think that's just something that's unfortunate and we're trying to help change that—that's part of our mission as well...but unfortunately we have a lot of work to do because there is still a stigma attached, still a "but I'm living in an urban setting and I'm a female, maybe Black woman, and I don't have the same access and means to those same long-term therapy that costs a lot of money" kind of stuff...then there's the whole aspect of attorney's fees... if you're gonna want to file anything, like a civil suit, ever, then attorneys are super expensive. But I think that goes along with pretty much most people. I mean I've experienced that with all of our clients.

### *Stereotypes of Black Women and Survivors*

Several of the helping professionals discussed how their clients had been discriminated against because of stereotyping. Three of those interviewed brought up stereotypes of Black female survivors. Additionally, Ayanna discussed how, at her agency, which served a very diverse population of clients, all survivors were stereotyped:

If someone comes in and they have a PTSD diagnosis, then you already have an assumption, you already assume that they just can't get over this thing, that they're just crying out for attention and that they're using this thing that happened years ago to get attention now...Everyone who had been there for years and years and years, they treated them based on the way that they treated other clients that presented similarly. It wasn't about culture, it wasn't about race. I do feel like women who came in and presented with PTSD, or were complaining that they were battered or abused or raped—they were treated more like attention seekers, or cry babies, as opposed to the men who came in.

In a previous section Naomi spoke about a client she had worked with who was gang-raped by white men in a homogeneously white town. About this case, she said the following:

And there's just the stereotype of the "crack whore" who, well maybe my assumption was that they were kind of looking at her like maybe she solicited them, not that its ok to rape sex workers either...But yeh I just think that all the stereotypes are coming from—you're more likely to believe someone who looks like your neighbor than someone who doesn't look like your neighbor.

Last, in commenting on the layers of discrimination that her clients come up against, Pilar added: "The racial stereotypes of women wanting to be beaten and that's why they go back."

### *Systems of Oppression*

When discussing the discrimination that their clients face, two helping professionals spoke about macro-level systems of oppression. Zuri spoke about how those systems of oppression play out both outside of, and within, the anti-rape movement:

You see it all the time. We're inundated with racism and it plays out on the daily, whether or not people choose to see that or not...yeh, I just I get annoyed with that whole feeling of "wowness" of the discovery that racism exists, that people are treated unfairly. It's like the fucking country is built upon that premise... it continues to play out that way because it's easy for people to remain aloof, it feels better to remain aloof and to don the lip-service of liberalism and progressiveness.

Pilar also spoke about these systems of oppression:

Part of the advocating is questioning and us being on point as well about being clear that there's something at work here that is extremely oppressive...So I really feel like with women, in particular women of color and Latinas, we do this work around self-esteem. We do this work around the power and control wheel, we do all of these things but it doesn't necessarily apply to them because even when they go and they advocate for themselves they're again shut down. The system's not built to work for them or with them.

### *Additional Comments*

This subsection contains what were deemed to be valuable comments that did not fit into one of the above subsections. The following are additional insights and clues into how Black rape survivors interact with those services that are designed to meet their needs. Gisella began:

African American victims suffer what we can say twice, in the sense of when they go to ask for help they face a lot of issues, a lot of questions. And it's not because I was a woman, I was raped because I'm Black, I was raped because I'm different. And when they go to other agencies and they are treated differently the first thing that comes out is "because I'm Black"—unfortunately.

Robyn shared an example of how her predominantly white agency dealt with the needs of a young Black survivor:

I have one client who could really benefit from a mentor at this moment. And within the hospital agency there's only one person who has, he's not African American but he's the only person of color there. And my supervisor's supervisor got him to be my client's mentor, out of the whole hospital. And reasons for that are because they both come from Caribbean culture and he says that it's a way to support her from a cultural perspective. And it's just interesting because he's a man and this is a young woman who has been abused by several older men in her life, and would be probably the most inappropriate mentor possible and was given this man solely because of his culture and his racial identity. And in some aspects I thought that was probably supportive and in other aspects, as far as retriggering PTSD and her fear and lack of being able to feel comfortable with him, I thought it was totally inappropriate and was totally not successful. She refused to meet him. She just refused it, saying she didn't think it was going to work.

Pilar commented on a need to have more visible women of color within the anti-rape and domestic violence movements:

I really feel like women need to have someone that they're talking to who also looks like them and understands those pieces, whether it's "this isn't talked about in the family" or "this isn't seen as rape." There's different

religious stuff that comes up as well. They need to have someone who understands that and it's not like "oh that's so horrible." Its part of who they are.

### *Training*

Helping professionals were asked if they had ever been trained in working with rape survivors of racial and ethnic backgrounds that are different from their own. Of those interviewed, nine replied that they had received such training. Of these nine participants, four had received training when they were in school, and this training addressed issues of diversity and different cultures, but was not specific to working with rape survivors of various racial or ethnic backgrounds. The following section presents participants' perspectives on these training opportunities, including perspectives of those participants who have not received specialized training.

### *Resistance*

Resistance to training was a topic raised by six of the interviewed helping professionals. This subsection details examples of resistance that were discussed by participants, as well as acts of resistance, on the part of study participants, that can be seen through their own words. Pilar explained the resistance she has encountered in facilitating training:

We didn't realize the resistance we would encounter...and when you have people in positions of power who are also not taking these trainings, not thinking they're important, that's a problem...we're also working with people [staff and volunteers] who are privileged, who are not exposed to a lot of the issues that women are facing, including poverty and racism and classism and white privilege and we absolutely have, as an organization, the obligation to do this...its ongoing, its not just one training and you're ready and you're done and you're antiracist and anti-oppressive and go to it...people are more afraid and I think its much more necessary to talk about these different oppressions. Again, I do believe that when we work

with women of color what they're up against is very very different. They don't have a lot of the same privileges.

Savannah spoke about the resistance, towards antiracism and anti-oppression training, which she witnessed at one of the agencies where she had worked:

I feel like the agency itself was really mixed, and I think that part of the problem was generational. People who had been in the movement for a long time, in their 50s, tended to just think that "of course we're gonna do this, its important." I don't think they put as much emphasis on it, but they thought they put a lot of emphasis on it. And sometimes it was the younger people who were like, "hey! We really need to talk about this" and the older people were like, "we already know about that." At most places because people are doing the work they think of themselves as being allies and they think of themselves as being advocates. But some places people really don't want to invest a lot of energy in it because they think that they already know it. And so sometimes that's what the attitude is: "well I already know this stuff. I don't need more time on this."

Zuri shared some memories of resistance in an agency she had worked in:

It was very much coming from the older school, white women's movement kind of rape crisis center framework. That analysis wasn't there...The people at the forefront were white middle/upper-class women with a handful of folks of color on staff—that's certainly not in significant places of leadership, and there was no investment in growing that leadership. And so you operate from the context that you know, and so that being the context that they knew, that's what they knew to do. They did great work, but it was just void of that analysis. And I think they tried, there were a lot of attempts there, but there wasn't that commitment to growing on an individual level an anti-oppressive analysis...And that's where it starts.

When asked if she believed that training was effective at her agency, Lauren explained:

I think that a lot of it is just looked at as something they [staff] have to do now. --- Center does have Kwanzaa every year, and that is really interesting to me. But a lot of this I knew...and then I have --- [African American advocate] so that if I have a question I can ask her. But I think diversity trainings are great but I think you're gonna get out of them what you want to get out of them...I just have never had an issue with that. I'm very lucky that I'm able to at least minutely, in no way can I say that I ever say that I know all about their culture and the trials that they've gone

through, because there's no way that I can ever say that. But I have a healthy respect.

Katherine commented on the dialogue that ensued after clients at her agency felt they were being discriminated against, based upon their racial identities:

I hadn't felt it was justified, although it was something that we kept having to look at as a group...I think there was a lot of defensiveness because it was hard to get to a place of feeling some understanding. It could be really frustrating because that was actually a self-defeating behavior some people had, especially addicts...tend to put the blame on external causes rather than their own behavior. So there was some frustration and then some staff would help us focus on the fact that this was something that they were really experiencing and whether they had experienced with us or not, it was a valid concern...There was open-mindedness but it was hard to not take a defensive stance knowing that people had been treated equally in a given situation...But it was important to, and there was discussion about, understanding more why someone would have that stance and that there was validity, whether or not there was validity in that given situation there was validity in that position or that assumption...yeh, there's a tension there between helping people to be supportive of the fact that they are being discriminated against and empower them to feel that they're in control of their situation, they can change it.

Madisyn spoke about her agency's optional training on race and diversity and how most staff were not likely to attend, and were more likely to choose workshops on trauma work, behavioral therapy, or body-centered work. She explained: "I think they think that a lot of the times it's preaching to the choir because we already feel this way, we already are trying to eliminate these injustices in the world." Madisyn also detailed a related frustration of her staff:

We have to mark off on our intake forms, and I'm sure everyone does, like everywhere for grant funding—and that's how we're funded, the ethnicity of our clients...I mean what is the deal? You know? Does it really matter and what does that prove...they ask about everything: identities, disabilities, age, socioeconomic status. I guess the socioeconomic status stuff is a crazy kind of question to ask but I get it—when you go to therapy, the idea of how you're going to pay...I get that we need to have a general idea of what we're serving so that we can receive funds. Again,



we should just have these services in place...when a lot of it is over the phone, its like you're not going to ask someone, "oh, gee, what ethnicity are you or race are you" because *what does that have to do with someone who is in crisis* [italics added] or who has just been assaulted or is having a flashback of having been assaulted years ago. *It just doesn't seem pertinent* [italics added]—unless they bring it up, again, as a racial issue regarding police or the hospital, something like that.

### *Diversity Training*

Five of the interviewed helping professionals discussed specific types of training they had attended. Savannah explained the two basic types of training that participants received:

There are two different types of training one tends to get. One is the "these are the characteristics of this group, these are some of the issues that this group might have, and these are things to watch out for" and the other is a general, cross-cultural training which is like "how do we treat people as individuals, how do we learn to not make assumptions, how do we notice what our own perspective is in order to be more sensitive to the variety of perspectives that are out there."

This section contains information about the first type of diversity training. Gisella talked about why she feels training is important:

We have to be updated because of the sensitivity of the situation is not the same. Like an African American that comes from Haiti or Jamaica or any other culture, that they have some beliefs that another African American person who comes from Portugal or any other culture—the beliefs are very different. So we have to learn how to talk to this person, what to touch, how to be sensitive...Let me tell you that rape is rape no matter what language, no matter what cultural background the victim has. But there's a difference if a person comes from any type of country—remember that even in some third world countries they believe that if a woman is raped, they still believe that that woman deserves to die, unfortunately. And if that woman is going to be safe we have to know where the woman comes from so we can help her to understand that this isn't going to happen here...and it's not the same as the Chinese or the Japanese lady who is raped—rape is rape. But her understanding of rape is very different than what we understand. And they have a very different view of the healing process and they feel guilty, believe it was her fault...and they feel rejected when they come here. To protect this woman

we need to work with that...I do believe that even though rape has a universal definition, the difference is the cultural issue and the energy of the person and that is very sensitive. We need to know how to deal with that. So I do believe that you need to be educated so that when you have a client to know a little bit about the background of the client, to know where you're going to start and what to touch and not to touch.

Naomi also spoke about why she thinks training is necessary:

We talked about racial stereotypes—the scary Black man who comes out from behind the dumpster to rape women and how that's not the reality—that most sexual assaults occur within the survivor's home or with people that the survivor knows. But also how that might impact a woman of color's choice to report, especially if their abuser or attacker is also a person of color, that it makes it more difficult thinking that you might then have another Black man in the system. And also just the thing about how race really matters in terms of who gets prosecuted and who gets convicted—more in terms of the race of the survivor. You know in our country I still don't think we're at a place where we have full equality or that people of color still aren't considered full human beings in this country.

Savannah spoke about one particularly helpful training she attended:

It was a panel of people from various cultures talking about, who were also trained in speaking about cultural competency, to be talking about their own culture but also making the comment that they couldn't represent their entire culture or their racial background. And I found that in those trainings they were very helpful but that often that person would not be challenged by people in the audience who were of different racial or ethnic identities but would sometimes be challenged by people of the same racial or ethnic identity if they didn't agree on something.

### *Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Work*

There were three helping professionals who also addressed macro-level training with an anti-racism and anti-oppressive framework. Specifically addressing the anti-oppression training with volunteers, Pilar said:

Again what we're dealing with, as well, is mostly students who are very academic. And I think that sometimes it's more difficult. And there's some who outright don't like it, don't want it. And I think it's painful. I mean we start right off with the introduction to anti-oppression, we go into

classism, we go into white privilege, we do a piece of working with and for women of color, we do a piece around immigration and domestic violence...we do one strictly on racism. Those are hard topics, I think, for people to hear about. Again, we have much more of an ability to shut the book, to ignore someone, to walk away...you have to deal with your own stuff and what your own upbringing has been because racism is a very strong part of our culture and oppression as well.

Zuri discussed observations of the work in her current agency and how she sees it reflected in treatment of clients:

This place has been quite a redemptive environment to work in, with the level of consciousness and analysis and just awareness of oppression is here, live and well, and how do we actively work to counter that both individually within ourselves and then collectively in the work that we do here...I mean there's a lot of focus spent on training the volunteers through an anti-oppression lens, through a social justice lens...and I see the results in the way that clients are held here...There's a huge focus placed upon understanding the dynamics of interlocking systems of oppression and how they work, how they work to silence and marginalize different communities. There's a lot of attention given to that and to checking that internally, checking those stereotypes, and all of the internalized systems internally and moving out from there. I mean nothing is going to change until we're challenging our shit internally. I feel like – does a really good job of orienting people towards asking those questions of themselves, which directly impacts the quality of services that we're able to offer to the community and the thoroughness of the ways that we're able to educate communities around sexual violence and the roots of violence, which are oppression.

Savannah talked about what she has learned in her training:

It's really important for me to be aware that it's a constant learning. I think that's one of the things that I've found is really important, and also to be able to treat people as individuals but also to know some of the institutional oppressions that people face. I feel like that's one of the things that we talk about – “what is it about these people, these survivors, these people of this racial or ethnic background?” instead of saying “what is it about the system?”...not so much “what is it about these people down there?” but “what is it about the institutions and the systems that causes problems?”

Zuri added an explanation of how anti-oppression work can be infused into all agency training:

When you start to look at the world through that framework, that's all you see then...so then every follow-up, continuing education piece that happens, that framework is automatically imbedded in it. So everything that they're getting, whether they're getting someone to come in and do a presentation on Dissociative Identity Disorder and that can look a myriad of ways. You can talk about DID or you can take it further and talk about the medical and psychological fields that are coming from a predominantly white male context that pathologized people. You can take any subject and, depending on what framework you're coming at it from, you can deepen the work or flatten it. So it's like that framework just continues to be woven into whatever it is that we do.

#### *Suggestions for Future Training and Work*

Some of the interviewed helping professionals shared their insights into what might work in rape crisis and domestic violence agencies in the future, and what they see as being particularly effective now. When asked what she felt was most effective in her agency's training, Zuri explained:

I would say that the greatest tool has been the way that this organization unpacks its analysis around oppression. And when I say that I mean no system of oppression exists independently of another—imperialism is very much connected to white supremacy is very much connected to male supremacy. I think we also don't sugar-coat and water-down term. You know "racism"—no, it's fucking white supremacy. That's what we're up against. It's male supremacy, that's what we're up against. I think that we also remind people that there's no such thing as the reverse of those "isms" because it's about where the power lies...I would say that being very conscious of the language that we use. I mean language is an oppressive tool all by itself. You have an English language that's steeped in racism...so there's a consciousness there...And I think a lot of that is bred out of the fact that there is a commitment at --- for strong women of color leadership, people that are steeped in a political analysis, and bring that wealth to ---.

Savannah added:

I feel its important for service providers to be aware of that combination of what I was saying before about knowing something about a community, knowing the common issues that might come up and yet also having a general sense of knowing how to be culturally competent and that its an ongoing process that never ends.

Naomi talked about training at a previous agency and what she thought might work in the future:

There was such an intensity about the way that the information was presented and the way that the dialogues happened, especially coming from people of color that it made it really difficult to sit as a learner and hear and take in what folks were saying. I feel like it wasn't necessarily presented in a way that people could hear.... I think it was intensity of presenters and "guilty white women syndrome" on the end of the recipients, which really is toxic for any dialogue because it means that presenters are aggressive and guilty white women are afraid to say anything for fear that she might say something wrong and be horribly racist. Which means that dialogue never happens, it really shuts down a dialogue actually between women of color and white staff....I think on both ends for white folks I think that we need to be at a good enough place in our identity development to know that we can do racist things and we will do racist things, and its sort of an inevitable thing and though people of color also have to have responsibility for their actions and so not holding people of color accountable is just as racist as not taking into consideration different cultural and ethnic perspectives. And on people of color's part I think that, again, to really work on individual identity development and be in a secure enough place in identity development so that people who are doing trainings, it doesn't have to be everyone in the agency, but people in leadership, people who are doing the trainings can present information in a way of joining, as opposed to separating, in a way that "I really want to share this about my culture and ethnicity" as opposed to "you need to hear this because I'm really angry about all the ways that I've been treated for so many years." Though I think that anger is justified, I think that if the end goal is for people to hear the information and make changes in their practice based on that information, then the goal of presenting should be to speak so you can be heard, not just speak so you can be angry. And there's criticism of white folks too, particularly white folks in leadership at agencies and presenters should, again, not feed into this idea that they can't hold a person of color accountable or have any critique of their work because I must be racist if I'm doing that. And not let people get away with every time a person of color doesn't like

something, its racist. Its important that there be strong enough white women and women of color in leadership roles in agencies to be able to have honest conversations with each other, where those leaders can really hear each other and talk through this stuff. I think that's one of the things that was really missing in the first agency where I worked—that issues of race and racism were so much in the forefront. It felt like the only reason there were white people in the agency were so that people of color could be angry at us. And there's certainly a place for that and I will, again, acknowledge that people have a right to be angry and we'll take that on to some extent but we need to sort of have a balance.

Zuri added these last few words of hope for the future:

Which I would love to see collectively our paradigm, our zeitgeist jump up a bar or two or three, so that, like I feel like there's just certain dynamics that will no longer be tolerated here and I would like to see a collective movement where it starts there, and then we continue to evolve. We have so much evolving to do, and why aren't we doing that, like what's the fear that keeps us from taking the next step and continuing to evolve in the way that we treat people. Ultimately we're just trying to end violence, you know?

The next chapter discusses these findings in light of the current literature that was reviewed in Chapter II. It then offers implications for practice, outlines the study's strengths and weaknesses, and suggests areas for future research on this topic.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the role that race plays in the reporting experiences of Black female rape survivors. As was discussed in the previous chapter, one survivor was interviewed and 12 interviews were conducted with helping professionals who work with Black female survivors, both within the anti-rape movement and in other types of agencies that serve the needs of this population. Because one survivor, Reema, was interviewed, we can learn from her experience and the role that race played in that experience, but of course, we cannot assume that her experience is representative of this population. Still, her experience supports those identified in the literature: survivors are often silenced by negative reactions in their social environment as well as by internalized stereotypes about Black women and rape survivors.

One small but poignant example is related to Reema's insights regarding her counselor. Their relationship exemplifies the internalization of stereotypes and how that internalization infuses the social and cultural lens of our helping professions. Even if unintentionally, practicing through this lens often prevents a survivor from receiving effective services. As Reema's perspective of her relationship with her white counselor illustrates, limited understanding of how to work effectively with a diversity of survivors can shut down a therapeutic relationship and prevent a client from receiving much needed services.

The 12 interviews conducted with helping professionals for this study have yielded some rich and important answers and insights. For example, length of time in the field appears to have little to no bearing on amount of training received concerning interventions with a racially diverse population of survivors. For this sample, job title also seems to have no correlation with amount of training. Even some respondents with upper-level positions and responsibilities in anti-rape organizations had not, at the time of the study, ever received specialized training to work with survivors of diverse racial backgrounds. Finally, the racial identity of participants did not automatically translate into an awareness of racial discrimination within the system or past experience of specialized training: identifying as Black or Latina did not always indicate an awareness of discrimination and identifying as white did not always imply a denial of discrimination. While three of the four women of color interviewed identified as having had specialized training to work with a diversity of survivors, the fourth woman of color had not received this type of training and did not acknowledge having known of instances of racial discrimination. From what I learned in these interviews, however, some white women who work in agencies that are staffed primarily by women of color have awareness of discrimination and see the importance of specialized training. It is my belief that white women who have the opportunity to work in an agency that is staffed and led predominantly by women of color are more likely to be attuned to the discrimination that their clients face and see the need for specialized training. Perhaps this awareness is due to elevated exposure to an agency dialogue that recognizes discrimination in the anti-rape movement and a multitude of perspectives that can speak to oppression in the personal lives of agency staff.



According to participants, nine of the sixteen agencies in which they had worked serve a diverse population of clients: usually Black, Latina, and white clients. In contrast, only five agencies were known to have a staff with at least 50% women of color. The remaining eleven agencies were described as predominantly white.

Several participants also commented on the predominance of white volunteers in the anti-rape movement, and only one worked at an agency that had made a deliberate effort to develop a volunteer base to reflect the diversity of clients. In short, there is a significant discrepancy between the staffing of most of the agencies that work with survivors of sexual violence and the profile of the populations they serve.

Overwhelmingly, the awareness of oppressions that affect their clients and the training to work with a diversity of survivors was greater among participants who worked at agencies staffed primarily by women of color. In fact, the participants who seemed to be resistant to the idea of discrimination and who seemed to deny its existence within the anti-rape movement all worked at agencies that were staffed primarily by white women. This would suggest that agencies that are staffed primarily by white workers but that serve a racially diverse client population may not be well prepared to provide effective services.

The literature points to the existence of overt discrimination (Campbell and Raja, 2005; Collins, 2000; George and Martínez, 2002; West, 1999, 2006), limited access to services (Washington, 2001; West, 1999), and insufficient training to understand the wide range of needs among a diverse population of rape survivors (West, 1999, 2006). This study corroborates the literature in that eight helping professionals expressed knowledge of overt and covert discrimination that their clients had experienced based upon their

racial identity. In addition, the findings indicate that Black female survivors are likely to face various types and levels of oppression when they do, in fact, manage to reach out of help, making that outreach all the more unlikely.

The findings of this study also add to the evidence (Frese, Moya, and Megías, 2004) that even helping professionals who have experience in working with survivors of color are not necessarily aware of the discrimination inflicted on their clients – either by themselves or by the systems in which they work. It is clear that two levels of oppression need to be addressed by the anti-rape movement and the larger social work community. First is the prevalence of discrimination experienced by Black female survivors of rape, and the second is the pervasive denial of that discrimination by agencies that think of themselves as anti-rape organizations. What follows are some implications for practice as a result of these findings.

#### *Implications for Social Work Practice*

The first implication is that there needs to be a focus on the intersection of oppressions as it plays out in the lives of our clients. Second, professionals who work in the anti-rape organizations need effective anti-racism and anti-oppression training. Third, we need to recruit women of color for positions of power in the anti-rape movement. Fourth, there is a need for greater social work presence in other types of helping agencies in order to ensure equal access to and fair treatment for all rape survivors regardless of their racial identification. These implications are discussed in some detail below.

#### *A Focus on the Intersection of Oppressions*

In Chapter II, the subsection “The Intersection of Race and Gender” describes how Black women carry the oppressions of both their race and their gender. King (1990)

explains that the interaction of these systems of oppression does not simply carry an additive effect but that rather, they are interdependent systems of control that create a level of oppression incomparable to the burdens when each system exists alone.

Crenshaw (1995) explains how in this place of intersecting systems of subordination, women of color still remain in the periphery of the anti-racism and feminist movements.

The findings of this study yielded several examples of racial discrimination that participants had either witnessed or that were related to them by clients or colleagues. In addition to these examples, some participants spoke specifically about the multiple systems of oppression that their clients face and how the anti-rape movement has traditionally failed to address oppressions beyond that of gender. Zuri was one of the helping professionals who spoke about the privilege, life experience, and professional experience of agency staff members, which can contribute to this defensiveness and resistance to anti-oppression training. As Zuri commented, “it’s easy for people to remain aloof. It feels better to remain aloof and to do the lip-service of liberalism and progressiveness.” A common sentiment among those who acknowledged these systems of oppression is well reflected in Savannah’s statement:

At most places, because people are doing the work, they think of themselves as being allies and they think of themselves as being advocates. But some places people really don’t want to invest a lot of energy in it [anti-oppression training] because they think that they already know it.

Those who acknowledged multiple systems of oppression also recognized the danger in the common assumption by anti-rape organizations that just because they fight gender oppression they are automatically and simultaneously fighting oppression based on race,

class, and ability. In fact, this assumption generates much resistance to training, as discussed in the previous chapter. Participants who had participated in anti-oppression and anti-racism training recognized that even after greater awareness of their own prejudices and subjective worldviews, they still had to actively explore how and where they might still be engaging – even unintentionally -- in classist, racist, sexist, or ableist acts. Clearly, this places the responsibility to take an active anti-racist and anti-oppressive stance upon the individual professional. However, we usually only come to this understanding after training forces us to examine ourselves within our racial and oppressive social context. It is important, therefore, that we work through the denial and defensiveness that prevents us from acknowledging our role and privilege in raced society. The discussion of another implication, titled “Effective Training,” will further explore how to overcome this resistance to training.

For the purposes of learning about what needs to change in the anti-rape movement, it was valuable to hear the denial of these oppressions. Some of the helping professionals had no recognition that their clients’ fears went beyond their gender and may be related to their racial identity as well. This is an example of working against gender oppression and not acknowledging the additional levels of oppression at work with survivors of sexual violence. It seems to be a common misconception, among many helping professionals, that unless a client labels her crisis or concerns as “race-related,” race has no impact upon her interactions with the world, including those with helping resources, the community, and the perpetrator. To not acknowledge a survivor’s race is to ignore and not account for a significant component of her identity, both as a woman and as a survivor of rape. Racial identity is clearly not just a demographic but also

permeates a client's sociocultural context, creating her understanding of both the world around her and of how society is going to regard her as a survivor of sexual violence.

As important as it is to acknowledge and work with every client's racial identity, and the culture and belief systems that accompany that identity, it is also important to recognize the systems of oppression that weigh upon the client. Katherine gave an example of a predominantly white agency staff who were struggling to acknowledge that racial discrimination might be occurring within the organization and, rather, were explaining their clients' claims as the externalized blaming of addicts. In cases like this, it is important to examine interactions with each client not only through a treatment lens, addressing the client's behaviors and symptoms, but also through a lens constructed by race, gender, class, and ability. By acknowledging how systems of oppression shape a client's worldview and influence her position in the world, a helping professional can gain insight into how these systems may have impacted past and present behaviors and life circumstances. This will help create a more inclusive, accurate picture of who the client is and how to best help her—rather than setting her up to fail within systems of oppression that are beyond her control.

### *Effective Training*

Ongoing training, both within the anti-rape movement and in other organizations that work with survivors of sexual violence, is the clear first step to better serving all survivors, particularly Black female rape survivors. This training should be split into two categories. The first category relates to general knowledge of culturally-specific characteristics and beliefs. This must be communicated with the understanding that clients must be treated as individuals and that culturally-specific knowledge cannot be

blindly applied to every client. This training should also include culturally-specific beliefs about rape from the point of view of the survivor and her community and how those beliefs may affect the healing process. This is crucial to truly to meet the survivor where she is when she presents herself for service. If she does not feel that she is understood or that her beliefs are accepted, she is unlikely to feel either heard or safe, making her reluctant to continue the service process or to reach out for any help in the future.

The second type of necessary training is anti-oppression or anti-racism training. This training must focus on historical racism and oppressions as well as institutional oppressions in our present society. This type of training creates a context within which to understand the culturally-specific beliefs and characteristics that were discussed above. As some participants commented, this training often meets resistance because it requires people to examine their own beliefs, stereotypes, privileges, and worldviews. It also requires an acknowledgment and analysis of white privilege and domination, both within the agency and our society as a whole. A necessary aspect of this process is the understanding of how white privilege shaped, and continues to shape, racism and systems of oppression. If these are not addressed, however, the assumption stands that joining in the work of the anti-rape movement automatically and actively fights all forms of oppression. Zuri explained how this is confronted in her agency:

There's a huge focus placed upon understanding the dynamics of interlocking systems of oppression and how they work, how they work to silence and marginalize different communities. There's a lot of attention given to that and to checking that internally, checking those stereotypes, and all of the internalized systems internally and moving out from there. I mean nothing is going to change until we're challenging our shit internally.

Once their resistance and defensiveness is combated, people can come to see that many more forms of oppression exist than they had been aware of, that oppression is woven through all aspects of our society, and that people in privileged positions can inherently contribute to racial, classist, and ableist oppression even if they are actively fighting it.

Just the process of acknowledging privilege can be complicated and frustrating and can initiate a spectrum of emotions. Learning how one has unknowingly contributed to the various levels of oppression can be extremely difficult, especially for individuals who may believe that they are being truly helpful. Pilar, who facilitates anti-oppression training and dialogues within her agency, explained it this way:

Those are hard topics, I think, for people to hear about. Again, we have much more of an ability to shut the book, to ignore someone, to walk away...you have to deal with your own stuff and what your own upbringing has been because racism is a very strong part of our culture and oppression as well.

Nonetheless, without a broader understanding of how levels of oppression interact and affect the lives of rape survivors, people who think they are helping are actually doing their clients an enormous disservice. It is clear that training can reorient our perspectives in such a way that we are better aware of the interlacing systems that affect our clients. We must take seriously the role of culturally-specific beliefs and perspectives on the quality of our work. As Zuri, whose agency puts a significant focus on anti-oppressive work, commented:

there's a lot of focus spent on training the volunteers through an anti-oppression lens, through a social justice lens...and I see the results in the way that clients are held here...I feel like – does a really good job of orienting people towards asking those questions of themselves, which directly impacts the quality of services that we're able to offer to the community and the thoroughness of the ways that we're able to educate

communities around sexual violence and the roots of violence, which are oppression.

The examination and reevaluation of personal beliefs and stereotypes, and challenging how they affect our work with clients, must be a continuous, never-ending process. We should not assume that after a defined amount of training we are “anti-racist” or “anti-oppressive.” It is necessary to continually reexamine our stance in order to actively assert a new perspective and engage in a way of operating that is truly anti-oppressive. The oppressive nature of language must be explored (e.g., “lame” or “bitch”), and blunt, honest language must be part of training. Diluting language is a disservice to the process because it prevents us from being in touch with the pain that oppression inflicts.

Some of the professionals who participated in this study commented on the competition for time and resources for training. Once an anti-oppression stance is taken by an organization, however, it can then be inextricably infused into all other training from working with crisis interventions to policy analysis. An anti-oppressive stance is not transitory: it creates a lens through which to learn, work with survivors, and interact with the world. It becomes incorporated into all aspects of personal and professional life.

One professional, Naomi, carefully explained what her experience has been in agency training and what she feels could help training to be more effective in the future. She felt that learning and growing had shut down because white staff became overwhelmed and were shut down by “guilty white women’s syndrome” and staff of color became more angry and aggressive in the face of this resistance. Participants perpetuated a cycle of denial and resistance that amplified anger, which in turn increased



resistance. In that situation, learning could not occur because the strength of the resistance prevented staff from hearing anything. Naomi suggested that what might facilitate better learning is staff members' individual identity development, particularly in terms of their racial identity. She explained that for white staff, this would help in breaking through the resistance and acknowledging acts of racism and privilege before bringing this understanding into a dialogue in the context of anti-rape work. This would also help in creating a context that encourages questions and discourse and discourages silencing out of guilty and fear of "being racist." For staff who are people of color, identity development might help in understanding how to confront resistance in training in a way that breaks down barriers as opposed to building up walls. Beginning with an awareness of the personal may help to facilitate dialogue in which staff are open to listening and can learn from each other. It is only through personal exploration, agency training, and open discourse that the anti-rape movement can fully embrace and uphold an anti-oppressive stance which will, in turn, enable agencies to better serve a diversity of rape survivors.

#### *Need for Women of Color and Social Justice Leadership in the Anti-Rape Movement*

There is a compelling need for the anti-rape movement to recruit leadership that is socially and culturally competent, particularly that found in strong women of color. Deliberate recruitment of this social justice perspective into agencies, especially into positions of leadership, is a key first step to implementing the type of awareness that is needed. While it is not the responsibility of women of color to educate white women about cultural differences, the presence of women of color and white women with a social justice stance, in leadership positions, can help to bring issues of race and

oppression into the forefront of agency consciousness. A strong agency presence of women of color, particularly in positions that command attention and respect, can make it less likely for important voices to be dismissed and silenced. For those in positions of power to carry an anti-oppressive/ anti-racism stance, makes it more likely that, as one participant suggested, all staff training is offered through this lens, which in turn, can help staff understand that oppression is woven through all aspects of people's lives and that needs, concerns, and beliefs cannot be interpreted without that acknowledgment and understanding.

#### *Social Work and Social Justice Presence in Other Helping Agencies*

Black female rape survivors need a variety of different services as they reach out for help and attempt to meet needs that are both directly and indirectly related to their assault. Such services may include counseling, law enforcement, shelter, medical services, financial assistance, or education. One important step that we can take, beyond the adoption of an anti-oppression and anti-racism lens, is to advocate for the implementation of this social justice lens into all service agencies that survivors are likely to encounter. This is an enormous but necessary step toward a network of systems that truly supports rather than discriminates against survivors of rape. This step should begin by networking in the community and educating other human-service organizations and agencies of law enforcement. Because survivors of sexual violence are so often a hidden population, many agencies actually serve them on a regular basis without knowing it. They serve survivors, therefore, without being aware of how that status, their experiences, and their perspectives shape their needs and concerns. As experts, leaders of the anti-rape movement must take responsibility to help human-service agencies become

more effective at identifying and serving survivors of sexual violence. They may meet resistance in many organizations, but it is a significant part of ending the discrimination that female survivors of color face in their healing process.

### *Study Strengths and Limits*

It is recognized that this study was limited by several factors, first of which was the inability to carry out the originally-intended Plan A. The original goal of this study was to explore the reporting experiences of Black female survivors with this population directly, through their own words, in order to gain insight into the role that race in that process. Extensive effort was made to recruit a sample of survivors, but achieving this goal was not possible in the time frame allotted for this project. First, the area in which I was based, Western Massachusetts, is not an ideal setting to recruit this population because the area is predominantly white and most communities are rural, even though I recruited heavily in the most racially diverse locations accessible to me. Not having direct access to such a sample through an agency with which I had a relationship was also a barrier, because potential sample members were asked to take a huge risk in contacting me, a stranger—essentially just a name on a flier—even if they were relatively comfortable in talking about their experience. Of the many survivors I spoke with in recruiting participants, several said that they would have been interested in participating; yet, they had not reported their own assault. Although my original intent was to include only survivors who had reported, this criterion then became a limitation, because their voices might have lent more insight into why so many Black women do not report rape.

I was told by many women of color that while they were very excited about what I was doing, it would be very difficult if not impossible to gain access to a sample. One

woman explained that women of color in her community were fearful of retribution from local law enforcement and the community as a whole. Another woman I spoke with who had planned to connect me to a Black women's group she was a part of retracted her offer after speaking with the group's organizer. The organizer felt that rape was not a topic for their group and explained that they were a group of professional women whose discussions centered on politics, business, and international issues and that rape was not something that they dealt with or that concerned them because they were "professionals." I knew I could not argue with her, even though I know that rape knows no boundaries of race or class, but this conversation also made me see what I was up against.

Another limitation to the study is that nine of the interviews with the secondary sample (Sample B) took place over the telephone because they were not accessible to me by reasonable travel means. Yet another limitation is that although every effort was made to interview helping professionals who are women of color, only one third of the final sample ended up with this profile.

Although this study was small in scope, it also had strengths. The respondents reflect a range of experience, agency setting, and professional status and role and as such, contributed in many ways to a broader understanding of how rape survivors interact with services that are theoretically designed to meet their needs. Another strength of this study is that respondents had varied levels of training and very diverse insights into the experiences of survivors, particularly those of Black women, increasing the likelihood that their views represent those of other helping professionals who work with rape survivors.

Finally, although access to the originally-intended Sample A was not achieved, the insight, experience, and words of the one survivor who was willing to speak with me, enhanced and grounded the findings of the practitioners who did participate. Although the words of one woman cannot speak for all, her words can give voice to many survivors who chose to report and found themselves in similar circumstances.

#### *Suggestions for Future Research*

The first and most obvious suggestion is to renew efforts to access the originally-intended sample for this study in order to continue to explore and document the degree to which Black women face discrimination when they attempt to report rape and access services. Second, it is clear that many women do not report their assaults. Future research should explore experiences of these women, the factors that played into that decision, and what might have enabled them to reach out for help. Future research into the reporting experience should be also conducted with survivors of all identifications, including males and transgender persons.

#### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, this study has uncovered some of the complexities of the role that race plays in the reporting experiences of Black female rape survivors. Not only is race an inherent aspect of a survivor's identity, it is also inextricable in the identity of the helping professional with whom she comes in contact. Race both informs and mediates the lens through which individuals understand and interact with the world and through which agencies understand and work with people. For an agency to focus solely on gender oppression and to overlook the importance of racial identity in service provision is

to ignore the impact of worldviews and belief systems and to disregard how interwoven systems of oppression shape life.

Helping professionals must become better trained and more aware of levels of oppression and the pervasiveness of racism. They must become informed enough to both allow and help clients to feel understood and accepted and to help them begin to heal. The anti-rape movement purports a commitment against gender-based violence, and it is aggressive in meeting that commitment. However, until it fully adopts an anti-racism and anti-oppression stance, it is not in tune with the experiences and needs of women of color. The anti-rape movement must evolve such that it effectively addresses all levels of oppression that exist for women of color, or survivors of rape will not be fully supported and heard by those people who claim that they are dedicating their lives to doing so.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide for Data Collection (for use with Sample A)

1. Age
2. How would you describe your racial/ethnic identity?
3. Are you disabled in any way?
4. How would you describe your socioeconomic standing at the time of the sexual assault and/or the time of reporting?

*“The next few questions are to gather basic information about your experience of sexual violence.”*

5. Approximately how old were you when you experienced the rape/sexual assault?
6. Can you describe your relationship to the perpetrator(s)?
7. How do you describe the perpetrator’s racial/ethnic identity?

*“How are you feeling so far? The next several questions deal with your reporting experience.”*

8. To what type(s) of agency did you choose to report?
9. What factors led you to choose to report to this/these particular agency/office/organization(s)? (familial, social, personal, cultural factors)
10. Do you believe your racial identity played a role in your choice to report and to whom to report? If yes, please describe.
11. What were your expectations or concerns about reporting?
12. Please describe how you were treated by the agency representative(s) with whom you worked.
13. What role do you believe your racial identity played in your experience of reporting?

14. Do you believe you have internalized any social myths or stereotypes about who you are, as a woman of the African Diaspora? If yes, please describe.
15. Do you feel that these myths and/or stereotypes affected your experience of reporting? If yes, please describe.

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Data Collection (for use with Sample B)

1. What is your professional title?
2. Length of time spent in your professional field of work?
3. How would you describe your racial/ethnic identity?
4. Describe the capacity in which you work with survivors of rape.
5. Can you describe the racial and ethnic diversity of the clientele you currently work with? (And the racial and ethnic diversity of the clientele at other agencies where you have worked with rape survivors?)
6. Can you describe the racial and ethnic diversity of the staff at your agency? (And the racial and ethnic diversity of the staff at other agencies where you have worked with rape survivors?)
7. Does your agency utilize volunteers in working with clients? If so, please describe the racial and ethnic diversity of the volunteers at your agency. (And the diversity of volunteers at other agencies where you have worked with rape survivors.)
8. Have you known of instances in which a rape survivor was treated differently because of her racial/ethnic background? This might include situations you have personally witnessed or those relayed to you by clients and/or colleagues. If yes, please describe.
9. Have you been trained in working with survivors of racial or ethnic backgrounds different than your own? If yes, please describe.

## Appendix C: Informed Consent Form (for use with Sample A)

Dear Potential Study Participant,

My name is Amy Hochberg and I am a MSW student Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a research study on Black females who have experienced rape and who have chosen to contact some type of support service as a result of the experience. I hope that by allowing these voices to be heard, professional support services will be better able to serve this population. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Masters of Social Work degree at Smith College and data will be used as part of both a written thesis and a presentation.

You are being asked to participate in this study as a person who meets the following study criteria: (1) a biological woman who is at least 18 years of age; (2) self-identification as having experienced rape; (3) self-identification as a Black, African American, an Afro-Cuban woman, as a woman of African or Caribbean descent, or any woman who identifies as belonging to the African Diaspora; (4) as a result of the rape you have contacted a law enforcement agency, counseling service, medical assistance or some other type of support service. Additionally, it has been at least six months since the sexual assault. For the purposes of this study, rape is defined by the Massachusetts' legal definition as penetration of any orifice by any object; force or threat of force; against the will of the victim.

The purpose of this study is to examine the role that race has played in the reporting experience of Black females. If you agree to participate, you will be asked about your experience of reporting and how you feel that your race has affected that experience. You will also be asked to provide general demographic information and minimal information about the sexual assault experience. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. Notes may be taken during the interview and it will be audio-taped to ensure that experiences are accurately represented in my thesis report.

A potential risk to participating in this study is the possibility of experiencing flashbacks or feeling overwhelming or distressing emotions connected to the trauma and your recovery. If at any time you feel unable to continue, you may end the interview. Also, I will check in with you throughout the interview to verify that you still want to proceed. If you agree to participate, we will schedule the interview for a time when your support system will be available to you, and I will also provide contact information for support services that might be of help to you following the interview.

Although there is no financial benefit, participation in this study may give you an opportunity to voice thoughts and concerns about your experience of reporting that may have otherwise remained silent. Voicing your experience in this study represents self-advocacy as you are able to give feedback about your reporting experience. Your experience will add to the body of knowledge regarding how women, particularly Black females, experience helping services they might contact after an incident of sexual

violence. Finally, you may benefit from knowing that an understanding of your experience may help other survivors of rape who choose to access legal, medical, or support services.

Confidentiality will be maintained by assigning each participant an identification number by which all information will be coded. A master list of participants and identification numbers will be accessible only to me and names will not be held with collected information. My research advisor will have access to collected information once all names and identifying information have been removed. All audio recordings will be transcribed by me. Original notes, tape recordings, and transcripts will be kept locked for a period of three years in accordance with Federal guidelines and will then be physically destroyed. All personal information will be disguised so that it is not identified with you. If information from this study is utilized in scientific presentations or publications, the anonymity of all participants will be preserved. Collected data will be presented as a whole, and any quotes used will not contain identifying information.

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question. You may also choose to withdraw from the study at any time prior to March 1<sup>st</sup>, at which time I will begin to write the final report. If you choose to withdraw before this time, all information collected from you will be destroyed.

You may reach me, Amy Hochberg, at (413) 773-2746 if you have any questions about the study or if you would like to discuss the interview after it has taken place.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form (for use with Sample B)

Dear Potential Study Participant,

My name is Amy Hochberg and I am a MSW student Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a research study on Black females who have experienced rape and who have chosen to contact some type of support service as a result of the experience. I am also interviewing helping professionals, who have worked with Black female survivor of rape, for their unique perspective of the reporting experience. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Masters of Social Work degree at Smith College and data will be used as part of both a written thesis and a presentation.

You are being asked to participate in this study as a person who meets the following study criteria: (1) a helping professional who works in an agency or organization which provides services to Black females who have experienced rape and (2) you have personally had experience, in your professional capacity, working with Black females who have experienced rape.

The purpose of this study is to examine the role that race has played in the reporting experience of Black females who have experienced rape, from the perspective of both women who have reported rape and from the perspective of helping professionals who work with Black female survivors. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked about your experience working with rape survivors, particularly Black female survivors of rape. You will not be asked to reveal the identities of clients you have worked with and the name of your agency will be kept confidential. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. Notes may be taken during the interview and it will be audio-taped to ensure that participants' experiences are accurately represented in the study's findings.

A potential risk to participating in this study is the possibility of feeling overwhelming or distressing emotions connected to your work with survivors of rape. If you personally identify as a survivor of trauma, you may also risk experiencing distressing emotions related to your own experience of abuse or trauma. If at any time you feel unable to continue, you may end the interview. Additionally, I will provide contact information for support services that might be of help to you following the interview.

Although there is no financial benefit, participation in this study may give you an opportunity to voice thoughts and concerns about your experience of working with survivors of rape. Your experience will add to the body of knowledge regarding how women, particularly Black females, experience helping services they might contact after an incident of sexual violence. Finally, you may benefit from knowing that an understanding of your experience may help agencies, which work with rape survivors, to better serve their clients.



Confidentiality will be maintained by assigning each participant an identification number by which all information will be coded. A master list of participants and identification numbers will be accessible only to me and names will not be held with collected information. As previously stated, you will not be asked to reveal the identities of your clients, and the name of your agency will be kept confidential. My research advisor will have access to collected information once all names and identifying information have been removed. All audio recordings will be transcribed by me. Original notes, tape recordings, and transcripts will be kept locked for a period of three years in accordance with Federal guidelines and will then be physically destroyed. All personal information will be disguised so that it is not identified with you. If information from this study is utilized in scientific presentations or publications, the anonymity of all participants will be preserved. Collected data will be presented as a whole, and any quotes used will not contain identifying information.

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question. You may also choose to withdraw from the study at any time prior to May 1<sup>st</sup>, at which time I will begin to write the final report. If you choose to withdraw before this time, all information collected from you will be destroyed.

You may reach me, Amy Hochberg, at (413) 773-2746 if you have any questions about the study or if you would like to discuss the interview after it has taken place.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix E: Human Subjects Review Approval Letter

January 18, 2007

Amy Hochberg  
1 Aqua Vitae Road  
Hadley, MA 01035

Dear Amy,

Your amended documents have been reviewed and all is now in order. We are, therefore now happy to give final approval to this study. It is a very important topic to pursue and I hope some women will be willing to come forward and tell it like it is. It will be hard for them, but I would think they would also be glad to have the opportunity to be heard.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with this useful work.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Dominique Steinberg, Research Advisor

Appendix F: Outreach Advertisement (for recruitment of Sample A)

Are you a woman of the African Diaspora

who has experienced sexual assault?

Did you report your experience

to a counselor, doctor, or the police?

**Your experience could help other women like you.**

I invite you to **speak about your experience of reporting the sexual assault**

to a counselor, advocate, police office, or doctor.

**I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work and I am studying**

**the reporting experiences of adult Black women who have experienced sexual assault and chose to report their experience to legal, medical, or counseling services.**

**If you think you might be interested, or would like to know more about this project,**

**please contact me at:**

(413) 773-2746  
and ask for Amy.

*Participation in this study will be kept strictly confidential*

## Appendix G: Resources Distributed to All Study Participants

### **Agencies**

YWCA's ARCH (Abuse and Rape Crisis Hotline)  
Springfield, MA  
413.733.7100 (hotline)

Everywoman's Center: Counselor/Advocate Program  
Free counseling, support groups, legal/medical advocacy  
800.439.0183 (24 hr hotline: after business hours an  
answering service may answer, take your number, and  
a counselor will call you back as soon as possible)

NELCWIT (New England Learning Center for Women in Transition)  
hotline, counseling, free support groups, bilingual services,  
legal consultation, and safety planning  
Greenfield, MA  
413.772.0806 (hotline)  
888.249.0806 (toll-free hotline)

CT Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.  
hotline, provides information on local services  
East Hartford, CT  
888.999.5545 (toll free)

YWCA of New Britain Sexual Assault Services  
(Hartford, CT Office)  
888-999-5545 (toll free hotline)

Safe Passage  
Shelter, hotline, support groups, referrals/ legal advocacy  
888-345-5282 (toll free hotline)  
Northampton, MA

Jane Doe Inc.: Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence  
[www.janedoe.org](http://www.janedoe.org)

SafeLink Hotline: MA domestic violence hotline  
877.785.2020 (24 hour toll-free hotline)

### **Nationwide resources**

RAINN (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network)

800.656.HOPE (24 hr. free, confidential hotline)

National Domestic Violence Hotline  
800.799.SAFE (7233)

Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community  
Resources, hotlines  
<http://www.dvinstitute.org/>

Incite! Women of Color Against Violence  
Activism, resources  
[www.incite-national.org](http://www.incite-national.org)

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
<http://www.ncadv.org/>

Women of Color Network  
Activism, resources  
<http://womenofcolornetwork.org/>

National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women  
[www.vawnet.org](http://www.vawnet.org)

National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault  
[www.sisterslead.org](http://www.sisterslead.org)

Black Women's Health  
Resources, articles  
[http://www.blackwomenshealth.com/domestic\\_violence.htm](http://www.blackwomenshealth.com/domestic_violence.htm)

\*if you are using internet resources, and you think someone might be tracking your online activity, please look at <http://www.janedoe.org/safety.htm> or <http://www.nelcwit.org/Internet%20safety.htm> for information about maintaining your privacy and being safe.