Fetishized and Blamed: Attitudes Toward Asian American Women as Victims/Survivors of Sexual Assault

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FETISHIZED AND BLAMED:
ATTITUDES TOWARD ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN
AS VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

by

JANE LU RHYNE MATEJKA

SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

PROFESSOR JENNIFER MA
PROFESSOR HEEJUNG PARK

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Acknowledgments

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To my friends, you have seen me through the absolute ups and downs of this undertaking. Thank you for listening to me rave on and on about my topic. Thank you for your company all those days and nights in the library. Thank you for the coffee breaks, the going-on-a-drive breaks, and the laying-in-the-sun-on-Jacqua breaks…You guys keep me grounded! I love you all!
Abstract
The present study sought to investigate whether there are differences in the perceptions of Asian American women as victims/survivors of sexual assault compared to White American women, as well as which factors may influence any differential attitudes. This study utilized an online survey format to present participants with a sexual assault vignette that featured either an Asian American woman or a White American woman as the victim. Participants ($N = 256$) were asked to assign blame to the victim and the perpetrator, as well as to categorize the vignette as either a crime or not. In addition, participants responded to measures of their endorsement of rape myths and stereotypes about Asian Americans. It was found that participants who were neither White nor Asian blamed the Asian American victim significantly more than the White American victim, although no differences in perpetrator blaming were found. Among Asian and White participants, this research did not demonstrate differential blaming based on victim race. The results of the study demonstrate that there is a tendency to blame Asian American women more than White American women for their sexual assaults, though this effect was not established for all participants. This finding has huge implications for the legal system, the healthcare of Asian American women, and broader society.
Fetishized and Blamed: Attitudes Toward Asian American Women as Victims/Survivors of Sexual Assault

Asian Americans are now the fastest-growing population among the four largest racial groups in the United States, tripling in number in the past 30 years (“What’s Going On in This Graph?”, 2022). The term Asian American is presently employed to describe a pan-ethnic group that contains many identities and experiences, and whose boundaries are fluid and may shift per varying historical and political contexts.¹ Although significant Asian populations have been situated within American society for more than a century and a half (Pew Research Center, 2012), violence against this group has been on the increase – especially since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Federal Bureau of Investigation reported a 77% increase in hate crimes against Asian Americans between 2019 and 2020 (Findling et al., 2022). Moreover, Yam (2021) found that 68% of the post-pandemic hate incidents against Asian Americans have been against people who experience misogyny (hereafter, the term women is used to describe this population, with recognition of the limitation of this term to truly encapsulate the full range of lived experiences). Further concerning is the fact that up to 55% of Asian American women will report experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime (“Statistics on Violence Against API Women,” n.d.). This research aims to understand whether there is a difference in the perceptions of Asian American women as victims/survivors² of sexual assault when compared to White American women, as well as what factors may contribute to any differences.

¹ This study recognizes that Asian Americans are not a monolith, and the term encompasses many different groups who come from vastly different cultural backgrounds. However, this study interested itself in the broad Asian American group as opposed to the narrower East Asian American group because most of the cited sources did not differentiate regional Asian identity, and because Asian women across diverse ethnicities experience societal othering, as well as racialized and sexualized stereotypes.

² It is worth noting that the choice of the label “victim” or “survivor” is individual to the person who was sexually victimized. To accommodate, this study will intersperse both terms with recognition that either word may not be the preferred descriptive of every person’s experience.
Racism Against Asian Americans

Racism is a system of oppression that is built on the categorization of social groups into “races” that are valued and treated differently (Priest et al., 2018). Many social groups are victims of racism and Asian Americans are no exception; racism against Asians is extremely prevalent in American society. Alvarez et al. (2006) found that 98% of Asian American participants reported at least one encounter with a racial microaggression within the last year. Sue et al. (2007) identified eight distinct types of racial microaggressions that Asian Americans are specifically subjected to: 1) alienation/foreignization, 2) ascription of intelligence, 3) denial of racial reality, 4) exoticization of Asian American women, 5) invalidation of interethnic distinctions, 6) pathologizing of differential cultural values, 7) designation as second-class citizens, and 8) invisibility as people of color. The COVID-19 pandemic ignited fresh racism against Asian Americans. An opinion piece survey (Lee, 2022) found that one in five Americans believe that Asian Americans are at least partly responsible for the pandemic and one in three Americans believe that Asian Americans are more loyal to their country of origin than the United States. This prejudicial attitude towards Asian Americans is certainly born out of stereotypes that are still pervasive, such as the notion that all Asian Americans are foreigners or that all Asian Americans are overachievers who are good at math and science, as reported in mainstream narratives (Tian et al., 2023).

Stereotypes about Asian Americans

Stereotyping is a fundamental process of human cognition that is driven by a need to categorize, simplify, and process the complexities of the social world (Zhang et al., 2023). While the process of stereotyping is generally viewed by psychologists as a normal function of cognition, there are societal consequences to the formation of stereotypes (Augoustinos &
Stereotyping contributes to the development of racist attitudes and behaviors by causing people to overgeneralize and misunderstand racially stigmatized groups. For example, the model minority myth unfairly asserts the stereotype that all Asian Americans are submissive, docile, and hard-working (Junn, 2007). These stereotypes lead to differential attitudes and behaviors towards Asian Americans based on race. For example, Okura (2022) found that high school teachers hold higher academic expectations for their Asian students when compared to their White students. Although this stereotype-based behavior may seem positive, especially when compared to the negative academic stereotypes that affect other students of color, the construction of Asian Americans as the model minority serves to not only justify the further degradation of other racial minority groups but also to obscure racism against many Asian Americans (especially those who do not subscribe to the stereotypes). Although stereotyping may be a natural product of human psychology, it also must be recognized that stereotyping can lead to the harmful and discriminatory treatment of social groups.

Asian American women are specifically subjected to harmful and intersectional stereotypes. Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality asserts that membership in certain social groups can make people the target of prejudice. As people inhabit different social groups concurrently (e.g., Asian, woman, disabled, low socioeconomic status), their experiences are unique to the combination of identities that they embody. Asian American women experience a combination of gendered and racialized stereotypes that lead to distinct prejudices, and these stereotypes are still prevalent in mainstream United States culture today. In an analysis of over 3,000 tweets, Azhar et al. (2021) identified three intersectional themes specifically related to stereotypes about Asian American women: 1) Asian American women are perceived as exotic
and are hypersexualized, 2) Asian American women are expected to be passive, and 3) Asian American women experience racialized violence and racialized sexual harassment.

**The Psychological and Contextual Basis of Stereotyping.** Psychologists have offered different explanations for why people engage in stereotyping. Augoustinos & Walker (1998) argue that stereotype formation theories fall into one of two perspectives: a social cognitive perspective or a self-categorization perspective. Social cognitive perspectives argue that stereotypes come from the basic need of human cognition for the organization of social life, such that the categorization of people into social groups occurs because of a cognitive need to navigate the world efficiently. Self-categorization perspectives argue that stereotypes arise from conflict and differences between groups of people. Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) extends self-categorization perspectives in such a way that integrates social cognitive perspectives as well. SIT recognizes that self-categorization does not just exist as a social process but is also affected by cognitive processes. Thus, for the purpose of cognitive simplification, individuals naturally process cognitive information in a manner that is congruent with or protects their group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The subscription to a group identity then incites behaviors that seek to delineate one’s group from other groups to maintain intergroup distinctions, often causing conflict. One of these delineating behaviors is stereotyping (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Furthermore, realistic group conflict theory (RGCT; Sherif & Sherif, 1953) posits that intergroup conflict is caused by the existence of conflicting goals between groups, and is reduced by the existence of a superordinate goal that is only attainable through intergroup cooperation. In addition, RGCT emphasizes how the broader social context shapes attitudes and behaviors -- namely prejudice and discrimination. Thus, RGCT may also explain the stereotypes that exist
about Asians in America. There is ample historical evidence for this proposition. For example, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act was passed to protect national resources from Asian immigrants. This act allowed immigration from Asia, but with a strong preference for “skilled” workers, thereafter becoming a formative factor in establishing the model minority myth (Junn, 2007). As explained by RGCT, the goals of these two groups (“Americans” and Asian Americans) to both find work and thereafter build a life in the United States were conflicting. Thus, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination emerged between these new Asian immigrants and the pre-settled Americans.

Furthermore, RGCT can explain other historical policies in the United States that have propped up stereotypes about Asian women specifically. The Page Act was passed in 1875, also to disrupt Asian immigration and protect American labor. This act functionally assumed all Chinese women to be sex workers and banned this group from immigrating to the United States (Loh-Hagan et al., 2022). This policy was foundational in the societal construction of Asian American women as hypersexual, “villainous temptresses” (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021, p. 568). The mere existence of these anti-Asian policies, created to resolve claims of limited domestic resources, demonstrates how realistic group conflict theory can explain stereotypes about Asian Americans.

While history and policy may have shaped the generation of stereotypes about Asian women, culture perpetuates these stereotypes. Tajima (1985, p. 309) argues that Asian women are classically portrayed as one of two caricatures in media: the “docile lotus blossom” or the “devious dragon lady”. For example, the characterization of the docile lotus blossom is epitomized in the famous musical Miss Saigon (Schonberg & Boublil, 1989). The production depicts a 17-year-old Vietnamese girl who, after being impregnated and abandoned by an
American soldier, commits suicide. The girl, Kim, is submissive and child-like, but still exotic and sexual, thus embodying the docile lotus blossom (Chow, 2014). The film *The Thief of Baghdad* (Walsh, 1924) launched the character of the devious dragon lady. In the film, one of the antagonists -- an enslaved Mongolian woman -- is depicted as extremely desirable but also immoral and deceitful, using her sexuality to trick the protagonist (Tajima, 1985). Woan (2008, p. 571) offers a third caricature: that of the “little brown fucking machine”. The “little brown fucking machine” refers to the characterization of Southeast Asians as the essence of hypersexuality and eroticism. Woan (2008) argues that Stanley Kubrick’s 1987 war film, *Full Metal Jacket*, elevated this stereotype into the mainstream. The film follows a platoon of American soldiers who find themselves interacting with the Vietnamese people. The “little brown fucking machine” is embodied by a Vietnamese sex worker, who speaks the famous line of: “… me so horny. Me love you long time,” to the American soldiers (Woan, 2008, p. 578).

**The Fetishization of Asian American Women**

These stereotypes leave Asian women vulnerable to being fetishized. The fetishization, or strong sexual preference and objectification, of Asian women is prominent in society -- garnering the colloquial name “yellow fever” (Ng, 2018). In an analysis of a dating website, Chow & Hu (2013) found that men of all races except Asian, messaged Asian women the most. This pattern demonstrates the prevailing attitude that Asian women are sexually preferential. Although this form of fetishization may seem fairly inconsequential, or even complimentary, the fetishization of Asian women is far from harmless. Content analyses of internet pornography sites by Gossett & Byrne (2002) and Zhou & Paul (2016) found that Asian women are generally depicted as more submissive and passive than White women, and are also vastly overrepresented in rape pornography. The disproportionate characterization of Asian women as the victims of rape is
stark. It has been argued that rape is rooted in a dynamic of power (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013), and this depiction of Asian women as victims of rape upholds (and persists) the stereotypes of passivity, submissiveness, and hypersexuality. Moreover, an analysis by Dougherty (2014) of an online community created to post reviews of sex workers showed that Asian sex workers are seen as sexually exotic and foreign. Dougherty reported that the reviews of Asian sex workers often compared them to White sex workers, and there was more emphasis on the size (usually “petite”), English-speaking ability, submissiveness, and race of Asian sex workers. It was also shown that Asian American women are perceived as a foreign “other” in society, which portrays them as sexually novel. These stereotypes of exoticism, passivity, and submissiveness bolster the fetishization of Asian women.

The fetishization of Asian women is incredibly prevalent in American society; a review by Forbes et al. (2023) of the intersectional discrimination that Asian American women encounter found that the theme of “exoticization, hypersexuality, and fetishization” was the most prevalent across all studies. Some psychological research has been done on this intersectional discrimination; Keum et al. (2018) developed the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale for Asian American Women (GRMSAAW) to measure the extent of this discrimination. However, the research is certainly lacking, especially when considering how large the Asian female population is in America. The lack of attention that is given to this issue can lead to terrifying realities for Asian American women.

For example, it has been found that Asian American women experience more sexual harassment than White American women and that their experiences of sexual harassment are correlated with post-traumatic stress (Buchanan et al., 2018). Furthermore, it was reported by the Asianweek news publication in 2005 that a White doctoral student at Princeton was arrested after
admitting to cutting the hair of unsuspecting Asian women, as well as pouring his urine and semen into the drinks of Asian women at the dining hall over 50 times (Macabasco, 2005). In a search of his apartment, which he shared with his Asian wife, police found underwear filled with the hair of Asian women – evidently used for masturbation (Macabasco, 2005). Particularly alarming is the way that the fetishization of Asian women can give rise to physical violence. On March 16, 2021, a man shot and killed six Asian American women at three different spa parlors across Atlanta. According to CBS News (Sundby, 2021), he claimed that he was driven by his sex addiction and a need to eliminate any temptations. Considering that none of the victims were ever reported to be sex workers, the gendered and racialized stereotypes against Asian American women that fundamentally motivated this crime are clear.

**Sexual Assault**

Sexual assault is unwanted sexual contact or behavior. Forms of sexual assault include rape, attempted rape, fondling or unwanted sexual touching, and forcing a victim to perform sexual acts (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, n.d.). Over 430,000 Americans aged 12 and over are sexually assaulted every year according to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network. Moreover, nine out of 10 victims of rape are women (Scope of the Problem: Statistics, n.d.). While sexual assault is evidently a catastrophic problem that harms nearly half a million Americans per year, there seems to be a large discrepancy between the occurrence of sexual assault and the pursuit of justice for survivors of sexual assault. First, a vast majority (Scope of the Problem: Statistics, n.d.) of survivors of sexual assault (up to 80%) will never formally report their victimization. Spencer et al. (2017) found that women may choose not to report for many different reasons, including shame, the fear of not being believed, and the use of substances at the time of the assault.
Furthermore, the likelihood that a perpetrator will be convicted for the crime is incredibly low. Out of every 1000 sexual assaults, only an estimated 28 perpetrators will be convicted (Scope of the Problem: Statistics, n.d.). Moreover, one report (Taylor, 2007) found that sexual assault cases have one of the highest acquittal rates compared to other criminal offenses. Interestingly, the report found that the beliefs and attitudes of the jurors were more predictive of juror judgment than were the objective facts of the cases. This finding is incredibly revealing of how individual attitudes affect the perception of sexual assaults, including the attribution of blame for the victim and the absolution of blame for the perpetrator.

**Assignment of Blame**

Victim blaming is the tendency to generally hold victims responsible for their own victimization (Adams-Price et al., 2004). While victim blaming does not singularly refer to situations of sexual assault, it is particularly pronounced in sexual assaults compared to other crimes. Bieneck & Krahé (2011) found that, on average, participants blamed victims of rape more than victims of robbery, and conversely blamed perpetrators of rape less than perpetrators of robbery. Evidently, survivors of sexual assault endure more scrutiny for their actions than victims of other crimes. It has been argued that victim blaming could occur because of the just world belief theory (Lerner, 1980, as cited in Hayes et al., 2013), which postulates that individuals tend to believe that the world is fair and that people get what they deserve. This belief has harmful consequences for victims of sexual assault. Multiple studies (Hayes et al., 2013; Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2021; Strömwall et al., 2012) have found that greater endorsement of the just world belief theory predicted higher amounts of victim blaming. The just world belief theory hinges on the assumption that people’s experiences are dictated by their actions, and thus,
often leads to the presumption that victims must have done something to warrant their sexual assault.

Pollard (1992) furthermore identified two categories of predictors of victim blame: individual factors and situational factors. Individual factors are the participant characteristics that affect tendencies to victim blame. For example, men are more likely to engage in victim blaming than women (Anderson et al., 1997). It has also been found that older people generally attribute more blame to the victim than younger people do (Adams-Price et al., 2004).

In terms of the race of the participant as an individual factor, different studies have shown varied findings. It has been found that Black and Latinx participants were overall more likely to blame victims than White participants (Casarella-Espinoza, 2015; Dull & Giacopassi, 1987). However, it was also found that White participants blamed the victim the least when the victim was White and the perpetrator was Black, while Black participants blamed the victim the most when the victim was Black and the perpetrator was White (Varelas & Foley, 1998). There are very few studies that address the attitudes that Asian Americans have toward survivors of sexual assault, but there is some research that has shown that Asian American college men engage in more victim blaming than their White peers (Koo et al., 2012). However, in contrast to these findings, Bell et al. (2006) & Gilmartin-Zena (1982) found that participant race had no significant effect on victim blaming. Research on the participant’s race as a factor of victim blaming has demonstrated varied results and thus necessitates further investigation.

While individual factors certainly influence victim blaming, situational factors also affect the tendency to blame victims. Situational factors are those that come from the sexual assault scenario itself. One prevalent situational factor is the level of familiarity between the victim and the perpetrator. Bieneck & Krahé (2011) found that victims are blamed more in acquaintance
rapes than in stranger rapes. Furthermore, Ferro et al. (2008) found that victims are blamed more in marital rapes than in acquaintance rapes. Thus, as the victim and perpetrator become more familiar, participants tend to assign more blame to the victim. Another strong situational factor is the use of alcohol and drugs. It has been found that a victim who was drunk was blamed more, compared to if the victim had been overcome by physical force (Bieneck & Krahé, 2011). Furthermore, Qi et al. (2016) found that victims who were intoxicated by marijuana were blamed more for their assault than sober victims.

Moreover, the socio-economic status and the race of the victim are important situational factors of victim blame, although not studied often. Spencer (2016) conducted a study in which the victim of a sexual assault was either described to be a cashier or an accountant. It was shown that participants were more likely to judge victims of a lower socioeconomic status as promiscuous and blame them for their assaults. In addition, Yamawaki et al., (2007) found that a difference in status between the victim and the perpetrator affected the amount of blame assigned to the victim. The hypothetical female victim was more likely to be blamed when the assailant was of a higher socio-economic status compared to when the assailant was of a lower socio-economic status. Regarding race as a situational factor, studies have almost singularly focused on Black and Latinx victims. For example, it has been found that more blame is attributed to Black and Latinx victims than White victims (Campbell, 2017; Lewis et al., 2019). Further, Foley et al. (1995) found that participants rated the rape as less serious and were more likely to excuse it when the victim was Black compared to White. Moreover, in contrast to the findings of Varelas & Foley (1998), George & Martínez (2002) found that both Black and White victims were more likely to be blamed when the rape was interracial (as opposed to just Black victims). While positionality as an Asian American has been studied (albeit infrequently) as an individual factor
of victim blame, there does not seem to be any research that investigates Asian American identity as a situational factor of victim blame.

In contrast to victim blaming is perpetrator blaming. Thus, perpetrator blaming is the tendency to hold the perpetrator responsible for the victimization of another. A vast majority of the studies that measure both victim and perpetrator blame found that participants blame the perpetrator more than the victim (Bieneck & Krahé, 2011; Dyer et al., 2022; George & Martínez, 2002; Varelas & Foley, 1998). Interestingly, there is some evidence that suggests that victim blaming and perpetrator blaming are not always correlated with each other (i.e., as one construct increases, the other does not necessarily decrease), and should thus be treated as separate constructs (Strömwall et al., 2012). However, multiple studies (Bieneck & Krahé, 2011; Dyer et al., 2022; Pollard, 1992) have shown that victim blame and perpetrator blame are consistently negatively correlated (i.e., as one construct increases, the other does decrease) across different crimes, severity levels, and genders of both victim and perpetrator.

**Rape Myths**

Victim and perpetrator blaming are fundamental ideas to the contents of this paper. It may initially be difficult to separate the concepts of blame and rape myths; however, understanding rape myths is essential to contextualize these concepts. Rape myths are false beliefs about rape that diminish victim harm or blame the victims for their victimization, thus creating a hostile environment for survivors of rape (Burt, 1980). Some frequently accepted rape myths are that victims are “asking for it” through their promiscuous behavior, that rape must cause physical trauma to be considered rape, that victims often lie about being raped for personal gain, that a healthy person could resist a rapist if they really wanted to, that a victim cannot be raped by their spouse, and that it cannot be considered rape if the victim was drunk (Buddie & Miller, 2001;
The acceptance of rape myths can precipitate the blaming of victims for their assaults (Anderson & Overby, 2021). For example, victim blaming increases when victims are perceived as adhering to rape myths, such as the myth that victims are asking to be assaulted if they dress provocatively. This can be seen in several studies (Gilmartin-Zena, 1982; Johnson et al., 2016) that have found that victims wearing more revealing clothes, such as a body-hugging dress and high heels, were blamed more for their assault compared to victims who were dressed more conservatively. Furthermore, victims portrayed to be more promiscuous with more of a sexual history were also blamed more (Pugh, 1983), as were victims who had been sexually assaulted before (Calhoun et al., 1976).

Rape myths not only include falsehoods about victims of rape, but they also include myths about the perpetrators. In fact, Johnson et al. (1997) found that participants were more likely to accept rape myths that excuse the perpetrator -- such as the myths that men have sexual urges that they cannot control or that all rapists are insane -- than to accept rape myths that blame the survivor. It has been argued that rape myths stem from both the existence of traditional gender roles, as well as the patriarchal belief that power and sex are inherently related (Edwards et al., 2011).

Rape myths endure today. For instance, Buddie & Miller (2001) found that 66% of a college student sample endorsed at least some rape myths. Additionally, Franiuk et al. (2008) conducted an examination of articles covering the 2013 Kobe Bryant sexual assault case and found that 41% of articles contained at least one rape myth -- primarily questioning the victim’s truthfulness and motive. Rape myths are tied to numerous structures of society, which is why they continue to be accepted. Rollero & Tartaglia (2019) found that participants who rated higher on measures of hostile sexism, or overtly negative attitudes towards women, tended to accept
rape myths more. Furthermore, Johnson et al. (1997) established that people with a more conservative attitude toward gender roles were more likely to accept rape myths than those with a more liberal attitude toward gender roles.

While sexual assault is obviously a serious criminal act, the belief in rape myths may skew the likelihood that a participant would recognize a sexual assault as a crime. One reason for this may be the “real rape” myth (Estrich, 1986). This rape myth asserts that real rape involves a stranger who threatens a victim with a weapon, usually outdoors during nighttime, then violently forces them to engage in intercourse. In addition, the real rape myth characterizes rape as something that causes serious physical injury to the victim (Waterhouse et al., 2016). It has been found that people tend to grossly overestimate the occurrence of aspects of the real rape myth in cases of rape (Sleath & Woodhams, 2014). Previous research has found that participants perceived intraracial rapes as rape more often than they viewed interracial rapes as rape (George & Martinez, 2002). While these studies investigated some of the factors that influence the categorization of a sexual assault as rape, it seems that more research needs to be done on the factors that specifically influence the categorization of a sexual assault as a crime.

**Perceived Similarity to the Victim**

The final construct that this study seeks to investigate is the participant’s perceived similarity to the victim. The defensive attribution theory (Shaver, 1970) supports the notion that as personal perceived similarity with the victim increases, victim blame decreases. Shaver suggests that people assign blame to others in a way that protects them from being vulnerable to blame themselves. It is thus expected that participants who perceive themselves as similar to the victim would be less willing to assign blame to the victim, as this could ultimately implicate their own character. The literature on this topic shows diverging support for this expectation. It has
been found that perceived dissimilarity to the victim was correlated with more blame of the victim (Bell et al., 2006). However, findings in the opposite direction also exist. Muller et al. (1994, as cited in Grubb & Harrower, 2008) found that perceived similarity was correlated with more attribution of blame to the victim. They argued that this pattern is also explained by defensive attribution theory: by blaming the victims, participants who perceive themselves to be similar to the victim create cognitive distance, thereby protecting themselves from blame. The existence of conflicting findings on this topic warrants further investigation.

**Study Overview**

After conducting a review of the literature, it was evident that insufficient investigation was being done on how Asian American women were blamed and perceived as victims of sexual assault. The current study investigated whether there were differences in how people perceived and judged Asian American and White American women as alleged survivors of sexual assault, as well as what processes may have caused this difference. A quasi-experimental design was used. The study was quantitative and utilized an online survey format. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of two vignettes in which the hypothetical victim of a sexual assault was either an Asian American woman or a White American woman. They were then asked to assign blame to each party (perpetrator and victim), as well as to complete scales on rape myth acceptance and stereotypes about Asian American people. They were additionally asked about the extent to which they perceived themselves as similar to the victim and the perpetrator, as well as whether they would classify the hypothetical sexual assault as a crime.

**Hypotheses**

This study sought to investigate nine hypotheses. First, victim blame and perpetrator blame were expected to be inversely related. This negative correlation was expected due to
research (Bieneck & Krahé, 2011; Dyer et al., 2022; Pollard, 1992) that showed that victim blame and perpetrator blame demonstrated an inverse relationship with each other.

Next, perceived similarity to the victim and perceived similarity to the perpetrator were hypothesized to demonstrate an inverse relationship. In addition, people who perceived themselves to be more similar to the victim were expected to assign less blame to the victim than people who perceived themselves to be less similar to the victim. Furthermore, it was expected that participants who perceived themselves to be more similar to the perpetrator would assign more blame to the victim than participants who perceived themselves to be less similar to the perpetrator. These expected results were congruent with prior research that found that perceived similarity to the victim was correlated with less victim blaming (Bell et al., 2006), and thus more perpetrator blaming was also expected.

Next, Asian American victims were expected to be blamed more than White American victims. This result was expected to be in accordance with previous studies that found main effects of victim race on victim blaming in Black and Latinx victims (Campbell, 2017; Lewis et al., 2019). Moreover, perpetrators who assaulted Asian American victims were hypothesized to be blamed less than perpetrators who assaulted White American victims. An interaction was also hypothesized, such that participants would be more likely to blame a victim of another race than a victim of their race. The interaction was expected because previous research done by Varelas & Foley (1998) found that White participants blamed White victims less than Black victims of sexual assault.

In addition, it was proposed that participants who perceived themselves as more similar to the victim would be more likely to categorize the contents of the vignette as a crime. This finding was anticipated because it was found that participants who perceived themselves to be
more similar to the victim tended to have more empathy for their victimization experience (Krebs, 1975). This led to the expectation that empathetic participants would also be more likely to take on the perspective of the victim and label the sexual assault as a crime.

Finally, participants who endorsed more stereotypes about Asian Americans were expected to blame the Asian victim significantly more than the White victim, compared to participants who endorsed fewer stereotypes about Asian Americans. This finding was expected due to the previously discussed existence of racialized and sexual stereotypes about Asian American women.

**Method**

**Participants**

An a priori power analysis was conducted to determine the power necessary for this study. Based on results found by George & Martinez (2002) and Varelas & Foley (1998), a small effect size was expected. To detect a small effect size in a two-group one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with $\alpha = 0.05$ and a desired power of 0.8, approximately 786 participants were needed (Cohen, 1992). Sufficient power was not achieved due to limitations in funding. Participants in this study were 256 American adults ranging from 18 to 76 years old ($M = 36.59$, $SD = 11.72$). Participants were recruited from the online survey platform Prolific and were compensated $3. Participants primarily identified as female (51%), White (61.2%), Democrat (53.7%), had achieved a bachelor’s degree (50.2%), and had a total personal income of $24,999 or less (25.2%). The complete information for participants who chose to report their demographics is displayed in Table 1.
### Table 1

**Reported Participant Demographics**

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Materials

Sexual Assault Vignettes

The sexual assault vignettes were adapted from those used by Lewis et al. (2019). In both conditions (Asian victim and White victim), the vignette describes an acquaintance rape scenario in which the victim and the perpetrator are dating. During a date night at a bar, the victim and the perpetrator both become inebriated and decide to go back to the victim’s apartment. The victim and the perpetrator kiss throughout the night, and they engage in foreplay up to a point just short of intercourse. Despite the victim’s verbalized hesitancy, the perpetrator continues with penetrative sex. The vignette in its entirety, including the different racial conditions, can be found in the Appendix.

The vignettes for this study differ from those utilized in Lewis et al. in a few ways. First, the victim was a 24-year-old woman, not a college student. Lewis et al. were specifically interested in how female college students assigned victim blame to other female college students. This study broadly focuses on Asian American women as victims of sexual assault, not just Asian American college students. Moreover, the Lewis et al. vignette included a victim who was either White, Black, or Latinx, and implicitly indicated the victim’s race by manipulating their names as well as the activity that the victim was coming from. The present vignette includes a victim who was either Asian or White. In addition, the vignette explicitly described the race of the victim, as well as featured an implicit indication (the culturally relevant activity that the victim was coming from; either a Fourth of July barbecue or a Lunar New Year celebration) of the victim’s race later in the vignette. This redundant emphasis (explicit and implicit) was included to eliminate possible confusion about the race of the victim and to strengthen the manipulation.
In addition, both victim and perpetrator in the present vignette were inebriated and the victim in the present vignette communicated her discomfort at the situation proceeding to intercourse without saying the words “No” or “Stop”. These changes to the original vignette were employed to introduce more ambiguity in the situation, which could lead to more potential variation in responses. Lewis et al. were less concerned with identifying whether participants believed an assault had taken place and were more concerned with understanding how blame was attributed in the assault. This present study included the additional layer of nuance regarding whether the situation involved a crime or not, and thus the vignette was modified to allow for reasonable variation in participant responses. Finally, some details of the assault from the Lewis et al. vignette that could be particularly triggering were removed, such as the inclusion of the perpetrator forcefully removing the victim’s pants. These changes were made to decrease the violence of the assault, thus also allowing more ambiguity, as well as to reduce harm to the participants.

At the end of the study, participants completed a manipulation check. They were asked to report the victim’s race from the 7-option race/ethnicity list (as described in the “demographics” subsection below), as well as the victim’s age.

**Categorization of the Incident as a Crime**

Participants were asked: “Would you consider a crime to have taken place?”, in order to measure the categorization of the incident as either a crime or not a crime. The allowed responses were: Yes or No.

**Victim and Perpetrator Blame**

To measure victim and perpetrator blame, participants assigned an amount of responsibility to each party in the situation. Participants were asked: “How responsible were both
[Victim] and [Perpetrator] for the alleged sexual assault?”. Participants then responded on two sliding scales (corresponding to either the victim or the perpetrator) that ranged from 1 to 15, in which lower numbers indicated less responsibility.

**Perceived Similarity to Victim**

To measure the level of perceived similarity to the victim, participants were asked to:

“Please rate how similar you feel that you are to each person, in which 1 indicates not at all similar and 5 indicates very similar.” They then responded on two sliding scales (corresponding to either the victim or the perpetrator) that ranged from 1 to 5.

**Endorsement of Stereotypes about Asian Americans**

To measure the degree to which stereotypes about Asian Americans were endorsed, participants completed the Scale of Anti-Asian American Stereotypes (SAAAS; Lin et al., 2005). This 25-item scale includes two subscales: sociability and competence. The scale is based on the stereotype content model (Fiske et al., 2002) which asserts that outgroups fall into one of two categories: 1) paternalized groups that are liked due to their warmth but disrespected as incompetent (e.g., elderly people and traditional women), and 2) envied groups that are respected as competent but disliked due to their lack of warmth (e.g., Asian Americans and Jewish Americans). Thus, the SAAAS measures attitudes that affirm both the heightened competence and diminished sociability of Asian Americans. For example, items that measure competence include: “When it comes to education, Asian Americans aim to achieve too much,” and “A lot of Asian Americans can be described as working all of the time”. Items that measure sociability include: “Asian Americans do not usually like to be the center of attention at social gatherings,” and “Asian Americans commit less time to socializing than others do”. Participants were prompted to indicate their agreement with each item on the SAAAS using a 6-point Likert scale
from *strongly disagree* (0) to *strongly agree* (5). Higher numbers indicated more endorsement of the stereotypes. A composite score was recorded for each participant, as well as scores for both the competence and sociability domains. Five items on the SAAAS were reverse scored, such that higher numbers indicated less endorsement of the stereotypes. In calculating the composite score, these items were reversed such that higher numbers indicated more endorsement of stereotypes. According to Lin et al. (2005), the SAAAS was shown to be generally highly reliable (α = .94), as well as across both the sociability subscale (α = .91) and the competence subscale (α = .92) (Lin et al., 2005). Finally, the SAAAS demonstrated robust construct validity (Lin et al., 2005).

In addition to completing the SAAAS, five items were added to measure the extent to which participants endorsed sexual stereotypes about Asian Americans. The items added were: 1) “Asian American women are often sexually submissive”, 2) “Asian American women are sexually exotic”, 3) “Asian American women are more sexual than other women”, 4) “Asian American men are more sexual than other men”, and 5) “Asian American men are often sexually submissive”. It should be noted that the fourth item in this list was reverse-coded. These items were added to increase the content validity of this measurement, as the original SAAAS did not include any sexual stereotypes. It was found that the five additional items measuring sexual stereotype endorsement demonstrated good reliability and internal consistency in this study (α = .83). Furthermore, the SAAAS in its entirety demonstrated good reliability in this study (α = .91).

**Endorsement of Rape Myths**

To measure the degree to which rape myths were endorsed, participants completed the Modern Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale – Short Form (mIRMA-SF; Canan et al., 2023).
The mIRMA-SF is a variation of the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA; Payne et al., 1999), but differs in its shorter length and gender-neutral language. Participants were prompted to indicate their level of agreement with each of the 20 items in the scale using a 5-point Likert (1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree). Example items include: “When people are raped, it’s often because the way they said ‘no’ was ambiguous”, and “People don’t usually intend to force sex on someone, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away”. Four items on the scale are filler items that are not used in any analysis, and these were left out of the present study. For the remainder of the items, higher numbers indicated more endorsement of rape myths. A composite sum score was created for the mIRMA-SF. The mIRMA-SF is reliable (α = .91) and demonstrated face validity, and the original IRMA scale demonstrated construct validity in multiple studies (Canan et al., 2023; Payne et al., 1999).

**Demographics**

Six participant demographics were collected: age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, educational achievement, personal income, and political affiliation. Participants were first asked to input their age in years. Participants then selected their gender from a list, in which the options were Female, Male, Non-binary, Other (please describe), and Prefer not to say. The Other option included a free text input box.

Participants indicated their race/ethnicity from a list that included: White/European American, Black/African American, Native, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latinx, Two or more races (please describe), Other (please describe), and Prefer not to say. The Two or more races and Other options included free text input boxes.

Next, participants indicated their highest-achieved education level from a list that included: No schooling completed, Between grades 1 - 11, no high school diploma, Regular high
school diploma, GED or alternative credential, Some college, but less than 1 year, 1 or more years of college, no degree, Associate's degree (e.g., AA, AS), Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS), Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA), Professional degree beyond bachelor's degree (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD), Doctorate degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, PsyD), Other (please describe), and Prefer not to say. The Other option included a free text input box.

Participants then reported their total personal income from last year with options that included: $0 - $24,999, $25,000 - $49,999, $50,000 - $74,999, $75,000 - $99,999, $100,000 - $124,999, $125,000 - $149,999, $150,000+, and Prefer not to say.

Finally, participants reported their political alignment from a list that included: Democrat, Republican, Independent/Other (please describe), Don’t know, and Prefer not to say. The Independent/Other option included a free text input box.

Procedure

This study was conducted online. The Prolific platform was used to recruit participants, who completed the survey on the Qualtrics platform. Participants began with a thorough informed consent process. They were notified about the inclusion of a scenario that depicts a potentially upsetting alleged sexual assault. In addition, they were informed that they would be asked to report their attitudes towards different groups of people and statements about sexual attitudes which may be distressing. They were then told about the anonymity of their study participation. Participants were also informed that they did not need to answer any items on the survey aside from the consent item, which had to be answered affirmatively to proceed.

Upon providing consent, participants were informed that they were going to read a short vignette about an alleged sexual assault. They were then presented with one of the two study vignettes, which were assigned randomly. After that, participants were asked whether they would
classify the incident as a crime. Then, participants were asked to assign an amount of blame to both the victim and the perpetrator. Subsequently, the participants were asked about their perceived similarity to the victim. Next, the participants completed the measures of their endorsement of stereotypes about Asian Americans and their endorsement of rape myths. Finally, participants provided their demographic information and completed a manipulation check.

Prior to being compensated, participants went through a debriefing process. In addition to providing compensation information, this process informed the participant about the study and its hypotheses, as well as provided resources for any participants who were feeling distressed or who had questions/concerns about the study.

**Ethics**

In this study, there were no direct benefits to the participants. However, this study may add to the base of scholarly knowledge and benefit society. Regarding the creation of scholarly knowledge, there have not been any studies that have focused on how stereotypes about Asian American women may influence their perceived victimization in cases of sexual assault. Although the ways that Black and Latinx women are blamed in sexual assaults compared to White women have been studied (Campbell, 2017; Lewis et al., 2019), a large gap in the literature exists for when it comes to the experience of Asian American women. This study aims to begin to fill this gap. In addition, this study could draw attention to the effects of racial stereotyping on sexual assault victimization and catalyze the creation of more support systems for Asian American survivors of sexual assault.

There are academic motivations for conducting this research, but there are some risks. While the threat to most participants does not exceed minimal risk, this study carries a level of risk that exceeds the minimal threshold for participants who have been sexually victimized.
While participants were not asked to reveal any sensitive information about themselves, they were exposed to a potentially upsetting vignette of a sexual assault. The details of the vignette were not highly graphic, though, and were similar to what could be encountered on the news.

In addition, participants were asked to complete a scale on rape myths and a scale on stereotypes about Asian Americans; both of which could be potentially upsetting to participants (especially Asian American participants and participants who have experienced a sexual assault). However, the level of harm that could occur due to these vignettes and scales was generally low, as they could be encountered in everyday media as well. The vignettes and scales had to be included as they constituted important ways to manipulate the independent variables in the study, as well as to assess the endorsement of rape myths and stereotypes about Asian Americans.

Despite this potential for greater than minimal risk, actions were taken to safeguard the well-being of the participants. First, a thorough informed consent procedure was employed, in which potential participants were warned about the inclusion of a description of a potentially triggering sexual situation. Participants were then asked to make a careful decision about whether they would like to participate or not. Next, the vignettes only provided as much detail about the sexual assault as necessary, with careful consideration given to the avoidance of language that may have been more likely to elicit emotional responses. Finally, a thorough debriefing occurred. During the debriefing, participants were guided to resources for survivors of sexual assault, as well as general mental health and crisis support services.

Furthermore, this study did not primarily focus on vulnerable populations and did not employ deception. In addition, the compensation for this study was not high enough to constitute undue influence, as it was comparable to the minimum wage in California. This, in conjunction with a thorough informed consent procedure, would render this study voluntary. Furthermore,
participants could skip questions and withdraw participation at any time. Finally, the data collection occurred through Qualtrics with data encoded anonymously, and participants will not be asked to report any identifying information. In addition, no secondary identifying information, such as IP addresses, was collected. This allowed for the completely anonymous collection of data which were stored in a password-secured account. In this way, the identities of the participants and their responses were protected. Having considered the ethics of the present study, the benefits to academia and society outweigh the potential risks to the participants.

**Results**

**Data Transformations**

The data from participants who failed the manipulation check \( n = 52 \) were removed before analysis, leaving 205 participants in the study. Next, missing responses were imputed into the data set. There were very few total missing data points \( n = 24 \) in the whole data set. Accounting for the fact that this study was already underpowered as demonstrated by the a priori power analysis and due to a lack of funding, it was decided that the missing data would be imputed using a linear trend-at-point method.

An outlier analysis was then conducted. Outlier responses \( n = 52 \) for the main study measures were deemed to be theoretically meaningful (usually representing a deviation in which rape myths and stereotypes about Asian Americans were endorsed more) and were thus left in the study. None of the main continuous variables were normally distributed, as determined by Shapiro-Wilk tests and demonstrated by all \( Ws < .99 \) and all \( ps < .04 \). Both a logarithmic transformation and a square-root transformation were attempted for the dependent variables to increase normality, but these proved insufficient. Thus, the original values were used to facilitate easier interpretation of the data. Although the skewness and kurtosis were problematic, the
statistical tests used were likely robust enough to withstand these issues (Knief & Forstmeier, 2021). Finally, participants who identified as neither Asian nor White had their races coded as a neither-White-nor-Asian (NWNA) participant race group, representing another out-group condition.

**Main Study Analyses**

First, it was hypothesized that participants who blame the victim more would blame the perpetrator less and vice versa. This relationship was assessed using a simple correlation. Consistent with the hypothesis, victim blame was significantly negatively correlated with perpetrator blame, $r(203) = -0.22, p = .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.35, -.09]$.

In addition, it was hypothesized that as perceived similarity to the victim increased, perceived similarity to the perpetrator would decrease. It was further hypothesized that participants who perceive themselves to be more similar to the hypothetical victim would assign less blame to the victim, and participants who perceive themselves to be more similar to the perpetrator would assign more blame to the victim. These hypotheses were tested using simple correlations. No correlation was found between perceived similarity to the victim and perceived similarity to the perpetrator, $r(203) = -0.03, p = .322, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-1, .08]$. It was found that perceived similarity to the victim was significantly negatively correlated with victim blame, $r(203) = -0.19, p = .008, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.32, -.05]$, supporting the hypothesis that people who perceive themselves to be more similar to the victim would blame the victim less. Further, perceived similarity to the perpetrator was significantly positively correlated with victim blame, $r(203) = .3, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.17, .42]$, supporting the hypothesis that people who perceive themselves to be more similar to the perpetrator would blame the victim more.
It was also hypothesized that Asian victims would be blamed more than White victims. Furthermore, an interaction between participant race and victim race was also hypothesized, such that participants would be more likely to blame a victim of another race than a victim of their race. Both hypotheses were tested using a two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with victim race and participant race with three levels (Asian, White, and NWNA) as the predictors, and victim blame as the dependent variable. In addition, the endorsement of rape myths was found to be positively correlated with victim blame, $r(203) = .53, p < .01$, and thus was used as a covariate. It was established that the amount of victim-blaming was low overall across both conditions of victim race ($M = 2.97, SD = 3.99$). No statistically significant main effect of victim race on victim-blaming was found, $F(1, 197) = .499, p = .481$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. The hypothesis that Asian victims would be blamed more than White victims was not supported as participants in the Asian victims ($M = 2.9, SD = 3.83$) were overall blamed less than White victims ($M = 3.06, SD = 4.19$). However, a statistically significant main effect of participant race on victim-blaming was found, $F(2, 197) = 3.72, p = .026$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$, such that Asian participants engaged in significantly more victim-blaming than NWNA participants. In addition, a statistically significant interaction between participant race and victim race on victim-blaming was detected, $F(2, 197) = 3.49, p = .032$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. The descriptive statistics for victim blaming by both victim and participant races are presented in Table 2.

Excluding Asian and White participants, and analyzing solely Black, Native, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, Hispanic, two or more races, and other participants revealed a statistically significant$^3$ main effect of victim race on victim blame. As shown in Table 2, NWNA

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$^3$ There is some academic debate about whether a $p$-value of exactly 0.05 is significant or insignificant (Kwak, 2023). The present study deems the probability as significant, and certainly meaningful enough to warrant discussion.
participants blamed the Asian American victim significantly more than the White American victim as assessed by Welch’s ANOVA, $F(1, 50.66) = 4.02, p = .05, \eta^2 = .05$. Contrary to the full sample, this group of participants demonstrated an insignificant correlation between victim blame and perpetrator blame, $r(51) = -.15, p = .29$.

**Table 2**

*Victim Blaming Scores by Condition and Participant Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Asian Participants</th>
<th>White Participants</th>
<th>NWNA Participants</th>
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<tr>
<td>Asian Victim</td>
<td>4.33 (5.05)\textsubscript{a}</td>
<td>2.43 (3.23)\textsubscript{a}</td>
<td>3.24 (4.3)\textsubscript{a}</td>
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<tr>
<td>White Victim</td>
<td>4.2 (5.33)\textsubscript{a}</td>
<td>3.35 (4.23)\textsubscript{a}</td>
<td>1.4 (2.37)\textsubscript{b}</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.26 (5.08)\textsubscript{c}</td>
<td>2.90 (3.82)\textsubscript{c,d}</td>
<td>2.62 (3.84)\textsubscript{d}</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Mean (SD). For the total row, means not sharing subscripts differ significantly at the $p < .05$ level. For the rest of the table, means not sharing subscripts differ significantly at the $p \leq .05$ level.

It was further proposed that perpetrators who assaulted Asian victims would be blamed less than perpetrators who assaulted White victims. This was tested using a two-way ANCOVA with victim race as the predictor variable and perpetrator blame as the dependent variable. Rape myth acceptance demonstrated a significant negative correlation with perpetrator blame, $r(203) = -.47, p < .01$, and thus was used as a covariate. Consistent with the established negative correlation between victim blaming and perpetrator blaming, the amount of perpetrator blame was high overall across both conditions of victim race ($M = 13.71, SD = 2.58$). No statistically significant main effect of victim race on perpetrator-blaming was found, $F(1, 197) = .01, p = .935$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. The hypothesis that perpetrators of assault against Asian victims would be blamed less than perpetrators of assault against White victims was not supported; the perpetrator was blamed more in the White victim condition ($M = 13.77, SD = 2.33$) than in the Asian victim
condition was \( M = 13.65, SD = 2.8 \). The main effect of participant race on perpetrator blame was not significant, \( F(2, 197) = .68, p = .507 \), partial \( \eta^2 = .01 \), nor was the interaction between participant race and victim race on perpetrator blame, \( F(2, 197) = .84, p = .435 \), partial \( \eta^2 = .01 \). There was furthermore no significant effect of victim race on perpetrator blame for NWNA participants, \( F(1, 50) = .59, p = .446 \), \( \eta^2 = .01 \).

It was also hypothesized that participants who perceive themselves to be more similar to the victim would be more likely to categorize the hypothetical sexual assault scenario as a crime than participants who perceive themselves as less similar to the victim. This hypothesis was tested with a logistic regression. The findings were significant. It was found that as perceived similarity to the victim increases, the likelihood that the participant classified the incident as a crime significantly increased, \( \chi^2(1, N = 205) = 5.36, p = .029 \), Nagelkerke \( R^2 = .055 \), \( \beta = .43 \). Furthermore, it was found that as perceived similarity to the perpetrator increases, the likelihood that the participant classified the incident as a crime significantly decreased, \( \chi^2(1, N = 205) = 5.9, p = .01 \), Nagelkerke \( R^2 = .06 \), \( \beta = -.52 \).

Next, it was expected that participants who endorsed more stereotypes about Asian Americans would blame the Asian victim significantly more than the White victim, compared to participants who endorsed fewer stereotypes about Asian Americans. For analysis, participants were put into two groups: those who scored above or equal to the mean of stereotype endorsement \( n = 113 \), or “high endorsers”, and those who scored below the mean of stereotype endorsement \( n = 92 \), or “low endorsers”. Low endorsers had a mean victim blame score of 2.9 \( (SD = 3.83) \), and high endorsers had a mean victim blame score of 3.06 \( (SD = 4.18) \). A two-way ANOVA was conducted with victim race and stereotype endorsement with two levels as the predictors, and victim blame as the dependent variable. It was found that there was a significant
main effect of the stereotype endorsement group on victim blame, $F(1, 201) = 14.06, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$, such that participants who endorsed more stereotypes about Asian Americans blamed the victim significantly more than participants who endorsed fewer stereotypes about Asian Americans. However, there was no significant interaction between stereotype endorsement and victim race on victim blame, $F(1, 201) = .321, p = .572$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$.

Furthermore, this analysis was conducted for endorsement of sexual stereotypes specific to Asian American women. Participants were again put into two groups: those who scored above or equal to the mean of endorsement of sexual stereotypes about Asian American women ($n = 96$) and those who scored below the mean ($n = 109$). Low endorsers had a mean victim blame score of $2.2$ ($SD = 3.45$), and high endorsers had a mean victim blame score of $3.85$ ($SD = 4.39$). It was found that there was a significant main effect of the stereotype endorsement group on victim blame, $F(1, 201) = 8.77, p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$, such that participants who endorsed more sexual stereotypes about Asian American women blamed the victim significantly more than participants who endorsed fewer sexual stereotypes about Asian American women. However, there was no significant interaction between the endorsement of sexual stereotypes about Asian American women and victim race on victim blame, $F(1, 201) = .207, p = .650$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$.

Finally, this was also investigated for sexual stereotypes about Asian American men. Eighty-two participants were categorized as high endorsers of sexual stereotypes about Asian American men, while 123 were categorized as low endorsers. Low endorsers had a mean victim blame score of $2.37$ ($SD = 3.55$), and high endorsers had a mean victim blame score of $3.88$ ($SD = 4.44$). It was found that there was a significant main effect of the stereotype endorsement group on victim blame, $F(1, 201) = 20.89, p = .137$, partial $\eta^2 = .95$, such that participants who endorsed more sexual stereotypes about Asian American men blamed the victim significantly
more than participants who endorsed fewer sexual stereotypes about Asian American men. However, there was no significant interaction between the endorsement of sexual stereotypes about Asian American men and victim race on victim blame, $F(1, 201) = .34, p = .560$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$.

**Exploratory Analyses**

A more extensive correlational analysis was conducted to determine whether any more bivariate correlations existed between the main dependent and predictor variables. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3. The endorsement of stereotypes about Asian Americans was found to be positively correlated with victim blame, $r(203) = .28, p < .01$, and negatively correlated with perpetrator blame, $r(203) = -.22, p < .01$. It was found that endorsement of rape myths and endorsement of stereotypes about Asian Americans were significantly positively correlated, $r(203) = .4, p < .01$. Among the demographic variables, victim blame was only significantly correlated with the participant’s age, $r(203) = .29, p < .01$, such that victim blame increased as the participant’s age increased. On the contrary, perpetrator blame was only significantly correlated with the participant’s education level of the demographic variables, $r(203) = .13, p < .05$, such that perpetrator blame increased as the participant’s education level increased.
Another explored question was whether perceived similarity to the victim differed based on the victim’s race. It was proposed that participants would feel more similar to victims of the same race. Thus, a two-way ANOVA was conducted with participant race with three levels (Asian, White, and NWNA) and victim race as the predictor variables and perceived similarity to the victim as the dependent variable. A post-hoc pairwise analysis was also conducted within participant races. In opposition to the hypothesis, it was found that there were no significant differences in perceived similarity to the victim based on the victim’s race for both White participants, $F(1, 198) = .08, p = .779$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$, and NWNA participants, $F(1, 198) = .326, p = .569$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$. However, it was also found that Asian participants felt significantly more similar to the victim when they were Asian versus when they were White, $F(1, 198) = 4.74, p = .031$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. The descriptive statistics for victim similarity by both

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Correlation Matrix for Main Study Variables</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1. Victim Blame</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Perpetrator Blame</td>
<td>-22** 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Similarity to Victim</td>
<td>-.19** .09 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Similarity to Perpetrator</td>
<td>.30** -.17** -.03 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Endorsement of Stereotypes about Asian Americans</td>
<td>.28** -.22** -.02 .11 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Rape Myth Acceptance</td>
<td>.53** -.47** -.18** .23** .40** 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Gender</td>
<td>.01 .07 .22** -.22** -.15* -.12* 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Age</td>
<td>.29** -.07 -.06 .10 .08 .13* .02 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Education</td>
<td>-.01 .13* .08 .05 -.04 -.08 .25** .08 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Income</td>
<td>.07 .03 -.05 .09 -.05 -.07 .16* -.01 .40** 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (1-tailed).
victim and participant races are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Victim Similarity Scores by Condition and Participant Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Asian Participants</th>
<th>White Participants</th>
<th>NWNA Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian Victim</td>
<td>3.35 (1.06)</td>
<td>2.78 (1.31)</td>
<td>2.76 (1.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Victim</td>
<td>2.13 (1.02)</td>
<td>2.71 (1.34)</td>
<td>2.53 (1.41)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Mean (SD). Means within a participant group (column) not sharing subscripts differ significantly at the p < .05 level.

Next, the existence of any significant differences in stereotype endorsement and rape myth acceptance based on participant race was investigated using one-way ANOVAs. The mean score across participants was 87.47 (SD = 19.65) for stereotype endorsement, and 24.07 (SD = 8.65) for rape myth acceptance. As shown in Table 5, there were no significant differences in stereotype endorsement based on participant race, $F(2, 202) = .325, p = .723$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$, nor in rape myth endorsement based on participant race, $F(2, 202) = 1.67, p = .190$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$.

**Table 5**

*Rape Myth Endorsement and Endorsement of Stereotypes about Asian Americans by Participant Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Rape Myth Acceptance</th>
<th>Endorsement of Stereotypes about Asian Americans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian Participants</td>
<td>24.87 (9.43)$\text{a}$</td>
<td>89.5 (20.06)$\text{a}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Participants</td>
<td>23.23 (7.89)$\text{a}$</td>
<td>87.77 (18.43)$\text{a}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWNA Participants</td>
<td>25.72 (9.88)$\text{a}$</td>
<td>85.83 (22.42)$\text{a}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Mean (SD). Means within a variable (column) not sharing subscripts differ significantly at the p < .05 level.
Next, significant differences based on participant gender were analyzed. Thus, two-tailed independent sample t-tests were conducted. Equal variances were not assumed for rape myth acceptance \((p = .048)\) and perpetrator blame \((p = .035)\), as assessed by Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances. As shown in Table 6, male participants were significantly more likely than female participants to endorse general stereotypes about Asian Americans \((t(198) = 2.1, p = .037, d = 19.23)\), to endorse sexual stereotypes about both Asian American women \((t(198) = 2.52, p = .012, d = 1.77)\), and to endorse rape myths \((t(184.73) = 2.98, p = .003, d = 8.52)\). Male participants were also less likely than female participants to blame the perpetrator, \((t(191.71) = -2.03, p = .043, d = 2.57)\). Male participants were not significantly more likely to blame the victim than female participants, \(t(198) = 1.53, p = .128, d = 3.94\).

**Table 6**

*Rape Myth Acceptance, Endorsement of Stereotypes about Asian Americans, Victim Blame, and Perpetrator Blame by Participant Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Female Participants</th>
<th>Male Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rape Myth Acceptance</td>
<td>22.23 (7.39)\text{a}</td>
<td>25.82 (9.53)\text{b}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsement of Stereotypes about Asian Americans</td>
<td>84.91 (19.56)\text{a}</td>
<td>90.65 (18.99)\text{b}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsement of Sexual Stereotypes about Asian American Women</td>
<td>6.50 (2.87)\text{a}</td>
<td>7.76 (2.83)\text{b}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsement of Sexual Stereotypes about Asian American Men</td>
<td>3.85 (1.71)\text{a}</td>
<td>4.45 (1.84)\text{b}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim Blame</td>
<td>2.49 (3.88)\text{a}</td>
<td>3.34 (4.0)\text{a}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator Blame</td>
<td>14.08 (2.36)\text{a}</td>
<td>13.34 (2.77)\text{b}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Mean (SD). Means within a variable (row) not sharing subscripts differ significantly at the \(p < .05\) level.
In addition to differences based on participant gender, participant political affiliation was also analyzed. Due to political affiliation being coded into three groups, one-way ANOVAs were conducted to test for differences between the three groups across the main study variables. It was found that there were significant differences in victim blame based on participant political affiliation, $F(2, 202) = 9.46, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$. Bonferroni post-hoc analyses thus demonstrated that Republicans blamed the victim significantly more than Democrats and Independents. On the contrary, there were no significant differences in perpetrator blame based on participant political affiliation, $F(2, 202) = .19, p = .830, \eta^2 = .002$. There were significant differences in rape myth acceptance based on participant political affiliation, $F(2, 202) = 7.01, p = .001, \eta^2 = .07$. Post-hoc analyses also showed that Republicans accepted significantly more rape myths than Democrats and Independents. In addition, there were also significant differences in endorsement of stereotypes about Asian Americans based on participant political affiliation, $F(2, 202) = 4.34, p = .014, \eta^2 = .04$, such that Republicans endorsed significantly more stereotypes than Democrats and Independents.

There were furthermore differences in the endorsement of sexual stereotypes about Asian American women based on participant political affiliation, $F(2, 202) = 6.73, p = .001, \eta^2 = .06$, such that Republicans endorsed significantly more sexual stereotypes about Asian American women than Democrats and Independents. Interestingly, there were no differences in the endorsement of sexual stereotypes about Asian American men based on participant political affiliation, $F(2, 202) = 1.19, p = .307, \eta^2 = .01$. The descriptive statistics for the main variables by participant political affiliation are presented in Table 7.
Next, the factors that affected the likelihood of categorizing the contents of the vignette as a crime were tested. These were analyzed using chi-square tests of independence. It was found that there were no significant differences in the likelihood of categorizing the incident as a crime between victim races, participant races, and participant genders, all $\chi^2$s < 2.33, all $p$s > .127.

While no significant differences were established in the likelihood of categorizing the incident as a crime between victim races, participant races, and participant genders, two-tailed independent samples t-tests revealed significant differences in victim blame and perpetrator blame.

It was found that victim blame significantly differed between those who categorized the incident as a crime and those who did not categorize the incident as a crime, $t(203) = -6.14, p < .001, d = 3.68$, such that victim blame scores were significantly higher for those who did not
categorize the incident as a crime compared to those who categorized the incident as a crime, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Victim Blaming Scores with 95% Confidence Intervals by Participant Categorization of the Vignette*

Finally, it was found that perpetrator blame, for which equal variances were not assumed as assessed by Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances, significantly differed between those who categorized the incident as a crime and those who did not categorize the incident as a crime, \( t(20.26) = 4.39, p < .001, d = 2.33 \). Perpetrator blame scores were significantly higher for those who categorized the incident as a crime compared to those who did not categorize the incident as a crime, as shown in Figure 2.
Discussion

This study aimed to establish whether there were any differences in how Asian American women and White American women were blamed as survivors of sexual assault, as well as which factors may have contributed to this dynamic. The main hypothesis that Asian American women would be blamed more than White American women, was not supported by the present study. The non-significant trend of victim blaming based on victim race went in the opposite direction of what was expected, such that White American women were blamed more than Asian American women. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that inter-group victim blaming would be higher, such that participants would blame victims who were of different races more than victims of their race. The present research also found a trend, albeit non-significant, in the opposite direction of what was expected, such that White and Asian participants blamed victims of their race more than victims of another race. This result was somewhat unexpected. Varelas & Foley
(1998) had previously found that White participants blamed the victim the least when they were White. However, the same study also found that Black participants blamed the victim the most when they were Black, which is more consistent with the findings of this study.

These results could be explained by the previously discussed social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which posits that people categorize themselves into groups, derive their self-identity from their group membership, and attempt to maintain a positive self-identity by enhancing the social status of the groups to which they belong. Following this logic, people may be more likely to blame ingroup members because their negative experiences (e.g., getting sexually assaulted) seem to threaten the group’s positive identity. Thus, the higher overall blame for the White American victim could be explained by the large portion of the sample that identified as White. It could be argued that defensive attributions also explain these results; people may want to maintain their self-esteem by distancing themselves from others in an in-group who suffer negative events.

On the contrary, when Asian participants and White participants were excluded from the analysis, Asian American women were blamed significantly more than White American women. This result indicates the expected outgroup-blaming tendency. Under social identity theory, this out-group blaming may occur due to intergroup conflict, such that people seek to denigrate other groups to maintain ingroup superiority. However, this theory does not necessarily explain why the victim in the Asian out-group was blamed more than the victim in the White out-group. This finding thus fits with the previous proposition that Asian American women would be blamed more than White American women due to intersectional stereotypes that exist in American culture. Another potential reason for this could be attributed to realistic group conflict theory (RGCT; Sherif & Sherif, 1953) which proposes that intergroup conflict is caused by the
existence of conflicting goals between groups. In this case, marginalized groups in America may perceive their struggle to achieve systemic power as conflicting. Thus, they could turn their blame against each other instead of against the dominant White out-group.

This study found further significant results. In support of the research conducted by Bieneck & Krahé (2011), Dyer et al. (2022), and Pollard (1992), it was established that victim blame and perpetrator blame were significantly negatively correlated. Furthermore and in agreement with the work of Bell et al. (2006), the relationship between perceived similarity to the victim and victim blame was also found to be significantly negatively correlated. This result could be explained by the defensive attribution theory (Shaver, 1970).

Expanding on this, this study found a significant negative relationship between perceived similarity to the perpetrator and perpetrator blame, as well as a significant positive correlation between perceived similarity to the perpetrator and victim blame. These results could certainly be explained by the defensive attribution theory as well; participants who perceive themselves as similar to the perpetrator defensively engage in low perpetrator blaming and high victim blaming to transfer blame from themselves to another.

Interestingly, the expected negative correlation between perceived similarity to the victim and perceived similarity to the perpetrator was not established. Upon analysis of the distributions for both perceived similarity to the victim and the perpetrator, it seems that this correlation was not established because most participants perceived themselves as extremely dissimilar to both the victim and the perpetrator. The general perceived dissimilarity to the perpetrator could be explained by the social desirability bias, which is the tendency for people to present themselves in a socially favorable manner (King & Bruner, 2000). Participants were likely aware that aligning their identity with the man in an alleged sexual assault is not socially acceptable. On the
other hand, the general perceived dissimilarity to the victim could also be attributed to defensive attribution theory; participants may explicitly engage in low victim-blaming but still assign their similarity to the victim in a way that protects them from risking implicit attribution of blame to themselves.

Furthermore, as perceived similarity to the victim increased, so did the likelihood of classifying the incident as a crime. In addition, as perceived similarity to the perpetrator increased, the likelihood of classifying the incident as a crime decreased. These findings are consistent with social identity theory explanations, such that a more similar target is perceived as more a part of one’s ingroup. These results were also congruent with Krebs (1975), which found that participants who felt more similar to the victim tended to have more empathy for their victimization. Thus, it follows that participants who identified with the victim were more likely to take on their perspective and label the sexual assault as a crime, and participants who identified with the perpetrator were more likely to take on their perspective and label the sexual assault as not a crime.

In addition, participants who endorsed more stereotypes about Asian Americans blamed the victim more compared to participants who endorsed fewer stereotypes about Asian Americans. This held true across general stereotypes about Asian Americans, as well as sexual stereotypes about Asian American women and men. However, the Asian victim was not blamed more than the White victim by participants who endorsed more stereotypes about Asian Americans, thus not supporting the proposition that the prevailing racialized and sexual stereotypes about Asian women are contributory factors in Asian American women being blamed more for their sexual assaults compared to White American women.
Exploratory analyses also aimed to establish whether participants felt more similar to victims of their own race. It was found that there were no significant differences in perceived similarity to the victim based on the victim’s race for White participants and NWNA participants. However, Asian participants felt significantly more similar to the Asian American victim than the White American victim. This result is not unexpected. As a minoritized out-group in the United States, it follows that Asian Americans would feel more identification with other Asian Americans than White Americans would feel with other White Americans. SIT asserts that people derive a portion of their self-concept from their group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For members of minority groups like Asian Americans, the allegiance to their group may be particularly potent due to shared experiences of racism, discrimination, and heritage. This proposition is supported by the survey finding (Horowitz et al., 2019) that 56% of Asian Americans saw their race as central to their identity, as opposed to 15% of White Americans.

The correlational analyses further established a significant positive correlation between the endorsement of stereotypes about Asian Americans and the acceptance of rape myths. As established by the tested relationship of both with political alignment, it seems that there are groups of people (for example, Republicans in this study) who are more likely to engage in both stereotype endorsement and rape myth acceptance. This proposition is in part congruent with the research of Johnson et al. (1997), which found that people with more conservative attitudes accepted more rape myths. Furthermore, the present study established that the endorsement of stereotypes about Asian Americans was also significantly positively correlated with victim blame and negatively correlated with perpetrator blame. This indicates that there is some underlying process or mediative relationship that relates the acceptance of misogynist propositions (i.e., rape
myth acceptance and blaming the victim) with the acceptance of racist propositions (i.e., endorsement of stereotypes).

Regarding other correlations related to the participant’s demographic information, this study found that there was a significant positive correlation between victim blame and participant age. This finding was expected, as previously established by Adams-Price et al. (2004). Curiously, this relationship could not be established in the inverse with perpetrator blame. However, perpetrator blame was significantly positively correlated with the participant’s highest achieved education level. This indicates that formal education may help people to be more critical of perpetrators of sexual assault or to be more aware of the sexual consent process.

Furthermore, in addition to engaging in more rape myth acceptance and endorsement of rape myths, Republican participants blamed the victim significantly more than other participants. This section revealed another notable finding; Republican participants were more likely to endorse sexual stereotypes about Asian American women than other participants, but they were not more likely to endorse sexual stereotypes about Asian American men than other participants. This was the only tested finding that showed significant differences in the endorsement of sexual stereotypes about Asian American women versus Asian American men and indicates the existence of gendered and racial discrimination specific to Asian American women among Republicans.

It was also found that participants who had significantly higher scores in perpetrator blame and lower scores in victim blame tended to classify the incident as a crime more than participants who did not classify the incident as a crime. This has large implications in the legal realm, such that the jurors’ attitudes towards victims could certainly affect the verdict that is rendered.
Finally, further exploratory analyses revealed significant gender differences in rape myth acceptance, stereotype endorsement, and perpetrator blame. Male participants accepted more rape myths and endorsed more stereotypes about Asian Americans than females. They also engaged in significantly less perpetrator blaming. However, male participants did not engage in significantly more victim blaming than female participants. This result was unexpected, as Anderson et al. (1997) had previously found that men were more likely to engage in victim blaming than women. Potentially, the past 27 years saw a change in the social conceptualization of survivors of sexual assault enough to truly diminish victim blaming among men. This could further be explained by the social desirability bias, such that male participants felt that it was not acceptable to blame survivors for their sexual victimization and thus responded in a way that reflected that.

**Limitations**

This study was limited by both methodology and resulting data. A redundant emphasis on the victim’s race occurred, in both explicitly stating the victim’s race as well as implicitly indicating their race by stating that they were either coming from a Fourth of July barbecue or a Lunar New Year celebration. However, the manipulation of the condition did not seem to be highly effective. Almost a quarter of the participants ($n = 52$) did not correctly identify the victim’s race in the manipulation check, indicating that the manipulation was not strong enough. Participants also took vastly less time to complete the study on average than expected. The study was expected to take 10-15 minutes with a complete reading of the study materials. However, the median completion time was seven minutes and 14 seconds. Over 15% of participants ($n = 39$) took five minutes or less to complete the study. This indicates that a substantial portion of the sample may not have been thoroughly engaging with the study materials, thus reducing the
strength of the manipulation as well. This lower-quality data could have resulted from the marketing of Prolific as an easy way to make money (Loper, 2024), thus attracting a general participant pool that prioritized quick earnings over quality research participation. This is a general limitation of online research. Future studies should consider ways to encourage engagement with the study through measures such as only allowing participants to continue to the next page after a set amount of time.

Furthermore, the study was vastly underpowered, particularly with Asian participants. According to Cohen (1992), 786 participants were necessary to show the expected small effect size within this study design. After the removal of participants who did not pass the manipulation check, this study was left with 205 participants. Within this sample, 128 participants identified as White and 24 identified as Asian. This meant that the hypotheses that were interested in the main effect or interaction between the participant’s race and the victim’s race were powered with a sample of only 152 participants. In addition, the participant race conditions were extremely imbalanced, thus particularly affecting the main effect of participant race.

Moreover, the data itself were highly skewed. None of the main continuous variables were distributed normally. Even after attempting transformations to reign in the non-normality, the skew of the data presented problems for analysis. The main dependent variables, victim blame and perpetrator blame, were especially problematic. The skewness of perpetrator blame was found to be -2.95, indicating that this variable was highly left-skewed. Thus, a vast majority of participants blamed the perpetrator a lot. The skewness of victim blame was found to be 1.47, indicating that this variable was highly right-skewed. Thus, a large majority of participants did not blame the victim a lot. Sixty-two percent ($n = 127$) of participants assigned the most amount of blame possible to the perpetrator. Thirty-eight percent ($n = 78$) of participants assigned the
least amount of blame possible to the victim. Although the tests may have been robust enough to handle these problems (Knief & Forstmeier, 2021), this pervasive skew problem likely reduced the performance of the statistical tests to some degree. In addition, this study conducted a high volume of analyses. This introduced the problem of multiple testing, such that running many analyses increased the probability of establishing a significant result by chance (Ranganathan et al., 2016). Some tests could have resulted in statistical significance even if there was no actual effect in the data. This concern emphasizes the importance of study replication, a topic explored in more depth later in this discussion.

Although this study was limited by its methodology and the resulting data, alternative reasons for not finding the exact hypothesized patterns and relationships must also be considered. As discussed briefly, social desirability bias may have affected participant responses. Even though participants were informed that the study was fully anonymous and that there were no correct or incorrect responses, it is possible that many participants felt compelled to answer some items per societal acceptability, indicating that the current societal norm is to not hold survivors responsible for their sexual assaults. This may also help explain the trend in the endorsement of stereotypes about Asian Americans based on participant races. It is possible that Asian Americans do not actually endorse more negative stereotypes about themselves than White Americans; instead, White Americans may have been more influenced by the social norm of not harboring racial prejudices than Asian Americans.

Finally, it must be considered whether the stereotypes of Asian American women as exotic and sexual may not exist to the extent that was expected. Many of the previously introduced sources that discussed the racialized and sexual stereotypes about Asian American women are now over 10 years old. The past decade may have seen an increase in sensitivity
towards Asian Americans, and thus a decrease in the endorsement of sexual stereotypes about this group. This may be demonstrated in the inability of this study to find any significant patterns of endorsement of sexual stereotypes (for both Asian American men and Asian American women) on differential victim blaming by victim race. This increased sensitivity may have stemmed from the recent integration of specifically East Asian popular culture into American society. This increase in Asian cultural importance can be illustrated by the monumental rise of Korean pop (K-pop) music in the United States, which is now the second-largest consumer of K-pop music with 9.2 billion streams in 2023 (Chan, 2023). Thus, the expected stereotypes about Asian American women may have diminished in societal relevance in recent years.

**Future Directions**

This study primarily aimed to fill a large gap in the literature regarding the understanding of how Asian American women are perceived as victims of sexual assault. As mentioned before, literature exists (Campbell, 2017; George & Martínez, 2002; Lewis et al., 2019) on how Black and Latinx victims of sexual assault are perceived and blamed. This present study aimed to contribute understanding to whether Asian American women were particularly blamed (or exempted from blame) as victims of sexual assault, as well as what contributory factors may have existed. This study demonstrated that participants who were neither White nor Asian blamed Asian American women more for their sexual assaults than White American women. Broader patterns of differential blame could emerge with replication; thus, the obvious next direction would be to conduct this study with more power and a stronger manipulation.

Aside from changes to the present study’s methodology, there are certainly other directions that this research could seek to encompass. For example, interactions between the perpetrator’s race and the victim’s race have been looked at in other studies (George & Martínez,
2002; Varelas & Foley, 1998), but not with Asian Americans. In addition, there are also pervasive sexual stereotypes of Asian men as emasculated and submissive (Keum et al., 2023). It may be generative to consider whether Asian American men are particularly exempt from blame as perpetrators of sexual assault due to these stereotypes. In another direction, a future study could also seek to understand whether Asian American men are blamed more than White American men as victims of sexual assault. This study focused on a heteronormative depiction of sexual assault, thus future directions may also include investigating these effects in cases where a woman sexually assaults a man, or in queer couplings.

Finally, this study focused on the general population of Asian Americans. As aforementioned, this group is highly diverse and not monolithic. Although the present study did not seek to delineate Asian ethnicities in the victim race conditions, an important future direction would be to consider the differences between stereotypes about various Asian ethnicities. These differences could also have effects on victim blaming.

Implications

Asian women represent a significant population in America, and the failure to fully understand the biases that affect this group constitutes a large scholarly oversight. There is an urgency and inherent value to addressing this gap in scientific understanding. Academia is woefully behind when it comes to studying Asian American women as survivors of sexual assault, as evidenced by the lack of studies that focus on this population. Increasing psychological equity in research necessitates the consideration of diverse groups of people. However, the more important justifications for this research are a societal urgency and a more general value to the American public and beyond. Prejudices against Asian Americans permeate society. Lin et al. (2005) found that 22% of participants demonstrated high levels of prejudice
against Asian Americans. The current study indicated that some societal groups tend to blame Asian American women more than White American women in situations of sexual assault. Thus, there is an indication that there could be differential treatment of Asian American women in broader societal structures. Particularly, the legal system is a domain that is very sensitive to racial prejudices. For example, it has been found that Black American victims of sexual assault had a significantly lower chance of having their case assigned to a detective for investigation than White American victims (Garza, 2022).

Furthermore, survivors of sexual assault are unlikely to formally report their assaults to begin with, with estimates of less than 20% of all sexual assaults being reported (Scope of the Problem: Statistics, n.d.). Moreover, Lim et al. (2023) found that Asian American victims of sexual assault are less likely to report their assaults and to receive treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than White victims. Even assaults that are reported aren’t always believed by police, which creates adverse mental health outcomes for victims (McQueen et al., 2021). In addition, survivors are less likely to continue disclosing their experience of sexual assault if their first disclosure is met with a negative reaction (Ahrens, 2006).

Considering that the psychological distress of many victims of sexual assault is already heightened due to feelings of self-blame and guilt (Sigurvinsdottir & Ullman, 2015), it is critical to understand the potential ways that racial prejudice may escalate the victimization of Asian American women who are sexually assaulted, as well as to understand that these behaviors can be changed with concerted education and awareness. Devine et al. (2012) demonstrated that people can show a markedly lower level of implicit racial bias after a 12-week program devoted to practices such as consciously counteracting stereotypes, taking the perspective of the member of the racial minority group, and increasing contact with people from the racial minority group.
Furthermore, O’Neil & Morgan (2010, as cited in Anderson & Overby) showed that discussion about sexual violence can decrease the acceptance of rape myths and the tendency to blame victims, as well as increase survivors’ willingness to disclose their experience and thus receive support from their social network. Finally, Currier & Carlson (2009) found that having students attend a course devoted to talking about violence against women caused a decrease in negative attitudes toward rape victims as well as a decrease in the tendency to blame victims.

While this research should be expanded upon to educate people on their potential intergroup biases and how these affect their behaviors, the primary positive impact of this line of research could be the facilitation of an increase in support available for Asian American women who are survivors of sexual assault. There is certainly still an abundant amount of work that needs to be done on this topic. The fact that a study like this has never been conducted is a clear demonstration of how the field of psychology is significantly lacking concerning specific populations of people. It is hopefully evident that both academia and society could be deeply affected by studies like the present one, which has served as the first to truly investigate the perceptions of and attitudes towards Asian American women as victims of sexual assault and the contributory factors of these.
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Appendix: Study Vignette


Hannah is a 24-year-old [Asian American/White American] woman. She describes herself as someone who is sexually uninhibited. Hannah’s friends say that she is a “temptress” who is very flirty and playful with attractive men. She used to have one-night stands often but is now dating a man named Chris. A mutual friend introduced Hannah and Chris to each other at a party. They hit it off immediately and went on a date the next week. Hannah told her friends about how her boyfriend, Chris, was smart, handsome, and funny -- as well as how much she liked him.

- **White Victim:** One evening during her family’s annual 4th of July barbecue, Hannah received a text from Chris asking her to meet up at a nearby bar.

- **AAPI Victim:** One evening during her family’s annual Lunar New Year celebration, Hannah received a text from Chris asking her to meet up at a nearby bar.

At the bar, Hannah and Chris talked for a few hours and each had a few drinks. Hannah enjoyed the ways that Chris touched her while they were talking in the bar. Eventually, both Hannah and Chris were inebriated, and Hannah invited Chris back to her apartment. In the taxi on the way back, Hannah and Chris kissed and engaged in heavy petting. They continued to kiss once they were back at the apartment. They engaged in foreplay up to a point just short of intercourse. When Chris attempted to engage in penetrative intercourse, Hannah said: “Wait, hold on. I’m not sure.” She shook her head and tried to move away from Chris, but he did not stop. He continued to kiss her. Penetrative intercourse followed.